



A remodeled country elevator serves as a unique retirement home for Jill Baumlér and her husband, Bob Mannisto. They live on the top four stories.

Photos by Ross Rodgers

Couple Turns Old Elevator Into Country Home

By Dee George, Contributing Editor

It hurts Jill Baumlér to see old grain elevators and other historical rural buildings torn down. The Manhattan, Montana elevator she and her husband, Bob Mannisto, are remodeling into a retirement home is proof of their commitment to salvaging a piece of agricultural history.

Baumlér purchased the elevator in 1993 while vacationing in Montana. She thought it would take a couple of years to renovate. After nine years of work, the couple lives in the top four stories as they work on the bottom two. Despite all the years of work, Baumlér says the views from their living quarters make it all worthwhile.

Except for moving an attached grain bin and roofing the 70-ft. structure, the couple has done all the work themselves - in addition to operating an Ohio blueberry farm. Mannisto, a retired veterinarian, does most of the roughing-in work and Baumlér takes care of finish work and decorating.

The elevator walls and 13 different bins inside (varying from 4 by 6 to 10 by 10 ft.) were made of 2 by 6-in. boards nailed flat on top of each other. Some bin walls were left as room dividers but each level is different.

"We started to put in floors from the bottom up after removing bin walls. Then we finished from the top down to reduce dust and dirt," Baumlér says.

She vacuums and washes each level thoroughly with a 10 percent bleach solution. The third and fourth levels are the main living quarters and are furred out and insulated. Windows were installed on the south side of the elevator, along with outside decks.

An antiques dealer, Baumlér enjoys decorating and creating interesting decor. "Every room is unique," she says. "The upper head house is wonderful. And I especially love my kitchen. All the



Attached grain bin was moved away before work was begun.

spaces are wonderful."

With 30 by 33-ft. on four levels, there's plenty of space to fill, and Baumlér admits there's lots more work. But, with 80 steps to the top floor, she laughs that she doesn't need to go to the gym.

Besides creating a unique retirement home, Baumlér is pleased to save a piece of history. The couple left enough of the elevator's mechanical parts that visitors can still see how an elevator worked.

"I want people to look at old buildings in a different way in the hope that many will be saved," she says.

Baumlér says she and her husband have kept renovation costs lower than expected by recycling material and "scrounging" materials and furnishings.

She and her husband are members of the Country Grain Elevator Historical Society (www.country-grain-elevator-historical-society.org), and she encourages anyone interested in more information to contact the society.

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The third and fourth levels are the main living quarters.



Baumlér says she especially loves her kitchen (left). The couple left some of the elevator's mechanical parts in place so visitors can still see how an elevator worked.