“A Love Affair”

C’est l’amour means “that’s love” in French. If you Google it, you’ll find 42 million links – from songs to dance videos to movies to books. But for now, I’m sure the owners of this barn, Michelle and Butch Monhollen, will admit that the title conveys the tone of the painting of this barn, which essentially had become a love affair.

When I first met Michelle, I could sense her enthusiasm not only for my Ohio Barn Project but also for her farm, the barn, and her 1870 farmhouse. Her joy was nearly thick enough to cut with a knife. And, even though she’s a girl from the fashionable suburbs of Kettering, Ohio, she grew to love the country, its old homes, its dilapidated wooden fences, and its rustic barns. Michelle and Butch have purchased four historic homes and have renovated them. But this one was different. Something about it drew them – like metal to a magnet.

Michelle told me that she drove by it one day and fell in love with it. She tried to buy it in 2005. At that time a Mr. Ernest Collins owned it, but he didn’t want to sell. Finally, after he died, his heirs put the farm up for sale, but their idea of its worth seemed inflated. They wouldn’t accept the Monhollen offer. And, over time, when no other offers came in, they settled on a price. Michelle and Butch bought the farmhouse, barn and six and a half acres in 2011.

And, here comes the c’est l’amour again: the buildings needed some TLC. A lot of it. The barn and house date to the late 1800s and, unfortunately, they had not been maintained adequately. Racoons had taken over the farmhouse, which meant massive renovation. And, the barn had a 20x40-foot hole in its roof, which meant it might collapse. But Butch, the ultimate do-it-yourselfer, put up scaffolding and repaired the roof. And, at Michelle’s request, he also built a charming wooden bridge – in a week – over a small gorge, which I painted on commission for the couple. Need help with a project? Call Butch. And even though he claims that he does not like carpentry, one would never know it after looking at his finished work.

Michelle also got her hands dirty, laying stone work on the front of the home and the fireplace. The decorative barn windows, also restored by the Monhollens, show that the barn’s builder wanted his barn to have class a century ago, which it still has today. Built as a true bank barn, it doesn’t have any livestock yet. But just wait. Who knows what Michelle and Butch have up their sleeves?