



Remember the movie  
“Baby Boom,” where  
Diane Keaton forsakes  
high-pressure corporate  
success for a quiet little  
job in the country?  
Well, say hello to  
Susan Shaw’s (BFA ’82)  
real-life story.

by Tracy Coley Curlee (ABJ ’90)

# The Art Barn:

A place where creativity grows

Shaw’s graphic design clients included such heavyweights as MCI and BellSouth, but she opted for younger clientele who scream with delight on tractor rides around her farm.

If it weren’t for the rooster on the mailbox and the antique tractor in the front yard, visitors might miss the Art Barn at Morning Glory Farm entirely. The house is just an ordinary brick ranch. But when Susan Shaw comes bounding off the porch in a white straw hat with a red bandanna and bubbling over with glad-to-see-you enthusiasm, it’s easy to see why she’s the ideal person to help children fall in love with art.

As she leads the way to the backyard through a wooden gate adorned with a hanging flower box and an old light fixture globe placed amongst pansies, Shaw’s world opens up like a scene out of “Green Acres”—hog wire fencing dotted with old soda bottles and wooden crafts, and wooden posts connected to small outbuildings and an old red barn. Chickens cluck happily in their pen while a Collie races around excited about having company. In Shaw’s refurbished barn, amidst hardwood flooring, a sack of goat feed, and an array of art supplies and various handmade projects, her story unfolds.

Art Barn at Morning Glory Farm is far different from the suburban Atlanta area where Shaw (BFA ’82) was born and raised—and far different from the career path she started out on. For 12 years, she ran her own design business with corporate clients that rival any major agency: MCI, BellSouth, Goodwill Industries.

So why did this savvy city mouse make such a diametrical move to the country?

“I was offered \$150,000 by a large production company here in Atlanta,” says Shaw. “But they would have owned me 24/7—and without much thought I said to myself, *I’d rather watch my grass grow and see if my dog remembers what it’s like to play!*” Shortly after that offer, I went on a trip to Arizona. As I sat out in the middle of the desert one night, gazing up into this huge sky of stars, I realized that this is what life is all about.”

As if on cue, a rooster crows from the adjoining shed, punctuating Shaw’s change-of-heart story.

“At that point in my life,” she continues, “it wasn’t about making money, it was about enjoying what nature had to offer and doing what I loved. So I told them, ‘Thanks, but no thanks,’



Shaw found her true calling by giving friends' children art projects to do while the adults had dinner. When the kids clamored for another art project on their next visit, she knew she was onto something.

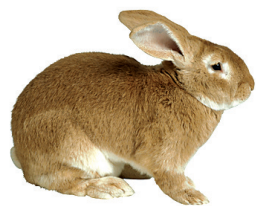


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and began looking for a place in the country."

Within a few weeks, Shaw found her Eden—a few acres of land on the outskirts of Canton north of Atlanta with a pasture, a small orchard, a garden, and a house that needed work. With help from her dad, Shaw and a contractor friend undertook the arduous task of renovating the house and barn. She began taking in one stray animal after another, including a pony, a few chickens, and a cuddly baby goat she named Moonpie who had free roam of the house in a diaper—while still running her own design business from her dining room.

While adjusting to the slower pace of country life, the real



**'I attribute my hard-work ethic to Ken Williams and the UGA graphic design program. [The professors] worked us hard and had high expectations' — Susan Shaw**

moment of transformation came one evening while having friends over for dinner. As the adults socialized, Shaw introduced the guests' children to her art studio in the converted barn, providing them with paper, paint, glue and some basic instructions. She didn't realize what an impression she'd made until the kids' next visit to the farm when they asked to paint again. Then and there, in her own backyard, the idea for the Art Barn blossomed.

At first, Shaw hosted an occasional Saturday birthday party for her friends' children. They'd gather up leaves, twigs, moss,

just about anything they could find on a nature walk on the farm, then bring them back to the barn, where Shaw would help them create an art project. After cake and ice cream, they'd each get a pony ride.

These days, Shaw's weekends are filled with birthday parties. She teaches a weekly preschool art class, runs a daily after-school program, and maintains a full schedule of summer camps. She's also begun an outreach program at a private school for children with attention and hyperactivity problems. A mother once called Shaw to comment on the beautiful

horse drawing her daughter brought home.

"It was drawn from a sculpture, right?"

"Oh, no ma'am," said Shaw. "I brought the horse to school!"

Shaw hasn't completely shut down her graphic design business. But the success of The Art Barn, combined with the daily demands of running a farm, has forced her to trim her client list to three companies. Even then, 12- to 14-hour days are pretty standard.

"I attribute my hard-work ethic to Ken Williams and the UGA graphic design program," says Shaw. "[The professors] worked us hard and had high expectations. Through the years,

I've also learned that you don't have to be the best at something to be a success, you just have to put your heart into whatever you do. And that's what I do here everyday."

The Art Barn's decor attests to the variety of projects her students have tackled: leaf fossil bowls, magnolia leaf purses, vine wreath mobiles. She manages to contribute a small art history lesson to each project, from painting methods to sculpturing, interwoven with a positive message. She points to a recent project on a table.

"Children and adults love creating these nature

mirrors. It's like a treasure hunt finding the pods, flowers, and lichen that we glue around the edges. I tell them that each time they look into their finished mirror they'll see the beauty of nature, and that right in the center is something very special: themselves. I emphasize that we should honor and respect both ourselves and nature because we are all a part of nature and the world around us."

Shaw recalls a visit from a group of inner city teenage girls brought to the country by the Sierra Club:

"Their arms were folded—totally uninterested and unapproachable. It was challenging at the start, but I began introducing animals and telling the stories of how the animals ended up here, and that they needed

a new home where they would be loved. Once I had them warmed up to the animals, they fell in love with the art project and were all smiles the rest of the day. By the end of the day the girls were hugging me and thanking me for their visit."

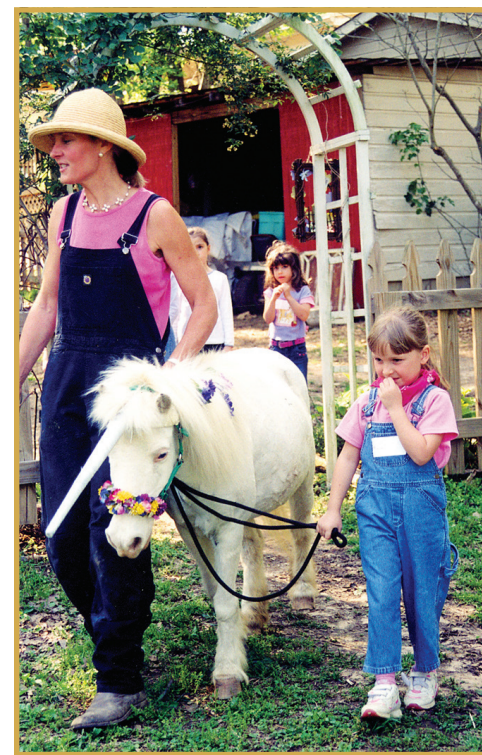
Carole Henry, art education chair at UGA, explains how important art is to a child's development:

"Children who are encouraged to see the world more closely through age appropriate and intellectually sound artistic experiences can gain understandings about that world and their relationship to it in ways that engage their emotions and their minds simultaneously. Learning to focus perception, to think creatively to solve problems, and to view and respond to works by artists dealing with similar issues are all aspects of thinking that can lead to greater personal insight and understanding. Art programs that strive to achieve these goals enable children to grow in their comprehension of themselves and the world around them."

The clip-clop of hooves can be heard on the porch as a horned head with bulging eyes peers through the back window, feet propped upon the sill like a puppy.

"That's Moonpie," Shaw smiles with pride. "That's my baby!"

Shaw's pet population in-



KRISTIN EASTABROOKS

Six-year-old Caroline Eastabrooks, daughter of Kristin Turner Eastabrooks (BBA '86) leads Tootles the unicorn through the magic wishing arch.

cludes bunnies, a lamb, several exotic chickens, miniature donkeys, ponies, ducks, two pot-bellied pigs and a miniature cow named RC. "After all," she says, "you can't very well have a Moonpie without an RC in the South!"

It's a beautiful afternoon, soft breeze blowing and very little humidity, an ideal day for a child's birthday party. Donkeys Eleanor and Earnest let out boisterous brays as Shaw, returning from a show-and-tell visit at Barnes & Noble with her pony Strawberry, steps out of her truck. Ducks, cows and roosters also voice hellos to their sur-

rogate mother.

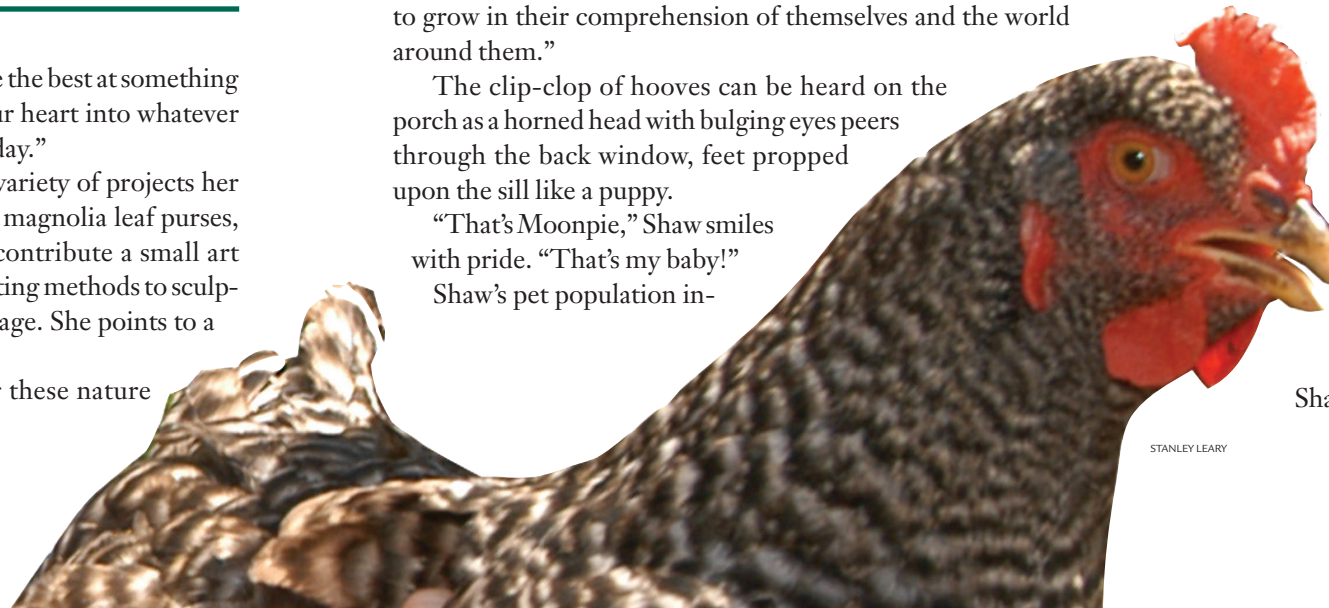
Shaw has 45 minutes to prepare for a princess party for four-year-old Emma, daughter of Kevin (AB '87) and Kristen Caldwell of Roswell. After tying Strawberry to a fence, she readies the studio for crafts and cake. Shaw has party preparation down to an art, and with only two minutes to spare she's ready for the group of 15 children and their parents waiting at the front gate. She goes over basic rules for the farm:

"Use gentle hands and quiet voices . . . and never get behind a horse!"

She leads the kids to the back of the Art Barn, where they wait in anticipation to meet Tootles, Morning Glory Farm's unicorn. For those who don't believe in unicorns, Tootles is a white miniature Shetland pony, adorned with purple and pink flowers around her saddle and bridle, with a cardboard horn extending from her forehead.

"Everybody, say hello to Tootles, our magic unicorn!" Shaw exclaims. The group of excited youngsters respond, "Hi, Tootles!"

She gives Tootles' lead to the birthday girl Emma, and the two other ponies, Strawberry and Lucy, to the other children. Thus begins the parade over to Rabbit Ranch. While the ponies graze outside the rabbit pen, Shaw lifts Emma onto Tootles for a ride around



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**Birthday parties are really fun at the Art Barn!**

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the garden patch, past Mr. McGregor's garden and around the Peanut Butter and Jelly Garden. Each child takes their turn riding, while others pet and hold the bunnies.

As the children head back into the Art Barn for crafts, Earl the rooster crows a cheerful greeting, and Wilbur and Violette, the pot-bellied pigs, poke their snouts through the wire fence.

Inside, the children sit at a long picnic table decorated with a denim cloth, cowboy boots, flowers, and ceramic farm animals. Today's art project is a bird's nest, a perfect age-appropriate craft for high-spirited four-year-olds.

To grab their attention above the jabbering, Shaw says, "One-two-three, eyes on me!" The children grow quiet and turn toward Shaw at the end of the table. Despite the fact that she has no previous experience with children, other than a niece, she exhibits an air of confidence as strong as a seasoned schoolteacher. "You're the chicken in charge," she exclaims, a tremor of giggles passing through the room, "so you can make as many eggs as you want out of your ball of clay!"

Once nests are made and hands are washed, Emma's eyes widen as her birthday cake is unveiled: a signature three-

dimensional red barn cake designed by Shaw and made by a baker friend from down the road. Plastic fencing and farm animals—which go home with the honoree—surround the

cake with "The Art Barn" scribbled in icing above the barn doors. Crayon candles sit on the roof, lined up behind the rooster.

After the traditional birthday song, the children head out back for the grand finale. Shaw steps onto her tractor, which pulls a slat-sided hay wagon loaded down with children.

"Are you cowboys ready for a ride around the farm?," she shouts over the putt-putt of the tractor's engine.

"Yeah!" the partiers shout.

Kevin Caldwell smiles. "Last year we had an animal farm come to our house for a birthday party," he says. "We paid just as much money, but there was an ambience missing. The Art Barn has a lot more substance. And it means more to the kids. Many of them have never even seen a cow up close."



## **The Art Barn is for kids of all ages — and it's handicap accessible.**

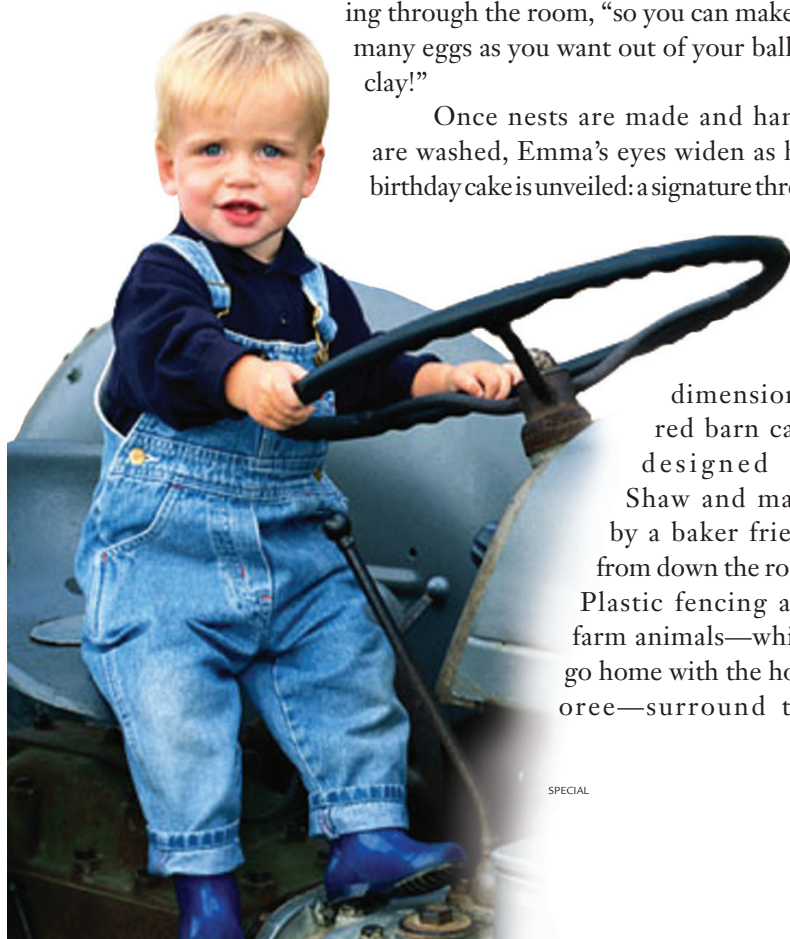
The Art Barn is for kids of all ages—and it's also handicap accessible. Adjacent to Shaw's house is a smaller facility, the hay barn, which comes into play on rainy days and provides work and play space for children who cannot easily maneuver over the bumpy terrain of the farm.

"I had a group of kids from the Shepherd Center," says Shaw. "Most of them were in wheelchairs, so we set them up in the hay barn. They got such a kick out of petting the ponies, goats, and bunnies!"

Asked if she'd ever return to the 9-to-5 grind of corporate life, Shaw replies without hesitation, "Oh gosh, no! I love this place! I turned off the cable and threw out my alarm clock. I get up with the roosters and go to bed late, but I've never been happier. Every single thing I love is right here. It's like magic. I can plant one tiny little seed—one little artistic suggestion—into each child and watch 15 different ideas grow. Just to see these kids' faces light up when they create something out of nothing, or when they get to touch and hold the animals. I would never, never, never trade that for anything in the world."

To learn more about The Art Barn at Morning Glory Farm, visit [www.TheArtBarn.com](http://www.TheArtBarn.com).

**Tracy Coley Curlee (ABJ '90) is an editor for UGA Publications.**



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