

final thought: **conserving americana**



Captions: The Palouse gave Appaloosa horses their name; Farmers once crafted red barn paint from rust, lime and skimmed milk; Oakesdale's grain elevator and Steptoe Butte; An old barn or homestead; The wheel fence at Dahmen Barn.

VANISHING BARNs ON THE BACKROADS

Spotted horses. Rolling fields of wheat. Rusted farm machinery and snaggle-toothed pioneer homesteads. The luminous landscape of the Palouse — a swathe of rich soil spilling from Idaho into Washington — now attracts photographers in record numbers.

Since 2010, snap-happy travelers have increased by at least 40 percent, says Jack Lien, a local who runs Palouse Country Photo Tours. “When 6,000 to 7,000 people stay an average of five days each, it has a big effect on the economy.”

But this marriage of art and Americana may be headed for hard times. The area's beloved, historic barns are succumbing to age, weather and upgrades such as metal siding: practical, but not so picturesque. Expensive renovations can cause farmers to flinch — a new roof can cost \$50,000. So when up-cycling companies bid on the distressed timbers for bars and restau-

rants, it's hard not to sell out.

“I encourage photographers to contribute to conserving the landscape they love,” Lien says.

The area doesn't have a dedicated charity for shutterbugs, but all visitors can donate to the Heritage Barn Registers (preservewa.org and preservationidaho.org). And they can also shop strategically at a rehabbed dairy, the Dahmen Barn in Uniontown, WA (artisanbarn.org), where volunteers created a non-profit gallery, event-space and ten artisans' studios. This autumn, they're starting a 3,600-square foot expansion, including a kitchen for culinary classes. Support the scene by buying some crafts and sweet Walla Walla-onion mustard. Or pick a buggy, wagon or steam-engine wheel to adopt from the barn's landmark fence outside — and help keep preservation rolling in the Palouse. — *text and photos by Amanda Castleman*