

smartlife

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The transformation from rundown barn to high-end home is spectacular to say the least...



JACK BRAND FINDS OUT WHAT HAPPENED WHEN A DILAPIDATED BARN MET ONE DETERMINED OWNER AND SOME HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED SOUND TECHNOLOGY...

AMINA farm

Spend long enough cruising the B roads and country lanes of rural England and you'll see them – storage sheds, outhouses and barns that made up many a productive farm back in the day, but which have since fallen into disrepair. Quite apart from what they say about the present state of modern agriculture in the UK (which now seems to largely revolve around quasi-industrial compounds that almost resemble army bases), the current condition of these structures is also poignant because of the care and attention with which many were originally built in more optimistic times.

Which is why it's so encouraging to see one such building restored not just to its former glory, but far beyond it. For the ambitious owner of this rustic holdover located in Northampton, his search for a place in the country led him to unearth something

of a forgotten treasure. In his own words, "When I first came across the barn, there was already planning permission to knock it down and build from scratch. But when I saw the wonderful Northampton Stone and beautiful original exposed beams, I decided to rescue it and make it a truly remarkable home."

Enlisting the help of architects Simon Condor Associates, the owner set about his plan of not just carrying out an extensive renovation, but also equipping the interior with a top-spec AV set-up in such a way that the building's existing charm and character wouldn't be compromised – not, it must be said, a particularly easy task. So how did they do?

Cutting edge

The centrepiece to the conversion was to be a large, open-plan living space comprising the kitchen, dining and lounge areas. It was also here where most of the AV kit was to reside, but first came the need to sort out those interior walls. The solution came in the form of birchwood panelling which, when installed floor to ceiling, would ultimately lend the space a fresh, airy and decidedly contemporary air.

To achieve the desired effect, each birchwood panel was laid out, carefully considered for the impact it would have and finally cut for positioning. So detailed were the working methods of the project's craftsmen, that when it came to cutting doors for the alcove the grain on each piece was closely studied and painstakingly matched with the surrounding fascia, thus ensuring that the grain pattern flowed naturally, even once the doors were in place.

You can see for yourself the fruits of these obsessive labours. In terms of appearances, what stands out in this renovation is a distinct lightness of touch. As per the owner's wishes, those handsome beams feature prominently and work well with the birchwood to lend what could otherwise be a somewhat cold space some much needed warmth.

The addition of some strategically-placed partitions and a resolutely modern choice of furniture helps to break up the space where needed, while still allowing the interior enough room to breathe. Neither does the Northampton Stone brickwork at either end that so appealed to the owner dominate proceedings. Overall, the elements all seem to be in tune with each other, and faithful to the distinctive character of the building.

But hold on, aren't we forgetting something here? Ah yes, that aforementioned 'home entertainment' business. Turn on the





When an unsullied interior is what you're after, Amina's speakers are hard to beat

KIT LIST
 1x Hitachi Widescreen TV
 1x Teac AG H550 Home Theatre
 1x Teac DV H550 DVD-player
 1x Sky HD Digibox
 4x Amina AIW5 80W in-wall speakers

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flatscreen TV located in the living area and rich sound proceeds to come at you from all directions – but how? Keep reading, and all shall be revealed...

Country life

You know the expression 'walls have ears'? Well that's certainly true here. Considering the sheer amount of effort that went into getting the barn's beechwood panelling, room layout and aesthetics 'just so', simply lobbing in a wedge of incongruously-styled loudspeaker hardware with enough power to meet with the owner's requirements would have disrupted the smooth, natural effect that the architect and craftsmen had worked so hard to achieve. As the owner recalls, however, an answer was soon at hand; "The architect suggested we look at Amina Plaster In-wall speakers as a solution for the audio. They seemed to fit the bill as they could be installed in the wall or ceiling, and when plastered over they would be invisible."

A quick word about the science between these sonic offerings – unlike conventional units, the speakers in question operate along the similar lines as an acoustic guitar or violin. In the same way that those instruments rely on their wooden bodies to generate their sound, the Amina AIW5's used for the project feature a lightweight composite panel, countless vibrations in the surface of which serve to create a soundwave. And all while remaining completely hidden from view. Once it was decided where they should go, installing the four

enclosures was relatively straightforward. The necessary wall panels were removed, following which the wood on their reverse was routed away until there was sufficient space to accommodate the shape of the speaker assembly while making sure that 2mm of material was left at the front. After fixing the enclosures in place with wood adhesive and putting the panels back into position, it was simply a question of connecting the relevant wires, cranking them up and letting them sing.

The owner's verdict? "The speakers are used across a wide mix, from opera and classical to home theatre, and they sound quite extraordinary. The detail in the sound is unlike anything I've heard from conventional speakers, and the way they fill the whole space is truly phenomenal." That'll be him happy, then.

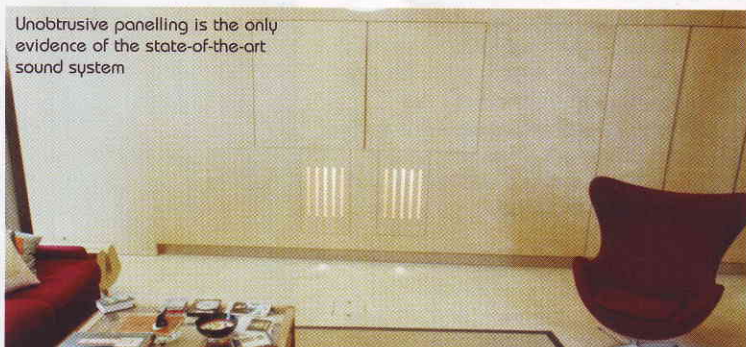
Rural retreat

So, from a one-time home for livestock and farming equipment long past its prime to an attractive showcase of what modern-day construction methods and sound technologies are capable of, you can colour us pretty impressed with the end result. It's different, it's daring and it works. All in all, one might call it a barnstorming success (I do apologise)...

Contact

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Amina Technologies Limited: www.amina.co.uk



Unobtrusive panelling is the only evidence of the state-of-the-art sound system