

# Yes! We Live in a **Barn**

Andover native Anita Toscano hired Bruce Brown to build this barn for her in Haverhill. Nineteen years later, they're happily married and enjoying their lifestyle at Dory Meadow Farm.



## “Shut the door, do you think we live in a barn?”

That’s a chastising most of us have been subjected to at least once in our lives.

Anita Toscano and her husband, Bruce Brown, can’t use that old fall-back on one another, however, because they do, in fact, live in a barn.

Now, barn living may seem out of the ordinary in these parts, Toscano concedes. However, there are places where it’s not a far-fetched concept at all. In Europe, for instance, it’s popular to take up residence in the top level of a barn, which helps to heat the house

among other perks.

Toscano, who grew up in Andover, began searching about 20 years ago for an appropriate property where she could live and have her horses, too. When she couldn’t find a farm within her budget in Andover, her real estate agent urged her to consider Haverhill.

“I said, ‘Haverhill is a city,’” she recalls. “But then I saw this spot and it was beautiful. It’s a great spot; country, but convenient.”

It’s true: Dory Meadow Farm is all of that. Located just five minutes from downtown Haverhill and even closer to I-495, the property is unexpectedly quiet, set back from the road and abutting conservation land.

From the barn, visitors don’t hear highway roars, but

ather the ear-pleasing sounds chirping of birds.

“We’re in the lost corner of Haverhill,” Brown says. “People don’t even realize it’s here.”

When Toscano pulled the trigger and bought the property, she was single and needed a good contractor to build her a barn. She got more than she bargained for in that deal, too: She commissioned Brown’s company, Advanced Barn Construction, and when the job was done had a barn and a future husband, too.

Nineteen years later, Toscano and

Because of the barn’s open layout, Toscano and Brown can watch their horses in the pasture from anywhere on the second or third floor.



## WHAT IS EVENTING?

**Eventing**, which was originally developed to train Cavalry horses, is the **triathlon of equestrian competition**.

► **First, the horse and rider** compete in a dressage phase, a formal competition used to show that the horse is obedient and graceful.

► **After dressage, the horse and rider** move on to a long cross-country circuit filled with obstacles such as walls or ditches. “It’s an all out effort,” says Anita Toscano, owner of Dory Meadow Farm in Haverhill. The cross country section shows that the horse and rider are in peak fitness, and trust each other.

► **Finally, the horse and rider** participate in a jumping competition. “That tests obedience,” Toscano says. “After it’s tired, will your horse give you one more push?”

Brown are happily married and have worked together to develop Dory Meadow Farm. They named it for her passion for riding, and his love for sailing.

“It’s the land and sea,” she says. “Him and me.”

The horses that Toscano boards – currently five in addition to her own two – are competitors, mostly in eventing. Because the horses need to perform at a high level, their care is demanding. Four times a day she feeds them imported Canadian hay. She cleans their stalls and turns them out to graze in the pasture during the day. And when they need baths, they get them right in the barn, which is equipped with a wash room and hot water.

“They’re well pampered,” she says.

She and her husband are very busy with their hobbies and jobs – he at his construction company and she tending to the farm and working as a medical technician

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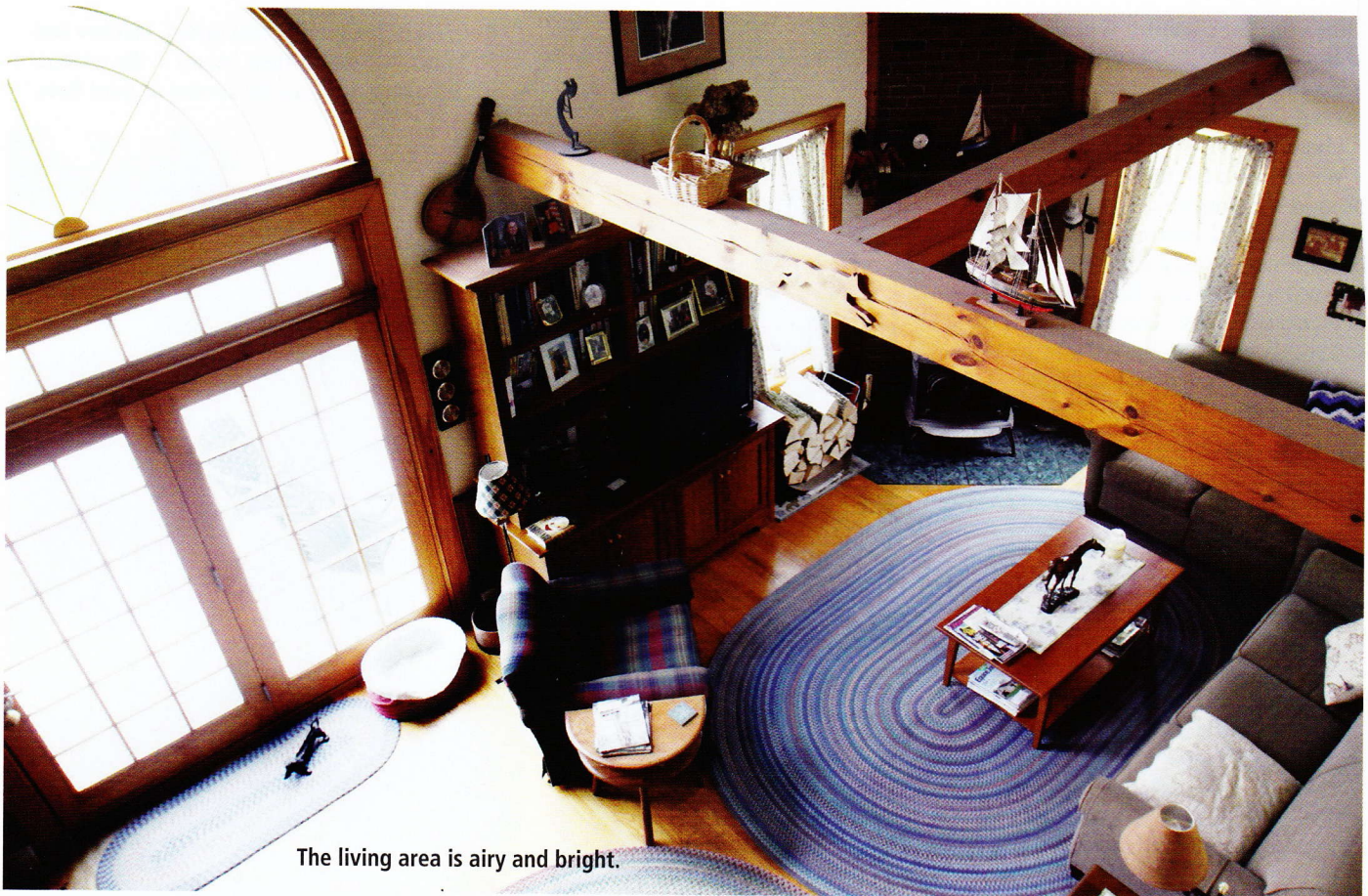
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The living area is airy and bright.



A sign leads the way to the stable.

at Holy Family Hospital in Methuen.

"We do each other's things, but we hardly see each other when we're busy," Anita says. "It's like having an affair."

Their 1,600-square-foot living space on the second and third floors is elegant. It might be easy for visitors to forget they're in a stable, except for the sign above the door proclaiming, "Barn This Way."

The kitchen and living room are open-concept, looking out over pastures and the riding arena.

"I wanted to be able to watch the horses while I did things," Toscano says.

The home has two bedrooms and an office, where they conduct business for the farm and Brown's construction company.

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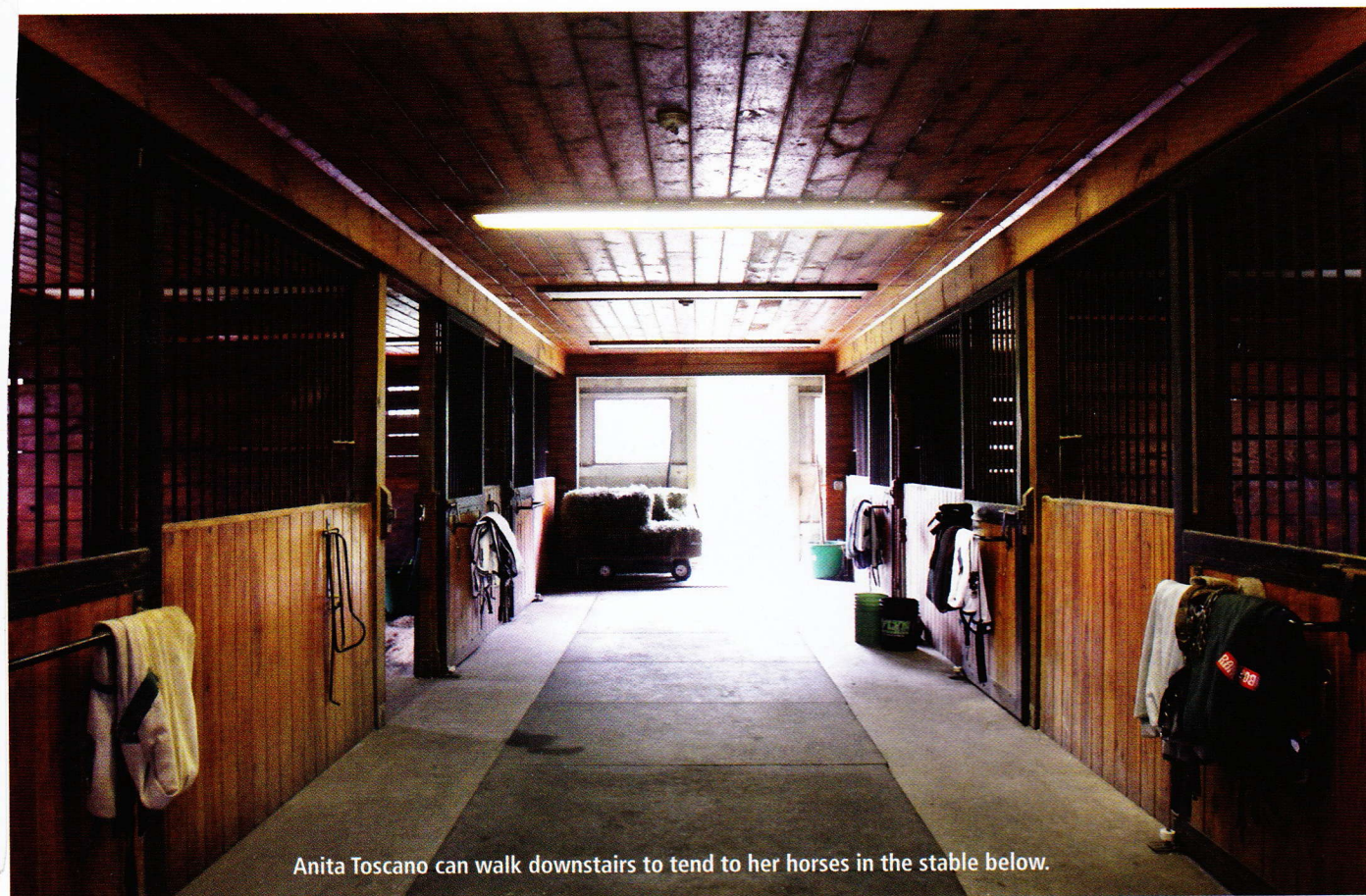
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Anita Toscano can walk downstairs to tend to her horses in the stable below.

Her work is made easier by living right above the horses. On cold, snowy mornings, she doesn't even set foot outside before doing her morning chores.

The horses benefit from having the humans so nearby, too.

"My bed is right above the horses," she says, noting that she hears all the sounds and knows well the difference between a good noise and a bad one.

"A mother never really sleeps," she says. "Because we're so close, we've been able to save sick horses that otherwise may have been found the next morning."

Dory Meadow Farm's motto is clearly displayed on another sign near the entrance: "Be nice or go away."

Toscano and Brown take the statement very seriously.

"We keep the costs down, so that we can pick and choose who gets to get in," Toscano says. "We want to be able to have nice people. People who ride their horses as a release."

Two dachshund dogs, Brillo and Maisy, keep guard, while Finn the cat keeps the mice under control and the people abreast of the weather.

"If he's inside it's going to rain," Toscano says.

Among the thoroughbreds resides

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Anita Toscano and Bruce Brown have two horses and board five others. They also own a donkey, two dogs and a cat.



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another, somewhat surprising, animal: Guido, the 35-year-old donkey that Toscano inherited from her uncle.

"When he died, it was, 'Who's going to take the donkey?'" Now, I'm thinking of who the next heir is."

Two special horses get a little extra TLC.

"We call it the assisted living barn," Toscano says of a smaller structure sitting on the pasture, where two horses are allowed to come and go freely from their stalls to the fields.

"They're retired," Toscano says. "They've earned the rights to that."

One of the horses in assisted living is Toscano's personal horse and former competition partner, Tavernier. The 28-year-old mare competed with Toscano into the mare's early 20s. The tack room at Dory Meadow is lined with the ribbons that the two won in eventing.

"She was a troublemaker, but a fabulous event horse," Toscano says. "She would jump the moon."

Toscano still rides Tavernier and her love for the horse is evident.

"Tavernier saved my life many times," she says. "She's the horse of a lifetime."

Toscano, who grew up near what is now the Raytheon plant, remembers quieter



## ABOUT DORY MEADOW FARM

► **Owners:** Longtime Andover resident Anita Toscano and her husband, Bruce Brown.

► **Address:** 141 Corliss Hill Road, Haverhill.

► **Contact:** 978-521-6802 or [www.dorymeadowfarm.com](http://www.dorymeadowfarm.com).

► **Built:** 1995.

► **Square Footage:** About 1,600 square feet of living space.

► **Inspiration:** Toscano and Brown designed their home with horses in mind. The first floor is a barn, and the living space on the second and third floor is arranged to overlook the many pastures at Dory Meadow Farm. "All the barn rats live in barns," Toscano jokes.

► **Philosophy:** The golden rule for Dory Meadow Farm is displayed in the barn and in the living space: "Be nice or go away."

► **Design Plan:** While designing the living space, Toscano wanted the area to be cozy and comfortable. "We didn't want it to be tight," she said. The open-concept living and kitchen area are small, but have no problem hosting 40 visitors, Toscano said.



days in that area of Andover.

"There was no 495, no 93, not even 133," she recalls.

She was obsessed with horses from an early age, a fascination her parents expected her to outgrow. Not so. As she grew, so did her interest in horses.

"I wanted to be on the Olympic Eventing Team," she says.

She moved one step closer to that goal when her neighbors built a horse farm across the street.

"It was the grace of God," she says of the property that today is the therapeutic riding facility, Ironstone Farm. "I was there handing them nails saying, 'Hurry!'"

When she was a girl, they trained thoroughbreds on that property. As a preteen, Toscano was small enough to break the horses and eventually became an exercise rider.

"I never did outgrow it," she says.

Toscano considered becoming a veterinarian, but realized that career would not fit her lifestyle.

"Vets didn't have time for their horses," she explains.

Instead, she graduated from the University of New Hampshire with a degree in Animal Science and Medical Technology. Throughout her life, she has continued to train, teach, and compete as an adult amateur rider, even while carrying on her day job at Holy Family.

"I'm with the horses in the morning,

and by 2:15 in the afternoon, I'm in the shower," she says. "By 2:30, I'm on the road, and when I get home I check the horses. I'm usually in bed at 1:30 in the morning."

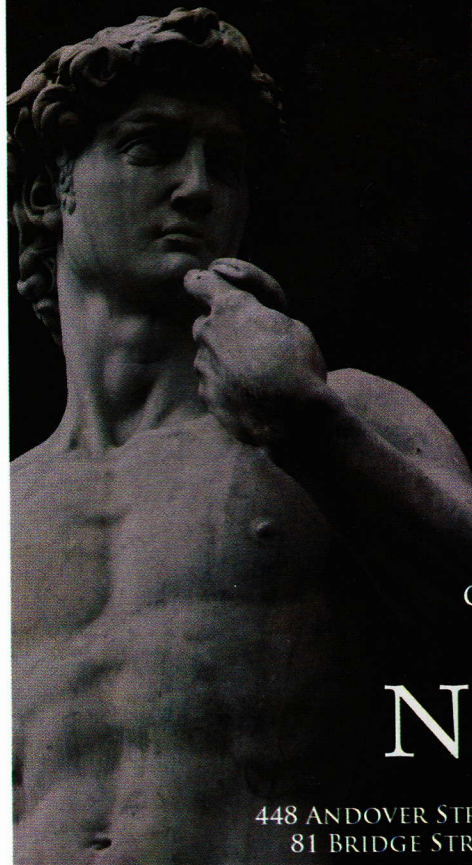
Although it's a busy life, it is one that

Toscano and Brown love. They hope to live at Dory Meadow Farm for as long as possible.

"It fits us both perfectly," Brown says.

Toscano agrees. "I would hate like hell to leave it." **A**

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