

Western Horsemanship

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Safe Haven

THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS. And in some cases, stall door latches.

Like most horses, it didn't take the stallion long to find a way to injure himself, and his injury came at a most inconvenient time. As the staff at the Texas breeding farm led the horse out of his stall to show him to potential buyers, he swiped the stall door's spring-loaded latch, tearing a gash in his hindquarters.

"They just turned around, put him back in the stall and called the vet, and someone said to me, 'There goes that sale,'" says John Blackburn of Blackburn Architects, a firm specializing in equestrian building projects. "Something as simple as a latch that's used in probably 90 percent of basic stall systems ... its malfunction can cause an injury."

Blackburn has studied the merits and pitfalls of different latches. He's analyzed bucket hooks and saddle racks, and after 25 years of experience, knows the best way to design a barn is to design for disaster.

"I tell my staff to design the facility so that at any time, a horse can spook," he says. "You have to expect the unexpected."

Of course, preparing for the unexpected often doesn't come cheap. Many elements that define custom barns—recessed waterspouts or proper ventilation—are tough, if not impossible, to retrofit, and re-designing or starting over can be an expensive undertaking. But there are still steps you can take to make your existing facility safer and more efficient.

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FARM & BARN

Safe Haven

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Make your barn a safer, more efficient space for yourself and your horses, with these seven simple ideas.



TODD GRALLA/GH2 GRALLA EQUESTRIAN ARCHITECTS

▲ **NATURAL VENTILATION** is the most important element in a barn. Technical details aside, an ideal barn is designed to move air up and out, while circulating new air into the building.

"In a lot of barns, ventilation is minimal or non-existent. The ammonia smell from urine is so strong it burns your eyes and gets into your lungs," says architect Lachlan Oldaker, of GH2 Gralla Equestrian Architects. "If you don't have that air changeover and one horse gets sick, it's easier for it to transfer to other horses."

Open-front stalls, such as the one pictured here, improve ventilation and filter in natural light.

»» **"IN GROOMING STALLS** and wash stalls, we try to create a recess for any equipment that might be there," says John Blackburn of Blackburn Architects, a specialist in equine facilities. "Particularly in wash stalls, we also try to provide a way to get out the back. I've heard of a case of someone who was backed into a corner by a horse and crushed. If you're around the back of a horse and he spooks, you need to be prepared."



COURTESY OF BLACKBURN ARCHITECTS, P.C.

▲ **JOHN BLACKBURN** strongly advocates pin-latch stall doors. "It's a fabulous detail," he says. "Very simple and not likely to cause an accident."



COURTESY OF BLACKBURN ARCHITECTS, P.C.



TODD GRALLA/GH2 GRALLA EQUESTRIAN ARCHITECTS

▲ **ARCHITECTS STEER AWAY** from air conditioning and heating barns, instead relying on natural ventilation and in-floor radiant heating systems. In-floor radiant heating systems heat the concrete from underneath, warming a barn aisle to slightly above freezing. System controls, like waterspouts and electrical plugs, are recessed to prevent injury.



COURTESY OF BLACKBURN ARCHITECTS, P.C.

▲ **IDEALLY, EVERYTHING** in a barn aisle should recess or fold flush to the wall, such as the saddle rack pictured here. "Anything that projects into the aisle is an accident waiting to happen," Blackburn says.