

HIS & HERS

Architect and Author,
John Blackburn, of
'Healthy Stables
by Design'
with LA Pomeroy,
Equinista



Not every barn designer earns a feature in San Diego Home/Garden Lifestyles Magazine but not every designer is John Blackburn. Like Buckminster Fuller, who challenged our concepts of home design, this author of 'Healthy Stables by Design' has turned traditional horse shelter on its ear, asking us to consider aerodynamic ventilation, strategic natural light, or passive solar heating and cooling to designing our barns. With 160 projects nationwide to his credit, Blackburn was among my featured guests on an Authors Panel during the third annual EQUUS Film Festival, November 19-22, in New York City, where he reiterated, "When you take a horse out of its comfort zone - the wild - it's your obligation to create an environment that protects its health and safety. A poorly designed barn can be worse than no barn at all."

Meet a man inspired by hay forts to create barns that care about horses as much as we do.

HERS: Earliest horse-related memory?

HIS: My first real experience interacting with horses happened when I was a kid. My twin sister had a Tennessee Walker when we were about 10 or 12 years old that she kept in our neighbor's barn. She was really enthusiastic about riding and took him to shows. Aside from the occasional bareback ride, I wasn't too interested but loved playing in the barn. I used to make forts out of hay bales and swing on a rope hanging off the hayloft and fish at the nearby creek - real country upbringing.

HERS: Who or what served as inspiration to write a book about barns?

HIS: I always wanted to write a book about barn design but wanted to experience a larger range of projects in different environments and contexts so as to expertly write on the topic. By the time the recession hit I had the diverse portfolio needed to exemplify my design philosophy. Maybe fortunately, the recession afforded me the time needed to focus on writing a book.

HERS: First big career break?

HIS: In the mid-1980s, an opportunity to work on a substantial horse barn project presented itself to me and a former colleague, Robbie Smith. Though fairly inexperienced with projects of this type, we were eager to get our feet wet and explore a new architectural arena. We studied the context and vernacular of the area and incorporated techniques that defied common barn conventions. That project was Heronwood Farm, the focus of the first chapter in my book. It was the first application of my philosophy to ensure the health and safety of the horse through design.

HERS: Favorite piece of your own work and why?

HIS: My kids! Actually my wife says work is my third child... I don't have a favorite, per se. They're all different. It's more about favorite moments. I enjoy the smile on a client's face when a project is completed and they're excited about their new barn.

HERS: Is there a barn or project you'd like to do one day?

HIS: I would like to gain experience with international environments

and contexts. I'd also like to work with a client to design a completely green, self-sustaining farm.

HERS: Work you admire most by someone else and why?

HIS: I admire architects who produce work that responds to the needs of a client and site in an environmentally-responsive way. Bohlin Cywinski Jackson comes to mind. They do brilliant contextual work that fits the environment. (Editor's note: Since 1965, Bohlin Cywinski Jackson has received more than 625 regional, national, and international design awards, including three Committee on the Environment Top Ten Green Project awards from the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and the prestigious AIA Architecture Firm Award).

HERS: Where can we find your work now?

HIS: We have completed projects in 30 states and two countries and currently have over 20 projects going around the country, including 13 horse farms and six residences.

HERS: If you weren't doing this, what alternative career might you have?

HIS: I've always been hands-on and interested in how things work, so I think I would have been a builder. I also really enjoy history, so archaeology might have been something I would have liked to explore.

HERS: What lasting impact do you hope your work can have on the horse world?

HIS: I hope to impress upon it the role that design has in responding healthfully and safely to the needs of horses and the environment.

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Equinista (fashionista + equestrienne) L.A. Pomeroy focuses on art, fashion, lifestyle and literature for the modern equestrian. A five-time (2013, 2012, 2011, 2010, 2008) American Horse Publications Editorial Awards winner and 2015 EQUUS Film Festival NYC award recipient, she may be reached on Facebook, lapomeroy.com and DonovanL.A@aol.com

