



SITE PLANNING

BY JOHN BLACKBURN

Locating turnouts close to the barn reduces leading time for handlers.

When designing an equestrian facility, planning that takes into consideration not only convenience, but also health and safety is vital for horses, handlers, riders and visitors.

The cardinal rule for any site plan is to isolate people, vehicles and horses whenever possible. Keeping that in mind, here's a sample of a safe and efficient layout.

Barn placement.

Barn placement is pivotal, allowing for seamless operation not only within the barn, but also throughout the farm.

Paddocks.

Locate these close to the barn to reduce leading time, with smaller paddocks closest to the barn. Consider a small sand paddock for short turnouts or for horses on restricted diets. Because horses will, given the chance, find ways to injure themselves, keep the paddocks as obstruction-free as possible.

Arenas.

Arena placement can depend on the geography and topography of your site. Cold climates, for example, can call for covered arenas adjacent to or attached to your barn. If an arena is located away from the barn, be sure that traffic patterns keep vehicles and horses apart.

Service areas.

Storage of farm equipment, hay and bedding, and other functional areas should be located between your barn and the local roads leading to your facility. While you must consider your day-to-day convenience, it is best to keep off-site service vehicles as far from the heart of the farm as possible.

Public areas.

If the public has access to your facility, the layout should incorporate security features such as easy observation of entrances and exits. All public traffic and parking should be isolated from areas in which horses are moving.

Site grade.

The grade should gradually slope away from the barn to a drainage swale, a French drain or a yard basin. Lead paths and paddock

grades should accommodate the type of horses using them. For example, endurance horses may benefit physically from steep grades that may injure horses like Thoroughbreds. However, increased slope is a serious concern in wintry conditions.

Trails.

Location and grade depend on the types of horses and riders using them, terrain, vehicular traffic and access to adjacent property. A trail plan should be addressed up front.

Residences.

Staff housing can be located above or within other farm structures for convenience and access to the stables. A caretaker apartment can be designed to include a view of foaling areas, but closed-circuit TV's are another option.

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.