

PIONEER HOSPITALITY: RAMSHORN FARM

1840s FARM HOUSE A TIME CAPSULE OF ORIGINALITY

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When we bought this place 40 years ago, this valley hadn't changed much since the Civil War," says the owner. He is leading the way toward his 1840s farmhouse, past the graceful double galleries of the porches. Emily, the guardian Newfoundland, escorts us as we walk, and then returns to her usual duties: watching the peacocks, keeping an eye out for deer down near the pond, and thinking about whether it's time for her morning swim yet.

The inside of the house is as delightful as the outside. Our host leads us in through the farmhouse kitchen, where the great brick hearth is still in use. Meat spits and the copper kettle stand ready to hand, and the cast iron firebacks that reflect the heat back into the room in winter are blacked and gleaming. Beside the kitchen door stands a roughly made wooden hutch stacked with redware platters, blue-spattered pitchers and cream crockery bowls. A flintlock musket and a powder horn hang over the mantel, ready to repel the



occasional bear, just as it would have in 1840, when this was still the frontier. But there is a modern stove, dishwasher and refrigerator, because this kitchen is not a museum piece, but the warm heart of a hospitable house.

"This is Pennsylvania Dutch country really," he points out. They are the third family to own the Ramshorn Grant farm, and some of the pieces in the house go back to the original builder, Joseph Schildknecht, who lived in it, raised his family in it, and gave it to his daughter Susannah as a wedding present. Her sam-

pler, worked when she was young, still hangs in the living room. "We found it in the attic," he says, recalling when he and his wife came to the valley and fell in love with the house.

They were just starting their family then, having been too busy with the war and its aftermath to settle down before. He had flown with the Flying Tigers under General Chennault; she was in the R.A.F., involved in decoding. They met in wartime Washington in 1942, but he was bound for the air war over the China, and she for an intelligence facility in

Dayton, Ohio.

"She swore she only married me to get out of Dayton," he chuckles. "I flew back from China on an assignment in 1944 – took five days, then, and I'd had no sleep. Stopped over in Dayton, and said, 'Honey, would you marry me?' She said I'd propose, fall asleep, wake up, and ask again; claims I proposed nine times altogether. Everybody said it was a wartime marriage, would never last, but we were married in the Little Church Around the Corner, in New York, more than 59 years ago," he grins.

After the war, they were both involved in rigorous service in Washington, he as publisher and editor of Aviation Week and arms control advisor to two presidents. They needed a place to get away from it, a place where their four boys could fish and climb trees. They started looking in the western mountains. That was how they found Ramshorn Farm.

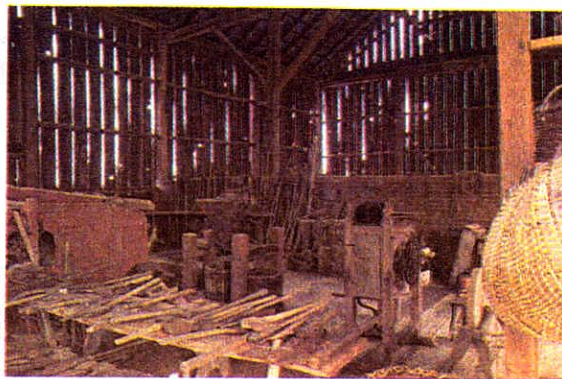
"We were pretty skinned after buying the farm," says the owner, "so we couldn't afford many of the pieces that they were auctioning



The Ram's Head sculpture on the weathered wagon shed refers to the name of the farm. The Ramshorn Grant was named for its shape, which curves between the two ranges of mountains like a ram's horn. The family owns all the land within sight; so the present owners can look out and see the same unchanging hills the original builders saw. "There was an art to siting a house in the old days," says the owner's son. "They worked it out so that the breeze comes up the hollow, along the creek, and cools the house all summer. The south-facing windows warm it in winter."



"We don't have to do anything to entertain people here," says the owner's son. "We just plunk them down in the chairs, and hand them a glass of lemonade. You can see them let everything drift away. What they really want is to be someplace peaceful, and this place does it."



One side of the soaring bank barn holds the owners' collection of antique farming tools and the antique cider press where they press their own cider from local apples every fall. The other side is used for parties and dances. Visiting children delight in the rope swing hung from the roof.

along with the house, but we bought as many as we could. That was a fantastic auction, because nothing had ever been moved out of the house. They had never put in any of the modern conveniences that rip up the fabric of old houses. When we bought it, the family had declined to an old brother and sister, living in two rooms."

The new owners set to work. They opened the boarded-up fireplaces, grew hay, farmed Angus cattle, kept a cow. Gradually, they

found other pieces for the house: quilts made by local women, ironmongery from the Catocin forge, brass and tinwork from local smiths, stiff naïve paintings of the country around South Mountain, a charming ink drawing of a woman in a sunbonnet, picking over a bowl of cherries for a pie. For the weary city friends who wound their way up the mountain road to Ramshorn, they kept the kind of openhanded pioneer hospitality that always makes the stranger welcome, and

regards good food and a good story as the best entertainment in the world. They collected antiques and what is now known as folk art, because they liked seeing the house filled with things that intrinsically belonged there.

"Most of what you see here was made right in this area," says the owner. "We used to comb country auctions and house sales."

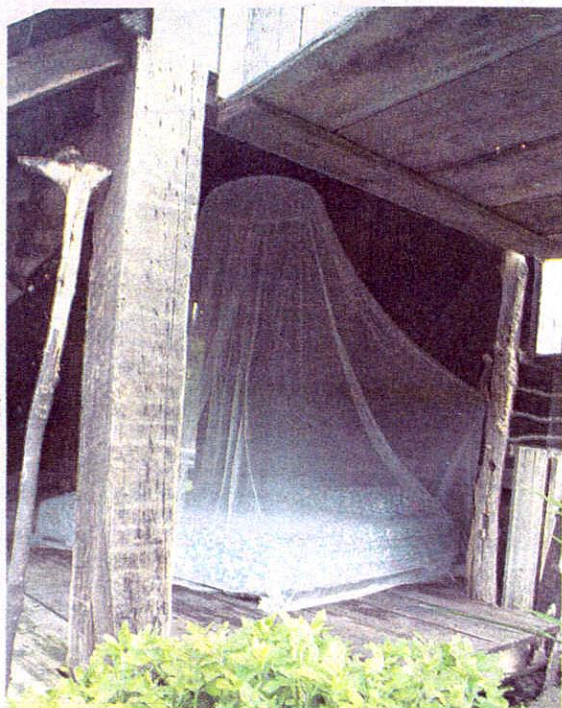
The dining room table, a superb gate-legged walnut piece that has seen generations of pies,

roasts and crusty loaves of bread pass over its surface to hungry guests, was one of those lucky finds. "We found it in an outhouse at a sale, and they weren't going to sell it, because it was all dusty and missing a leaf," he chuckles. "But we bought it, and took it down to a fellow in Virginia who found a matching piece of walnut and restored it."

That restorative care was lavished on the whole house, too. By the greatest good fortune, it had

fallen to owners who cherished it rather than "modernizing it" in any of the hideous ways that have destroyed so much of our heritage. The house is painted throughout in the vibrant colors popular during America's brash and hopeful adolescence: vivid yellow, brilliant blue, bright scarlet and viridian green. The original faux graining on the cross-and-bible doors, the marble-patterned feather stippling on the baseboards, the plain, polished balusters and the deep windows have been left as they were.

The old bank barn, which has seen so many harvests, has now become a second home for one of their sons, who comes here to decompress from New York, where he is president of the First Zen Institute. With the big double doors open, it's cool during the hottest day. "Usually when people come out they've been on that drive from 1-70," he says, "and I just plunk them down in that chair on the hill, and hand them a glass of lemonade or a beer. You can see them center in a bit. They like to come down here and let everything drift away. We keep a path mowed down to the pond, with a couple of chairs down there. We keep fishing gear for the kids who visit, and that pond has some pretty big fish in it. You



The "Summer Bedroom," is a lean-to on one side of the wagon shed, the bed covered with a bright geometric quilt made by a local quilter. Open to the stars and the moonlit view of deer browsing the night meadows, it's sited so that the breeze stirs the mosquito netting on the hottest nights.

should see the face of a little kid who's hooked a sizeable large-mouthed bass! The sad thing about kids today is that they don't get much unstructured space, where they can actually do things. But I was raised here, the old-fashioned way, where my parents sort of locked me out of the house and I ran around the woods."

He leads the way down the lane to the barn, past a number of peacocks and guinea hens in full voice. "Don't underestimate the intelligence of peacocks and guinea hens," he notes, as we watch a magnificent male display a full rainbow tail fan. "The peacocks lived in the Himalayas, where there are leopards, and the guinea hens lived in Africa, where there are plenty of predators. They roost up in the trees, and they have their own system for avoiding foxes. Many people don't know that the peacocks are a Colonial bird. They were very prominent in the orchards in this part of the world. Not only do they eat the bugs and keep your orchard pretty clean, but they sound a warning when anyone comes."

The barn itself is the best place in the world for parties. The foot-square posts soar to a beautifully beamed roof above wide

floorboards. One side of the barn holds the collection of antique tools, and the other, cleared for dancing or mingling, has plenty of room for both the band and the convivial guests who come here. The center crossbeam has a rope swing, and it gets a lot of use from visiting children.

"We have a working cider press in here, and we press cider every fall," he says. "For me, the thing about barns is not turning them into houses. People live in such small spaces that it's good for them to get into an immense space like this."

Musical mobiles stir in the breeze from the big open door. A crock filled with wildflowers, a wooden bowl of fruit, and a tray of tall drinks welcome us. Everything says, "Relax. Enjoy."

The "Farmer's Creed" on the white pottery jug in the dining room says it, too: "Let this be held the Farmer's Creed/ For stock, seek out the choicest breed/ In peace and plenty let them feed/ Your land sow with the best of seed/ Let it not dung or dressing need/ Enclose and dress it with all speed/ And soon you will be rich indeed." •