

# A CHAMPAGNE BARN

By Jennifer Corkery

**Y**earn to build a barn that's not only functional, but perhaps a little bit fancy, too? Will your budget keep you from having both? Maybe not! A utilitarian barn is a worthy goal, but why not have as much beauty and luxury as you can afford? In fact, some features that enhance the appearance of your barn will also add to its function and can save you money in the long run. Two barn design experts give their thoughts on how to add some bubbly on your brew budget.

## The Value of Planning

"A good barn meets the goals of the owner, the demands of the site, and the needs of the horse," says architect John Blackburn. "You may have to compromise to bring them all into balance and budget, but never sacrifice the needs of the horse. You can design a very low-cost barn that is safe and functional for horses and good looking, too."

As much as it may seem that the little details inside a barn are what give it luxury, they aren't the only factor. "Even with a modest barn, a viable site plan and layout by an expert will eliminate many hassles and costs in the long run," says Blackburn. "It's those details that permeate a good design and give a sophisticated feel to any horse property."

Professional planning will keep horses and vehicles from crossing



Courtesy Blackburn Architects PC

Architect John Blackburn: "First and foremost in any barn design is the welfare of the horse."

# ON A BEER BUDGET



Steve Roe

This Blackburn-designed barn features wide aisles and plenty of natural lighting and ventilation.

paths for safety, provide a safe place to load and unload horse trailers, keep turnout pens close by so time isn't wasted moving horses around the property, and keep manure from running into water supplies. It will maximize warmth and protection in the winter, shade and breezes in the summer, give delivery trucks convenient access to storage rooms, and so much more.

According to Tusha, a rough price for a complete but modest barn is about \$25 per square foot. "At that rate, a 36-by-40-foot barn would cost about \$36,000," he says, "but that's not including a lot of features most people want. For a fancier job on a four-stall barn you could expect to spend \$60,000 and get some extras like a nice tack room, wash bay and a hay loft."

## Let there be Light (and Air)

"The most expensive way to do lights and

ventilation is to go artificial and mechanical," says Tusha. "The least expensive, and conveniently the best looking and best for the horses, is natural light and ventilation."

For a sophisticated design that can stay on budget, hire a professional designer who is knowledgeable about horses' needs. "Pre-fab barns have low-sloped roofs that don't vent well," explains Blackburn. "Making a roof steeper adds no cost, but greatly helps the barn's looks and ventilation."

To save money on barn lighting, Tusha offers a tip on how to achieve a more stylish, finished look without spending a lot on fancy light fixtures. "You can buy basic fluorescent lights and trim them in the same wood found elsewhere in your barn. They'll look less commercial, more like your barn, and even a little fancy."

Natural ventilation is better for horses because it effectively eliminates odors and

harmful gases and better for your pocketbook because artificial heating and cooling systems are expensive to install, maintain and operate. Blackburn advises, "Situate your barn to take advantage of natural prevailing breezes in the summer. Horses can take cold better than heat, so airflow in the hot months is critical to their health."

Warmer air rises above cooler air, so the design goal is to bring air in low and vent it high, creating a lifting effect and natural airflow throughout the structure. Deep roof overhangs not only look sophisticated, but keep snow, rain and sun away from the building's sides, shading and protecting the horses.

## Blend in Beauty

A barn's location on the property can make a huge difference in project price. Choose a site that's suitable for construction, without a lot of earth moving—there's less impact on the

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Courtesy Teton Ranch Corporation



This barn by Steve Tusha's Teton Ranch Corporation features windows that let in lots of light as well as add an attractive touch.

land, and of course, it minimizes costs.

Barn materials, such as those used for floors, walls and roofs, must be horse friendly and safe, but can also show some creativity and eye appeal without breaking the bank. "Materials have an effect on light, heat and ventilation, but the choices often come down to what people want," says Blackburn. "A good design can be kept on budget by choosing materials carefully."

Much eye appeal, and even a fancy look, can come from making the building's materials fit the property and natural landscape, a technique that doesn't have to cost extra. "A barn shouldn't look superimposed on the landscape," says Tusha. "What are the area's natural colors? Is it arid or green? We use those tones, though a bit of contrast can be okay, and it gives a luxurious look."

Tusha also recommends using your area's natural fieldstone as accents, even if only on highly visible areas of your barn, such as the foundation and corners. "Accenting with local stone gives such a finished look—it's not high priced, but it's a big plus visually. You may even find other landowners willing to give away stone or sell it for next to nothing."

"Each region has an abundance of certain materials," Tusha explains, "and we try to stay with that for not only the natural look, but to save money over materials that must be shipped in. For example, in the northern US,

oak lumber is abundant, so we'll use oak board and batten siding. Wood adds such a rich look and can be competitively priced versus metal, or even less expensive. It's also safer than metal if a horse kicks a wall, and easier to work with from a contractor's perspective, so you also get some labor savings."

## Build It!

Designing and building a barn involves many pieces of a puzzle, and all those pieces should be laid out so you know what you're spending. You can have a very functional and good-looking barn without overspending, and planning with an expert will actually save you money on labor, maintenance and your horses' health.

## Tips for a Beautiful Barn

- Line your tack room in cedar tongue and groove. It's not expensive, but gives the wow factor—it looks good, smells good and keeps moisture levels in check.
- Attach white melamine cabinets, very affordable from chain building goods stores, to tack room walls. Covered in cedar to match the tack room's walls they'll look sophisticated, and their practical bright white interiors are easily wiped clean.
- Boost the image of a cold, sterile concrete tack room floor with cut granite tile.
- Wash stalls can become expensive because of drainage issues and other variables, but a

great alternative is a grooming stall. A dedicated grooming space, at least 8 feet wide and 12 feet deep with cross-ties, is practical and gives a barn a luxurious look.

- Grooming vacuums, available from equine catalogs, mounted to your grooming stall's wall give a custom feel, but add very little expense. Be careful to mount the vacuum in a recessed area so there are no exposed sharp edges for a horse—or person—to bump into. Rubber mats underfoot are the finishing touch for safety and good looks.
- Trim utilitarian light fixtures and sliding stall-door tracks in wood that matches your barn for a finished look.
- If you plan on a concrete barn aisle, make sure it is lightly broomed (ridged) horizontally for a no-slip finish to keep your horses safe and no added expense. (John Blackburn recommends not using concrete aisles in barns for safety reasons, but prefers a type of asphalt that prevents slipping if an owner wants this type of flooring.)
- If you want a cupola on your barn, hire a local carpenter to build custom cupolas. They'll look better than pre-fab versions, and don't cost much more.
- Purchase materials locally and use local shops for labor to save over shipped materials and big companies with larger overhead.
- Don't rule out those fancy rubber paver bricks—on a small project, you may be able to afford them. At about \$5.50 per square foot (plus shipping and labor), you may be able to have a 12-by-40-foot barn aisle done for about \$3,000—not much money for a lot of long-lasting luxury.

We thank architect John Blackburn, senior principal of Blackburn Architects P.C., 1820 N Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036, [www.equestrian-architects.com](http://www.equestrian-architects.com); and barn designer and consultant Steve Tusha, president and owner of Teton Ranch Corporation, 2104 Main Street, Emmetsburg, IA 50536, [www.tetonranchcorp.com](http://www.tetonranchcorp.com); for their expertise on this topic.