



Welcome One and ALL

A timber frame turns out to be an ideal
handicapped-accessible vacation cottage.

By Janet Mendelsohn

“EVERYBODY LOVES A BARN,” says John Libby. “This one is small but it satisfies a lot of needs.” Libby’s company, Houses & Barns by John Libby, is known for the beauty and craftsmanship of its New England timber-frame structures. His team of architects, designers, and builders has constructed everything from simple barns to a 9,500-square-foot luxury home. But a recent project, a guest cottage in Freeport, presented them with two challenges: create a vacation home for someone with exceptional physical needs, and test their ideas for modifying one of their popular Signature Barns as a living space.

For John Libby, work doesn’t get more personal than this. The project was for the benefit of

his daughter Kate and her husband, Tres Sansom.

“Years before Tres became our son-in-law,” Libby says, “two weeks after high school graduation, he dove into a swimming pool and broke his neck. He has been confined to a wheelchair as a quadriplegic since that day, about 18 years ago.”

“Tres is an assistant youth pastor in his church in Texas,” Libby continues. “He has an adventurous spirit and a positive attitude that makes him fun to be around. The first time he and my daughter Kate came to Maine together, Tres flew on a small plane to our place on Matinicus. Nothing stops him. But my wife and I live in an 1890s farmhouse. The stairs and narrow doorways make it difficult to get our son-



The open floor plan, exposed beams, and simple, clean lines are characteristic of all Libby homes and barns. Turns out those attributes also make the home ideal for someone with exceptional physical needs.



The cottage that John Libby built for his son-in-law's visits has all the comforts of home, but with features designed specially for him.

in-law in and out."

Libby and his colleagues had been looking for opportunities to build their Signature Barns for people who had never before considered living in a barn, so when Libby and his wife were discussing how to better arrange for Kate and Tres to visit, they realized that the small Maquoit Signature Barn would work well as a guest cottage. "Most people are surprised by how much living can take place in a 24' x 28' footprint," says Libby.

It soon became obvious that the Maquoit barn's size and design were well suited to creating a main level that completely met Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards for wheelchair accessibility.

From the kitchenette sink to the master

bath vanity and shower, living/dining area, and master bedroom with queen-size bed, there are no obstructions. The second level, which is not ADA-accessible, has a large bedroom with one queen and two single beds, and a full bath. Outdoors, a ramp slopes to the welcoming farmer's porch in front, where an automatic door opens into the cottage.

Now when Kate and Tres and their young children visit the Libbys several times a year, they enjoy a view of the woods and both privacy and comfort.

"To make this cottage financially viable," says Libby, "we rent it on a weekly basis, year-round, to travelers from all over."

Thanks to advertisements on vacation-rental websites, the property is booked close to 80 per-

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cent of the time. To date, none of the guests have said ADA-accessibility was the reason they chose it.

The cottage's accessibility features are also great for the elderly or anyone who relies on a walker or wheelchair. Imagine the convenience of kitchen-cabinet doors that slide back and in so that a wheelchair can go right up to the sink. For those who need more assistance, the ceiling in the first-floor bedroom is reinforced with hidden solid blocking that can hold a sling, called a Hoyer Lift, to move someone on and off the bed. When not needed, the lift is stored out of sight.

"Most people say barns are peaceful, wonderful spaces, and they always dreamed of owning one," says Libby, who learned his trade by restoring classic barns. All of his home and barn designs are customized for individual clients, but the five in his Signature Barn Series, which range from the 16' x 20' Harraseeket, the smallest, to the



36' x 48' Bradbury, make these projects especially easy for those who want a freestanding office, guest quarters, studio, boat barn, workshop, or small home. The pre-fitted barn frames are built to order, hand-cut in the company's Freeport workshop, and erected by Libby's crew on the client's slab, wood deck, or foundation. ■

