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BARN STORMERS

How a pair of artists is transforming old stable grounds into an art park.

by Lili Weigert | Photos Theodore Lillie



Writing on the Wall: Cathedral ceilings frame the airy living room, which also serves as a de facto art gallery.



San Francisco artists Tracy Ginsberg, 35, and Theodore Lillie, 33, knew they'd found their new home as soon as they drove up to the 3,700-square-foot barn in West Marin County, California. They watched from their car as another prospective buyer peeked inside, then quickly reversed course and left. "This place isn't for everyone," Ginsberg says. "In fact, it's really only for people like us."

By "people like us," she means those who aren't scared off by particleboard floors, woodstove heating, a septic system, and, on hot days, the pungent, faintly sweet smell of horses. After all, from 1972 to 2000 the structure had been a working barn.

She also means people who need space.

For nine years, Ginsberg had worked alone in a cold, cave-like studio in San Francisco's Mission District. It was there where she began to develop the idea for a less solitary, more collaborative arts organization. In 2002

she christened the company fulcrumProjects and began incubating multidisciplinary installations and performances. "An amazing synergy happens when a group of artists experiment freely together," Ginsberg says. "Installing and performing work in a forest or a meadow creates a whole new level of interconnection." FulcrumProjects gives Ginsberg a chance to connect with other artists—musicians, dancers, designers—and to explore the parameters of art.

As fulcrumProjects started taking off, Ginsberg and Lillie talked about moving to a bigger space. "We dreamt about big studios and lots of land where we could live and work and give fulcrumProjects a home," Ginsberg says.

As soon as the couple moved into the barn, they gutted anything that wasn't bolted down. The previous owners had already done a serious scouring job, disinfecting with



bleach and hauling out five tons of manure, so Ginsberg and Lillie could plunge headlong into demolition mode: They briskly tore out two rotting wood decks, bulky kitchen cabinets, and two non-load-bearing walls. For Ginsberg's studio—the old stables—the pair insulated, sheet-rocked, and installed a mail-order propane gas heater.

Once the heavy lifting was done, the couple painted all the walls white. "I always start with a blank slate," says Ginsberg. "It's the best way to see what you have to work with and the best color to display art on." It took 30 gallons to cover all their walls, so she and Lillie chose five-gallon buckets of Kelley Moore's "Swiss Coffee," which has a friendlier price tag than premium brands but doesn't sacrifice quality. Though they were happy with the results, they'd never do it the same way again. "We spent three weeks rolling the walls and ceilings," says Lillie. "For a big space with lots of nooks and crannies, it's better to rent a spray gun. Next time the job will take five days."

Finally, they attacked the floors, which were a random mix of particleboard, ceramic, and plywood coated with a layer of splattered paint. For an easy fix, they painted them black. Now they look modern and uniform.

As the interior is a work in progress, Ginsberg and Lillie are turning their attention outside. Having successfully built two decks—one that runs along the side of the house, the other cantilevered out from the front, where they sank in a hot tub that looks out over the treetops—the couple decided to get more experimental with their next deck, designing it to be modular and transportable. It currently lives on a gravel breezeway that leads to the front door and doubles as an art gallery. Eventually, pieces of the cedar platform will move around the property to be used for outdoor seating.

They've also started the process of transforming their 29 acres of densely forested, hilly land into an art park, where interconnecting trails will lead to sculptures, installations, and meditation enclaves. Lillie has already carved out two miles of paths with the help of some local high-school boys.

This summer the couple will produce an onsite event called Forest Alchemy featuring five installations, video, spoken word, and dance. Organizations like the SFMOMA and Gen Art have already booked field trips to the park.

Forest Alchemy will be fulcrumProjects' official debut in its new home, but Ginsberg and Lillie stress that the art is already happening. "We do a little bit every day, and then all of a sudden there's a shift and a big project is done," Lillie says. "It's a work in progress." 🍷



Equine Opportunity: Ginsberg and Lillie completely renovated the horse stable, transforming it into a work studio (top). The always-evolving living spaces (opposite and above) reflect the couple's vision for integrating art into their home.



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