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# RIDING



## **BARN • TRUCKS • TRAILERS**

**Featuring Blackburn Architects**

**World Cup Final of Show Jumping • Del Mar Western Week  
MacDonald and Seidel Win Big at Dressage World Cup**



by Megan M. Blake

It's Sunday afternoon. You've just ridden your favorite mare, wiped down your saddle and are cleaning up the remaining tasks in the barn. Perhaps you've thought about having your own barn or stables to call home, maybe you want to upgrade your current equine digs or are in the middle of your own design rut? Whatever your dreams, it may be time to follow them. It's time to hire an architect to create a horse haven of your own.

An experienced architect can free you of hesitations, questions and confusion in equestrian facility planning and design. For John Blackburn of Blackburn Architects, P.C., an architecture firm with offices in San Francisco and Washington, DC, this means providing specialized service. Undeveloped land, existing barns, homes, paddocks, even temperate climates all involve situations that require the anticipation and solving of various problems. Some of the problems are obvious, many are not, but they all affect the extent to which the owner, and more importantly, their horses, will be healthy, comfortable and happy in their stable for many years.

There is no one way to design a barn and there are many factors to consider. "If you ask 100 farm/barn managers how a barn should run, you'll wind up with at least 101 opinions," Blackburn says. "Placement of windows and electrical outlets, ventilation, tack room layout, where and how hay and bedding will be stored

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and finding a space for the farrier," are just the beginning, he says. "Then there's the often overlooked and always important placement of the fire extinguishers," he says, adding that they should be strategically placed and recessed into the wall so a horse doesn't bump a hip. Blackburn has developed a questionnaire to go over with the client. How many paddocks are you considering? Do you expect to use additional buckets with the stall space?

Blackburn has architecture degrees from Clemson University and Washington University in St. Louis, and he specializes in presenting unique options for custom equestrian designs. In his 20 years of experience with equestrian design, he has worked with many clients and challenging design issues. At Neeley Ranch in Del Mar, the firm designed a six-stall stable to fit the design of an adjacent art studio. Site conditions included a steep slope setback requirement, right of ways crossing the property and a severe building height restriction, and were tamed by incorporating curved roof structures to optimize light from all angles and ventilation in cross sections. The Devine Ranch in Northern California's Aptos is currently under construction, and an eight-stall barn, covered round pen, open arena, turn-out fields and paddocks, as well as a 6,000 sq. foot residence are part of the plan.

"Maximizing clients' construction dollars and easing the entire construction and design process is key," Blackburn says. "The cheapest barn may not be your best investment." Working with an architect that is experienced with horses' needs and their owners' preferences allows the client to customize their project in ways that are not possible with a prefab barn, Blackburn says. It also ensures that quality of design and materials

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match the customers' needs and preferences. An architect will provide site suggestions, he adds, and help clients consider treatment of important details like walkways that are shared by people and horses, building proximity and footing. "This deserves serious thought when laying out the land around the barn," Blackburn adds. "Service roads should be avoided if located near the barn and paddocks. Obstructed passageways can cause serious harm to the horse."

A barn needs to be positioned in a calculated angle to maximize natural light and ventilation. "Whether the barn should be oriented east/west or north/south is just the beginning," Blackburn says. "Is the parcel of land on a hillside? Most cases require site evaluations and studies. Incorporating customized ventilating features can help reduce long term electric costs. Believe me, your horse will thank you for the cool comfort."

When working with an architect, the efficiency of the operation is crucial. At two projects back East, for example, simply connecting building aisles between major buildings, staff and owner are able to use the facility year-round in cold Northern climates. Blackburn used this opportunity to incorporate fire breaks and fire walls to provide additional protection. Minimizing rot is one

of many long-term efficiency issues that can be addressed by good design. Simply placing boards horizontally, rather than vertically, can help minimize rot by allowing moisture from flooring and bedding to be swept only into the lower floor boards, keeping the boards above dry and clean. If stall boards are installed vertically and the bottom edge begins to rot, then all of the boards have to be replaced. These are just a few of the details a client can count on a qualified architect like Blackburn to address.


Blackburn says, "In a prefab barn the stall doors are frequently too high off the ground and leave a potential gap where a leg could get stuck. The bars may be spaced too far apart (Blackburn recommends a maximum of 2 inches between bars.) The best way to do this is to work with someone who understands the range of needs for the owner, manager and horse."

Aside from the initial site visits, design brainstorming and planning, there's the construction process. Construction time presents the owner with a chance to see the growth of their vision. Although this can be a thrilling time for both owner and contractor, the task of reading a blueprint or drawing can become arduous and uneasy for the client. The architect will ease the process and become the middleman between the client and the contractor. And the horse owner can sleep better knowing their horse is safe from the elements and secure in its Blackburn designed stall.

Article provided by Blackburn Architects, P.C. For more information, please call 415.863.0191 or 202.337.1755; or visit the website [www.blackburnarch.com](http://www.blackburnarch.com)



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