

BARN DESIGN

Arena design usually begins with determining the necessary width needed to accommodate the arena's intended use. From there, other factors such as roof, enclosures and lighting are considered.

STEVE ROE

ARENA CONSIDERATIONS

In terms of scale, there is no such thing as a “small” arena. In arena design, the landscape and the positioning of buildings are vital considerations to ensure that the arena is proportionate and fits in its environment.

Size

One of the greatest factors affecting the cost of an arena is the size, which is principally driven by its width. Because different types of riding require varying amounts of space, the arena usage—roping or cutting, for instance—is the main thing to consider.

Covered vs. Enclosed

Do you need a covered or enclosed arena, or just an open arena? Usually, weather determines this. A covered arena might be all you require for hot weather, but an enclosed arena might be necessary in cold and windy climates. If the budget allows, we frequently provide both. Roll-up garage doors with either clear or translucent panels—or a combination—around all sides of an arena allow it to be covered in hot weather and completely closed in colder, more severe conditions.

Scale

Because size has a huge impact on the scale of the arena in the landscape, it's important to design with sensitivity

toward its height and bulk. If possible, locate the arena at a lower elevation or push it into the ground so the height of the arena building is visually reduced. By lowering the arena four to five feet into the ground, an observation area with visibility over a kick wall or fence can be located along one or more sides, with an on-grade entrance from the exterior. This elevated area provides a great view of the arena floor.

Another technique to minimize bulk is placing other structures around the arena or attaching to it in a way that allows the eave of the roof to appear closer to the ground to portray a more human scale. The height of the eave above the arena floor can be whatever the owner is comfortable with for their use, but at least 16 feet is preferable.

The slope of the roof also affects the overall aesthetic of the arena. Many “prefab” arenas—framed in steel or wood—have a low slope of between three or four in 12, which causes the arena to look more like a big box in the landscape. Five in 12 or greater is more appealing. Roof slope is affected by the

type of framing and cost, but also by zoning or local building codes. If there is a height restriction, pushing the arena into grade by four or five feet literally provides more room to work with.

Lighting

As in barn design, we try to incorporate as much natural light and natural ventilation in arenas as possible. A continuous ridge skylight with translucent glazing down the center, and with continuous or operable louvers is the best approach, as it also aids ventilation and cooling. It is important that glazing be translucent to reduce the effect of sharp shadows that could confuse a horse. An arena that is illuminated naturally can be used during the day without the need for electric lights.

John Blackburn is an architect whose portfolio includes hundreds of equestrian projects, ranging from barns and arenas to complete training facilities. He has offices in San Francisco, California and Washington, D.C. To learn more about Blackburn's work, visit blackburnarch.com.