

BLACK- BURN GREEN- BARNs

Blackburn Architects' natural equestrian architecture is gradually changing the rural American landscape—with the same techniques it used 20 years ago

BY DAVID HUDNALL

"HORSES ARE MEANT TO LIVE in nature; as soon as you bring them into a barn you're asking for trouble," says John Blackburn, principal of Washington, DC-based Blackburn Architects. "So you want barns to have natural lighting and ventilation that's close to what a horse would experience out in the fields. You see a lot of barns heavy on electric lights. Our barns, you can work all day long without the need for a single light."

Blackburn's firm works on commercial, residential, and historical renovation projects, but it's best known for equestrian architecture; its portfolio includes more than 150 equestrian facilities. Blackburn has been specializing in efficient barns since he and his business partner (Blackburn later bought him out) started out in 1983; his energy-conserving designs maximize natural light

and ventilation via continuous-ridge skylights and steeply sloped roofs.

But it wasn't until the past few years that Blackburn started actively promoting green barns. Today, an offshoot of the firm called Blackburn Greenbarns offers four eco-friendly, pre-designed barn models available for customers to purchase. "We don't build the barns—we'll typically sell the models and the customer will build them," he says. "But we also work with builders who can deliver the materials and help with the siting and even assist in the construction the barn. So our involvement level varies."

Its sustainable approach, though, remains a constant. FSC-certified lumber, recycled rubber-paver flooring, low-VOC finishes, and an asphalt-composite roof are just a few of the Greenbarns' features. Local

materials are a large part of the process as well; in Florida, for example, the firm may use seashells in lieu of asphalt or concrete paving. Blackburn is also a firm believer in implementing solar-photovoltaic systems on barn roofs to generate electricity for uses elsewhere on the farm. "Our barns are naturally designed, so they don't require much energy," he says, "but a PV on the roof can provide the energy to heat the water for the horses' wash racks, for example."

For custom projects, Blackburn regularly incorporates reclaimed materials. The Granary, in Warm Springs, Virginia, was designed and constructed almost entirely from reclaimed wood from a barn on the property that had fallen into disrepair. For the Bank Barn, in Leesburg, Virginia, he also salvaged lumber from a barn from the 1800s.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

NAME
Blackburn Greenbarns

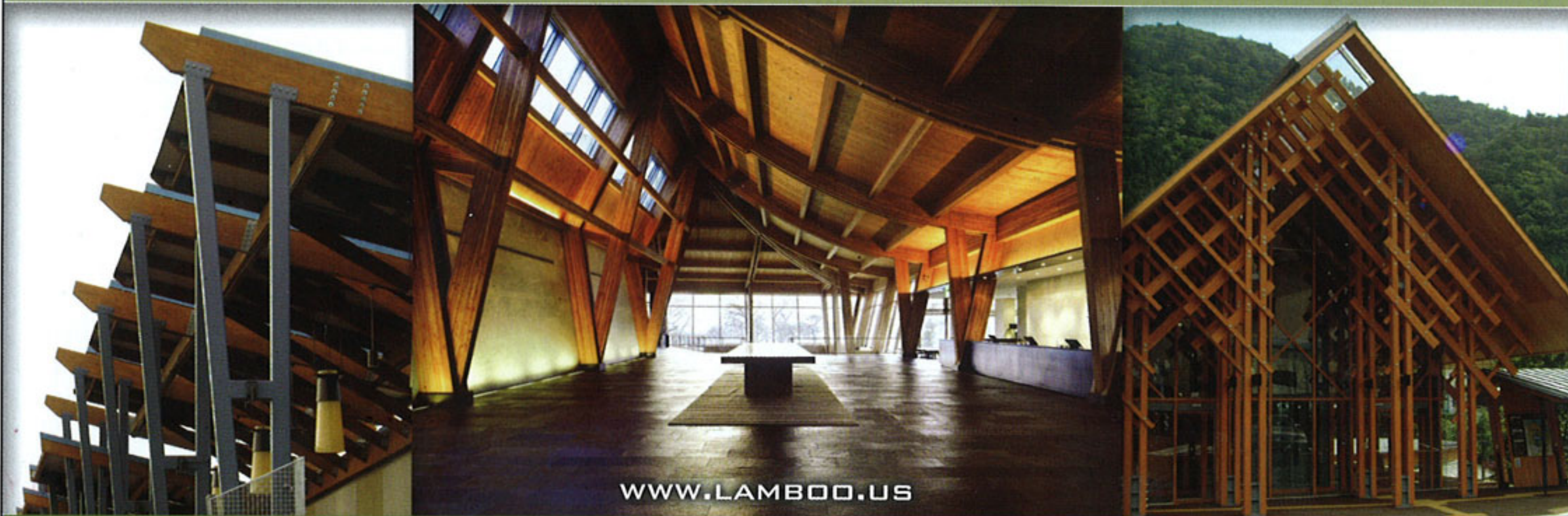
DESIGNER
John Blackburn

MODELS
4

UNIQUE FEATURES
All models include FSC-certified wood, recycled rubber-paver flooring, and composite-asphalt roofs

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And for the recently finished Oakhaven Farm, he harvested all stone from the site—the very same approach Blackburn used on his first equestrian project, Heronwood Farm, more than 20 years ago.

Looking ahead, Blackburn views wind power as an option he'd like to explore on more rural designs, "though it's more dependent on location," he says. "There's also a company in Iowa who has developed a

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—JOHN BLACKBURN, PRINCIPAL

system for generating power from horse manure, and we're looking into that as well." There's no LEED category for agricultural buildings, but Blackburn Architects tries to adhere to LEED guidelines on its structures, which can be found in more than 30 states. He also notes that the majority of the firm's clients are seeking some kind of "green, sustainable, or recycling aspect on their projects."

"If we can show clients a cost benefit, or even sometimes just an environmental benefit, and if it doesn't cost them much more, they're usually interested," Blackburn says. "And in some parts of the country, it can be beneficial in reducing permitting costs or for speeding up the permitting process. It all makes it easier for us to achieve our goal, which is to develop green barns that are natural, efficient, and affordable." GBO

