

HOMES WHERE

# Dreams

HAVE BEEN BORN

# Again

BY Nancy Hiller PHOTOGRAPHY BY Shannon Zahnle

Many of us would give our eyeteeth for the chance to make our home in a converted building. We swoon at the spare lines of a loft carved out of a former factory or the fusion of openness and solidity in a timber-frame barn-turned-home. The architecture of buildings designed for work enriches our experience of space and time with shades of a different, though palpable, past: Living in such spaces has the sense of a playful adventure.

Of course, echoes of the past are often discernible in environments that have been homesteads from the start — never more so than when a place has been in one’s own family, or when a home bears the unmistakable impress of some previous occupant’s forceful beliefs with which one concurs.

In each of the following homes — a converted carpenter’s workshop, a family farm, and a gritty urban compound — new occupants have embraced the original owner’s vision and are giving those dreams new life.



Caroline Beebe transformed her husband’s carpentry shop into a home for herself and her poodle mix, Kitty (right), whom she rescued while in Mexico. Lola, a Pekingese, is visiting. Beebe’s home is filled with artwork and antiques. The century-old high chair provided years of service when her daughters were little; today it holds an antique painting.



A welcoming sunroom now occupies the space where Beebe’s husband, Michael Yoakam, once brought construction materials in and out through an overhead door.

## A Carpentry Shop Becomes a Home

In 2009, when Caroline Beebe was thinking about how to turn her late husband’s carpentry shop into her home, one question — where to put the kitchen — was readily answered. She would put her workspace exactly where her husband, Michael Yoakam, had his. Her main counter area and sink would be where his workbench had stood, against the south wall with a view of the neighbor’s pasture. At her left, on the wall where shelves had long stored coffee cans filled with nails, screws, and other hardware, she, too, would have storage: for dishes, cookware, and foodstuffs.

“Michael loved this space,” says Beebe of the shop. She savored the prospect of living in the place where he had spent so many peaceful, solitary hours.

Thirty years earlier, the couple had hand-built a house on the same property in



Beebe designed a welcoming front entrance with a patio shaded by a honey locust tree. Instead of leaving the concrete plain, she had it stamped decoratively using a pattern she cut out of rubber entry door matting from a department store.

**“Michael’s last words to me were, “Sell the place and move back into town.””**

eastern Monroe County, using materials salvaged from Yoakam’s remodeling jobs. They raised two daughters there, adding on to the structure over time. The house eventually grew to more than 3,000 square feet.

The carpentry shop — now her home — came a few years later. Yoakam built the 24-by-40-foot structure in 1985 with business partner Duncan Campbell. Yoakam used the building for work and for the storage of architectural salvage as well as tools, lumber, and workbenches. When his parents passed away, their possessions moved into the shop. And when one of the couple’s daughters moved home, her things went there, too.

Yoakam died in the summer of 2007. “Michael’s last words to me were, ‘Sell the place and move back into town,’” says Beebe, a retired librarian with a doctorate in information science. She certainly needed less than 3,000 square feet. She searched diligently, but after so many years in a peaceful, rural setting, every place she found in Bloomington felt too close to neighbors.

So she reimagined the carpentry shop as a home. She subdivided the property, acquired permits, and in the spring of 2011 undertook the monumental task of emptying the shop. Her contractor, Chris Valliant, began construction that summer.

The basic footprint and shingled roof are unchanged, but the floor is now decoratively etched. The window locations on the south side have remained the same; Yoakam designed them with 4-foot overhangs to let in winter sunshine but provide summer shade. Even the carport, which Yoakam erected to store a tractor and other outdoor equipment when the shop became too crowded, is still there. “That was the last thing he built here,” says Beebe. “Everybody told me to tear it down” and replace it with a garage. But she couldn’t bear the thought of demolishing it. Instead, she had Valliant’s crew reinforce the sagging roof.

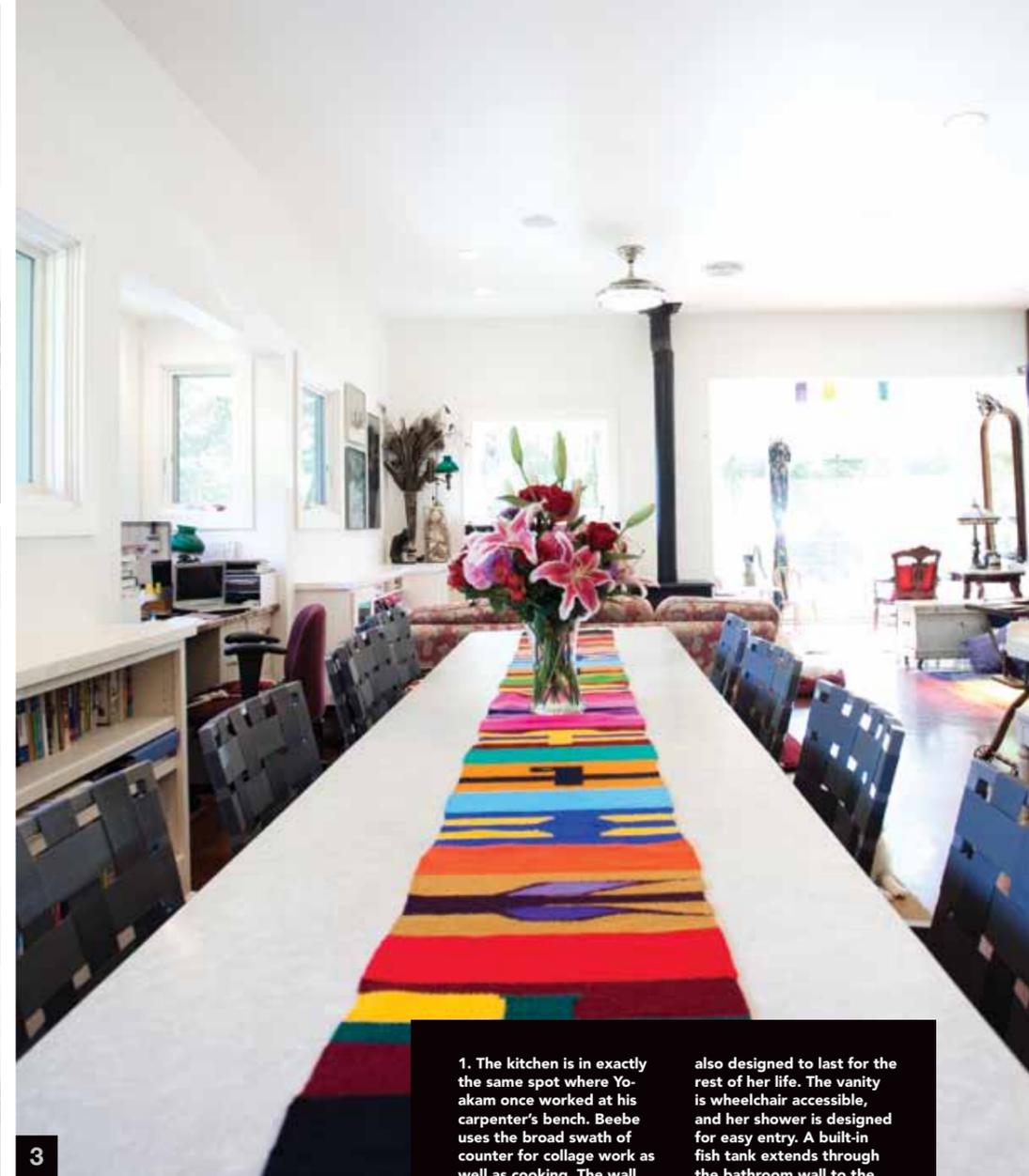
Beebe moved into her new home late in 2011. One of their daughters now lives with her own family in the original house. “I couldn’t be happier,” Beebe says with a smile.



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Beebe had the one-time carpentry shop extended 11 feet at the rear to create a guest room and bath. She looked long and hard before finding a daybed open and airy enough in its design to avoid making the small room look crowded. The Victorian sideboard has been in Yoakam’s family for five generations.



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1. The kitchen is in exactly the same spot where Yoakam once worked at his carpenter’s bench. Beebe uses the broad swath of counter for collage work as well as cooking. The wall visible here faces south, with a generous roof overhang designed to provide summer shade but let in winter sun. The pendant light fixture is from Foursquare Antiques, Furniture & Fine Art.

2. Natural light and delicious shades of lilac and wisteria make the bedroom as inviting a place to read or exercise as to sleep.

3. A 10-foot-long table from Foursquare Antiques dominates the dining area without overwhelming the space. “It’s impossible to find a tablecloth to fit,” laughs Beebe. Instead, she uses a woven runner found in a market at the ancient Mayan site of Tulum in Mexico.

4. The master bath is aesthetically pleasing, but it is

also designed to last for the rest of her life. The vanity is wheelchair accessible, and her shower is designed for easy entry. A built-in fish tank extends through the bathroom wall to the adjacent bedroom. The little sculpture above is a traditional Mexican carving of a mermaid.

5. A deep tub in the guest bath has garden views to the east and south, with glass block below for privacy. Beebe was determined to put a pedestal lavatory on the exterior wall, dramatically framed by the bathroom doorway. When her builder, Chris Valliant, advised against installing plumbing on an exterior wall in a climate where frozen pipes could be a problem, Beebe came up with the solution: bump out that section of wall and emphasize the relief with decorative appliques.



A screened porch just off of the kitchen and dining area adds comfortable living space and practical storage to this 1,200-square-foot home.

## A Family Farm of Their Own

Sisters Kelli Abdon and Nicole Smith have fond memories of summers and holidays spent on their grandparents' farm just east of Ellettsville. "From about the time we were 6 years old, Nana would hand us these little metal coal shovels and just turn us loose outside to play," Kelli remembers. "A shovel and the whole farm to explore, that's all we needed to have fun all day."

"Nana impressed upon us the simple, but amazing, beauty of all that nature right there on the farm," she continues, "though she said most people never took the time to appreciate it."

The 100-acre farm the girls grew up loving was purchased by their grandparents, Ruth and Kenneth Cole, when they retired back in the 1960s. They raised cattle and

operated a dog grooming and kennel business to help make ends meet.

The years passed, grandpa died in 1983, the farm ceased to operate, and Kelli and Nicole grew up.

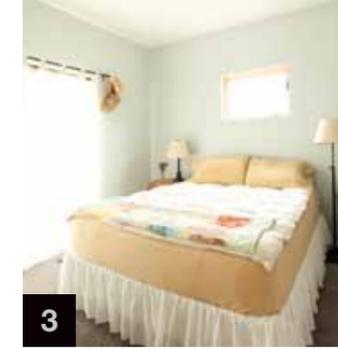
Fast-forward to the year 2000. Nicole, who was working at Macri's Deli in Bloomington, introduced Kelli to one of her colleagues, Ron Abdon, and the two fell in love.

The couple married, moved to Arizona, found jobs, and started thinking about the long term. "We had a shared dream of wanting to live on a farm and provide for ourselves, at least somewhat," says Ron.

Ever since Kelli's grandfather passed away, developers had been trying to buy the farm from her grandmother. As Kelli



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1. "This was a dream, to buy this place," say Kelli (who was pregnant with Jerome at the time of the photo) and Ron Abdon of the farm they are bringing back to life on land that has been in Kelli's family for three generations. With a large fenced-in vegetable garden and two groups of chickens — one for meat, the other for eggs — the Abdons are gradually restoring the farm from rows of corn and soybeans to pasture for beef cattle and goats.

2. Pride of place in this small house goes to the kitchen, the focal point of an open-plan living space with a warm Saltillo tile floor.

3. The master bedroom looks out toward a pond, with woods concealing the homestead from the road.

4. Windows in the dining area offer views of the chickens, whose behavior is often wildly entertaining.

5. Shadow and light cast by the light fixture in the front entry create decorative patterns on the ceiling and walls.

6. A floating vanity counter and continuous-floor shower are two universally accessible features of this home.



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pondered the future from 1,500 miles away, she was suddenly struck by the obvious: "Our family already had a farm — near Bloomington!" By moving home and buying some of the acreage from her grandmother, she and Ron could keep the place in the family. Nicole, too, bought a share.

Ron, a professional cook, found employment with Lennie's and One World Catering. Kelli started her own business, Express Grooming, in the shop her grandparents built decades ago. To save for the down payment on the house they hoped to build, they spent three years living in the 15-by-18-foot storage room of the shop. The close quarters convinced them that they could be happy living in a 1,200-square-foot house — as long as it had a great kitchen.

Loren Wood Builders designed and constructed their home in 2012. "We're planning on living here for the rest of our lives," says Kelli, 36, who had their first child, Jerome, on October 1. The Galvalume roof shouldn't need major maintenance for 40 years, and the poplar siding has been heat-treated for enhanced stability and rot resistance. The house is one level, with accessible features throughout. Nicole, who uses a wheelchair, has spent several months living with Kelli and Ron and can vouch for the design. Should they ever need more space, they planned the basement to allow for easy finishing.



The architecture of this house reflects its passive solar design, which maximizes southern exposure. The siding is western red cedar, which although new, had been discarded or left over from some other job. No piece is longer than four feet, making the boards impractical for a commercial builder.

## A Counterculture House Lives On

Just a few blocks north of the downtown Square, a thicket of trees conceals the entrance to one of Bloomington's most unusual homes. A path through the foliage

leads to a courtyard; just beyond stands a hand-built house that's a model of ingenuity, thrift, and gumption.

This story begins with the late Mike Andrews, a legendary figure of Bloomington's counterculture, who bought a scrubby plot of land near the railroad tracks around 1980 where he intended to reside in a shack. A zealous environmental activist and campaigner for social and economic justice, Andrews led by example: living in the simplest form of shelter, providing for himself, and vigorously rejecting consumer culture.

When city officials declared the shack substandard housing, Andrews planned a slightly less unconventional domicile out of salvaged materials. He repeatedly had to make his case to city building department officials as he moved forward with his idiosyncratic structure.

Over the next 15 years, he and his wife, Nancy Rinehart, worked on the house, erecting a basic framework of debarked poplar tree trunks to form the 30-foot-high

south wall, filling in with salvaged lumber, and supporting the second floor with eastern red cedar posts. Most of the windows face south to maximize solar gain in winter, while the trees that hide the property from the street provide summer shade. The couple made a point of keeping things utterly basic — even crude, in some cases — to emphasize that anyone could build a house.

In 2003, they sold the property to three young people eager to try co-operative living. To prepare the house for its new owners, Andrews and Rinehart installed drywall, furnished the kitchen, and built a staircase, replacing the ladder that had previously provided access to the second floor.

The housing co-op lasted several years. At one point, seven people lived in the 900-square-foot structure. Eventually two of the original owner-occupants sold their shares to the third, Rusty Peterson, who stayed on with his partner, Emily Winter.

Precious few parts of the house are straight, square, or plumb. Peterson, 39, a meticulous craftsman who has his own carpentry and contracting business, has found working on the house both "frustrating and freeing," as it challenges his customary standards. But as a builder who shares the basic values that guided Andrews and Rinehart, he says, "I definitely appreciate how much time and hard labor it took for two people to build this place, let alone collect such a quantity of salvaged materials."

Peterson and Winter, 31, who were married in 2011, now share the house with their year-old daughter, Hazel.

"Mike said his ideal house would be made of materials that, when you walked away, would rot into the ground," says Peterson, explaining Andrews' choice of building supplies, as well as his aesthetic. "This is the house we live in!" Winter responds, a hint of irony in her appreciative smile. ✧

1. Rusty Peterson and Emily Winter in the living room with baby Hazel. Branch stubs on the red cedar posts that support the second floor come in handy as hooks for hanging things.

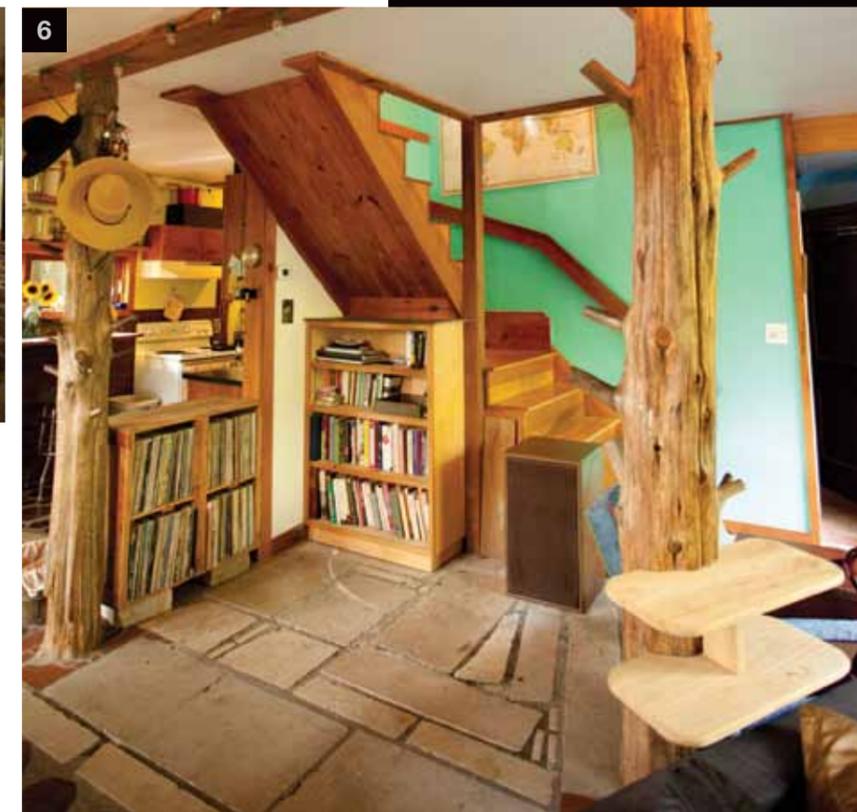
2. The blue slope of the ceiling at the far end of the kitchen provides a dramatic backdrop to an efficient kitchen made from recycled materials. The cabinets were salvaged, and the soapstone counters were a rare find in an Indiana University dumpster. Peterson made the hanging pot rack from copper plumbing pipe. Flooring toward the rear wall is limestone; in the foreground, the flooring is cordwood — cross-sections of a tree trunk.

3. At 50 square feet, the third floor makes a perfect workroom for Winter, a seamstress. South-facing windows fill the area with warmth on sunny days.

4. The larger of two bedrooms, this one on the southeast corner of the house overlooks the verdant garden where former homeowners planted fruit trees, now mature. Winter, who recently left her position as garden-and-gleaning coordinator for the Hoosier Hills Food Bank to spend more time with Hazel, grows an exuberant mix of edibles and flowers.

5. The main door opens into the open-plan first floor. Peterson built the base of the dining table, which is topped temporarily with a piece of plywood saved from the trash.

6. A colorful staircase is just off of the living room. Strategically designed built-ins provide useful storage while preserving the space's open feeling.



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