



Upon retiring, Don and Gerrie Etter remodeled their dairy barn into this 3-story bed & breakfast.



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## Dairy Barn Remodeled Into Bed & Breakfast

When retiring dairy farmers Don and Gerrie Etter said goodbye to their Brown Swiss cows in 1991, they started cleaning the barn and then remodeling it for human guests who want to stay at their 3-story Dairy Barn Bed and Breakfast near Ionia, Iowa.

Gerrie admits it had been her dream to live in the barn when the couple first moved from Colorado to the farm in 1970. After 20 years of milking, she used her interior designer skills to transform the 38- by 64-ft. barn. Having worked on hotels and other commercial buildings she understood the importance of sound infrastructure: plumbing, heating, venting, etc.

The Etters installed a geothermal heating system and put in a new concrete floor, but left the barn's gutter open underneath to use as a cold air vent. They hired an Amish crew to add dormers and shingle the roof.

They installed a constant pressure well pump to meet the needs of kitchen facilities and 11 bathrooms. "I never thought we'd get all the plumbing done," Gerrie says.

The couple did much of the remodeling themselves, from powerwashing the barn twice, to tearing out stalls and walls, to

sheetrocking, painting and decorating.

"We recycled everywhere we could," Gerrie says, including used fixtures from restaurants, used furniture she reupholstered, and the Etters' own personal belongings. The Etter bought new mattresses and bedding, however.

Wherever possible, Gerrie left barn wood, such as the beams exposed. She covered the cement walls with vintage wood. Rooms are named after some of the Etters' cows: Rosie, Flossie and Hyacinth, for example.

Besides offering eight rooms for guests on the main and second floors that can sleep 19 people, Gerrie's dining room seats 32 people, and there's room for overflow on the second floor. In addition to breakfast, she serves guests supper with vegetables from her garden and good country meals like meatloaf and mashed potatoes. Guests appreciate not having to go into town for their evening meal, Gerrie says, and they get a kick out of dining under the same numbers that once marked cow stalls.

She also feeds bus tours and caters reunions and people on retreats.

"We're in the middle of everything," Gerrie says. "We're 150 miles from Des Moines and 150 miles from Minneapolis. We're a good stopping place." Located near the Little Brown Church, The Etters also book many newlyweds and tourists.

Don enjoys the B&B business. "It's like traveling without going anywhere." Guests have come from as far as England, Italy and Australia."

The couple does most of the work themselves, with occasional help from a daughter and granddaughter.

"I knew it would be a lot of work, but I'm a farm wife," Gerrie says. "To me this is less work than farming."

Like Don she enjoys meeting people — many come back regularly. She also likes living in a barn and the view from her third floor bedroom.

"We're not getting rich," she says. "You just have to enjoy what you do."

They are expanding the kitchen, and Don, 70, and Gerrie, 65, plan to run the B&B as long as they enjoy it. During the slower time in winter, they take a short vacation.

The Etters have a website, which is the best marketing tool, Gerrie says. They are also members of Iowa's B&B guild and they're involved with the state's tourism office.

People considering remodeling a farm building into a B&B, should first talk with local zoning boards, Gerrie suggests. Regulations vary on septic systems, fire exits (at least two per floor in her case) and kitchen licensing requirements.

Cost for remodeling varies greatly. The Etters saved money by doing most of the work themselves and purchasing used items. They paid less than it costs to build a home that size, plus they have a way to bring in income.

Another benefit of living in a barn is just outside the front door.

"We have the most lush lawn you ever saw," Gerrie laughs, "because it was once a barn yard."

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## Big Bull Draws Tourists To Rural Acreage

By Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

My family was driving along Interstate I-90 about 25 miles west of Sioux Falls, S. Dakota, last summer when we spotted the horns of a huge bull off to the side of the highway. We pulled off onto the next exit and drove into the Porter Sculpture Park. There we got a good look at the 60-ft. tall metal bull that's just the beginning of a private metal sculpture garden that grew out of Ron Porter's imagination.

"My parents say I was three years old when my interest in art began to show," says Porter. "As I got older, I put down crayons and picked up a welder. My creations just got bigger."

Porter came by his welding skills naturally, helping out his dad in the family blacksmith business.

"As someone from the country, I wanted to tell people about agriculture and nature," explains Porter. "I tried to pull everything from history and what we are. The bull is a powerful image throughout centuries, so I built it. It gets the most attention from visitors."

The head, neck and shoulders are made mostly out of railroad tie plates. The horns and ears are made from 1/8-in. iron. The entire statue weighs 25 tons and is as tall as the heads on Mt. Rushmore.

Porter has more than 40 other sculptures at the park, including fish swimming out of a tipped gold fish bowl, a giant hand with a butterfly landing on the tip of a finger, dragons, vultures, a giant pink rocking horse and many, many more.

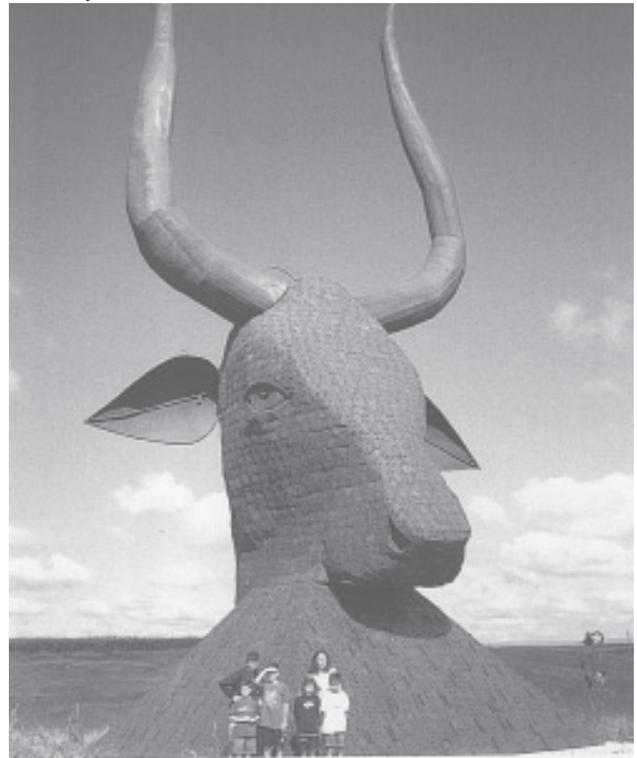
"Sometimes I'm just goofing around, and sometimes I'm trying to make a statement," he says. "I enjoy watching people interact with the sculptures."

Porter spends his summers at the sculpture park, giving tours and visiting with those who stop by. From Labor Day to Memorial Day he returns to St. Lawrence, S. Dak. to work with his dad in the blacksmith shop and to work on his latest creation - a giant horse.

"It will take years to complete, stand 40 ft. tall, and weigh close to 30 tons," says Porter.

Porter charges adults \$4 each and children 13 to 17 pay \$2 each. It's definitely one of the best deals to be had in South Dakota.

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Huge 60-ft. tall metal bull stands next to Interstate I-90 near Sioux Falls, S. Dak. Entire statue weighs 25 tons and is as tall as the heads on Mt. Rushmore.