

From barn to home: MetroWest couple creates an ADU for returning kids

With a smart layout, high ceilings, and storage built into the walls, the unit lives larger than its 900 square feet.

By **Marni Elyse Katz** Globe Correspondent, Updated July 17, 2025, 6:00 a.m.



The backsplash tiles are from The Tile Shop in Wellesley. The owners' daughter, who is a trained chef, requested the pot racks. SABRINA COLE QUINN

Prompted by their growing family — and encouraged by the recently passed Massachusetts accessory dwelling unit law, which eases the path for creating independent living units — the owners of this MetroWest property tasked David Sharff

with turning a backyard barn into an ADU. The architect, after all, had designed the main home for the family in 2009.

The original motivator was to give the couple's grown children a place to stay when they visit; especially their eldest daughter, son-in-law, and very active grandchildren, who lived in the Midwest. In a happy plot twist, during construction, the young family learned they could return to the Boston area for good. They move into the ADU next month.

Sharff worked with the barn's existing footprint and gabled roof form. The ground floor function remained; there's a two-car garage on one side and storage, a workshop, and a multipurpose room on the other. What had been an unfinished loft at the top of the central stair is now a 900-square-foot, two-bedroom, one-bath home with an open-concept living space that includes a full kitchen.

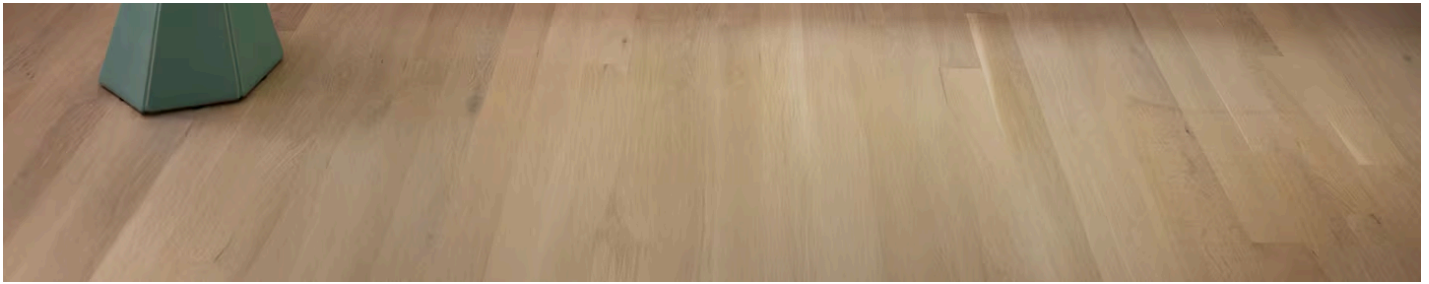


There are now nicely sized double windows in each gable end of the building. SABRINA COLE QUINN

To create the bright and airy unit, Sharff added dormers on both sides of the building. The dormer on the back runs about 40-feet across, almost the full length of the building. In the front, Sharff did two separate 18½-foot dormers that are a few feet apart. Not only did this add charm to the front façade, it helped to limit the apartment's overall square footage. "Per the zoning regulations, the living space could not exceed 900 square feet," the architect says. "It would have exceeded that if we developed the full area of the existing second floor."

Still, shrinking the size of front dormers didn't quite do the trick. The fix? "We built thick walls to reduce the width from front to back," he says. The tactics offered major advantages, such as deep sills, opportunities for storage niches, and a window seat carved into a barn-shaped alcove that's a favorite spot for the kids. "That alcove is the leftover space between where the dormer stops and the rest of the original gable roof continues at the end of the building," Sharff explains.





The window seat niche capitalizes on the ceiling height — 13-feet tall at its peak. SABRINA COLE QUINN

Entry is to the right of the garage doors in the front, then up the stairs. The 410-square-foot open concept living space occupies the entire left half of the structure, which is the side of the building with the best light. A sofa nestles into a niche on the back wall, the bump-outs on either side the result of making the walls thicker. “We were strategic in creating the bumps and voids so they’re practical,” the architect explains. The trio of casement windows above the sofa pairs nicely with the smaller awning windows on the ground floor. “We worked from the inside out,” Sharff says, noting that interior function was first priority.

The kitchen and dining area occupy the dormer in the front of the building where a row of four casement windows enhances the home’s cottage-meets-contemporary aesthetic. A built-in banquette with storage underneath maximizes function in one corner while the kitchen — anchored by full-size island painted in Sherwin-Williams’s Labradorite — sits across from it. Cabinetry painted Sherwin-Williams’s Gratifying Green is tucked into the wall, a pull-out pantry to the right of the fridge. The range is flanked by crisp white quartz countertops — there’s no shortage of counter space in this kitchen. A mottled blue-green tile backsplash ties together the palette. “We encouraged them to have fun with color; this big, open space can handle it,” Sharff says.



The team thickened the walls on either side of the windows in the living area, creating a niche for the sofa. **SABRINA COLE QUINN**

The bath is at the top of the stair and, beside it, is the laundry nook; nearby there's a roomy coat closet. The remainder of the square footage on that half of the unit, which overlooks the edge of the property and is therefore more private, is devoted to the bedrooms. In the primary bedroom, a king-size bed sits under a trio of windows in the dormer above the garage. The kids' bedroom's quirky shape — two offset rectangles — is ideal, allowing for separate sleep and play zones as well as cute built-in storage. There's also a glass door that leads to a new stair for secondary egress.

Although the young family is moving from a condo that's 500-square-feet larger than their new home, the owners say this layout is much more functional. It's so nice, they joke, that they should move in here and let their daughter and her family have the main house.

Resources

Architect: David Sharff Architect, davidsharffarchitect.com

Contractor: MC Conrad & Co. (retired)

Finish carpenter: Shane's Custom Woodworking, shanescww.com

More photos

A tiny addition for a secondary stairwell runs alongside the kids' bedroom. SABRINA COLE QUINN

Built-ins save on square footage and maximize storage. SABRINA COLE QUINN

Nightstands aren't necessary thanks to wall-mounted sconces and a deep sill behind the bed. SABRINA COLE QUINN

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