Mike Nistler remodeled this 14 by 40-ft. silo to create a comfortable 4-level hangout for family and friends. Note door cut into side of silo.

Silo A Great Place To Hang Out

For Mike Nistler there's nothing like ending a busy day listening to his favorite tunes out in his remote silo. He spent about $4,000 and a big chunk of time remodeling the 14 by 40-ft. silo to create "Schnitzelbrau Silo", a comfortable hangout for family and friends with four levels.

The rural-based carpenter knew he wanted to do something with the silo as soon as he and his wife, Sue, moved to their 6 1/2-acre homestead near St. Cloud, Minn.

"I enjoy the history. I love the old buildings," Nistler says. "I hate to see old barns replaced by steel buildings."

Nistler first remodeled the 1920 barn with plans to make it into an event center, but regulations that required an elevator (for the loft) and a sprinkling system made that expensive. His wife used the bottom level for her day care until she moved into another building on the farm.

In 2009, he started working on the silo. Since it hadn't been used in a while, it was fairly clean and in good shape. He cut in a door and poured footings and a concrete floor. He first sealed the inside walls and then started building them out with 2 by 6 studs using Tapcon concrete screws and anchors. At 10 ft., he installed a deck for the second level and continued to work his way up.

Because of the small diameter, the 25-degree, ladder-like stairs are very steep between the floors. Nistler used canoe paddles for railings.

"The biggest challenge was dragging everything up two and three pieces at a time," Nistler recalls.

He removed the silo doors and replaced them with double pane windows.

Each level offers something different. The lowest level has a hot tub. The second has swings hanging from the ceiling, which Sue's daycare kids like to swing on. Made of chains and tractor seats, one swing is painted John Deere green and the other International red.

This view from top level looks straight up into silo roof.

The third level is where Nistler hangs out. It has a 1904 bar from a St. Cloud business in front of a peek-a-boo mirror (five mirrors to see five images of yourself), a stereo system, a table and five chairs and exercise equipment.

The top loft has three chairs.

"You can see the prairie pretty well from the top two floors," Nistler says. The combination of the speakers at the top, and the round shape are great for listening to music, he adds.

The silo isn't insulated so it's only used seasonally and stays fairly cool in the summer. Nistler rented a lift to paint a membrane sealant to mend the leaking roof and hasn't had moisture problems.

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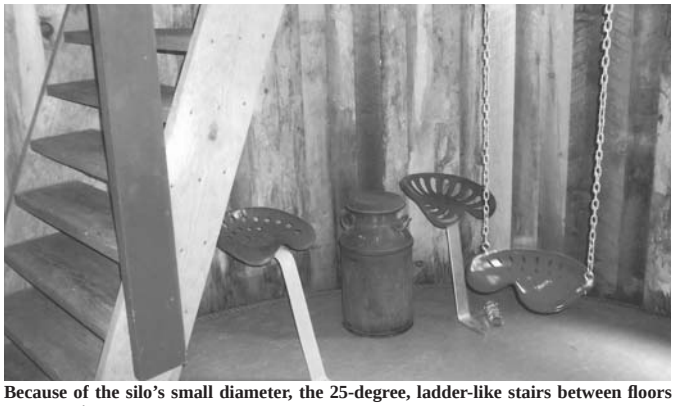

Because of the silo's small diameter, the 25-degree, ladder-like stairs between floors are very steep.

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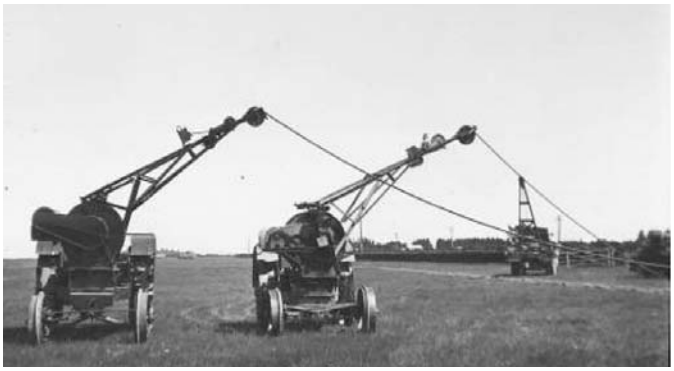

Two of the electric mains-powered tractors with their cable-carrying turrets. The service truck in the background was used for erecting poles and lines.

Electric-Powered Tractors Date Back To The 1930's

By Graeme Quick

In the 1930's Mr. H.G. (Pete) Kemp, engineer for the Ashburton Electric Power Board on the South Island of New Zealand, designed a tractor driven by an electric motor. The motivation for the move to electrics was to increase local demand for electric power. New Zealand has a lot of hydroelectric power.

The input power came from the high-tension mains-power lines. These were in turn linked to the tractor by a feeder cable from a transformer mounted on a nearby truck. The voltage supplied to the field was 6,600 volts using heavy galvanized wire. The 30 kVA transformer on the truck broke that down to 440 volts for the tractor's motor. The machine *looked* cumbersome, but it actually worked quite well. The feeder cable passed from the transformer through the pivoting turret into the tractor.

Eight machines were built, based mainly on the chassis of the 18-36 Hart Parr. In total, the 8 tractors logged more than 8,000 hours, working over a 7-year period. In the end, however, tractors driven by fossil fuels proved cheaper to operate.

Now the idea of exploiting electric power in tractors is making a comeback. Deere in Europe has an E-Tractor, as does Belarus in the Ukraine with on-board generator to deliver 172kW DC shaftless power to front or rear drives.

Photos and some details courtesy Michael Hanrahan, Curator, Ashburton Museum, New Zealand

Riding Mower "Sidecar"

"My grandson Ethan and I drive it around at antique tractor shows where we always have great fun," says Jim Dowling, Hopkinsville, Ky., about his home-built riding mower "sidecar".

The sidecar is on the left side of a 1970 Deere RX 92 riding mower. It rides on a single caster wheel and is attached to the mower by two hinge pins. The seat folds forward, allowing Dowling to fold up the sidecar so the entire unit will fit in his pickup.

"Ethan and I built it five years ago when he was 11 years old. He did part of the welding and helped me scavenge the mower and parts. It's a low tech, low budget affair but it works great," says Dowling. "He usually drives and I ride along. It floats smoothly over rough terrain. If I want, I can pull the 2 pins and use the rig to mow grass."

The caster wheel mounts on a spindle off an old riding mower. A pair of footrests from an old riding mower bolt on front for the passenger.

Home-built "sidecar" mounts on left side of an old Deere riding mower and rides on a single caster wheel.

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