

INSIDE

the Rider's Home

An interior designer and dressage rider tells you how to showcase your love of horses through home décor and functional design.

By Diane E. Barber

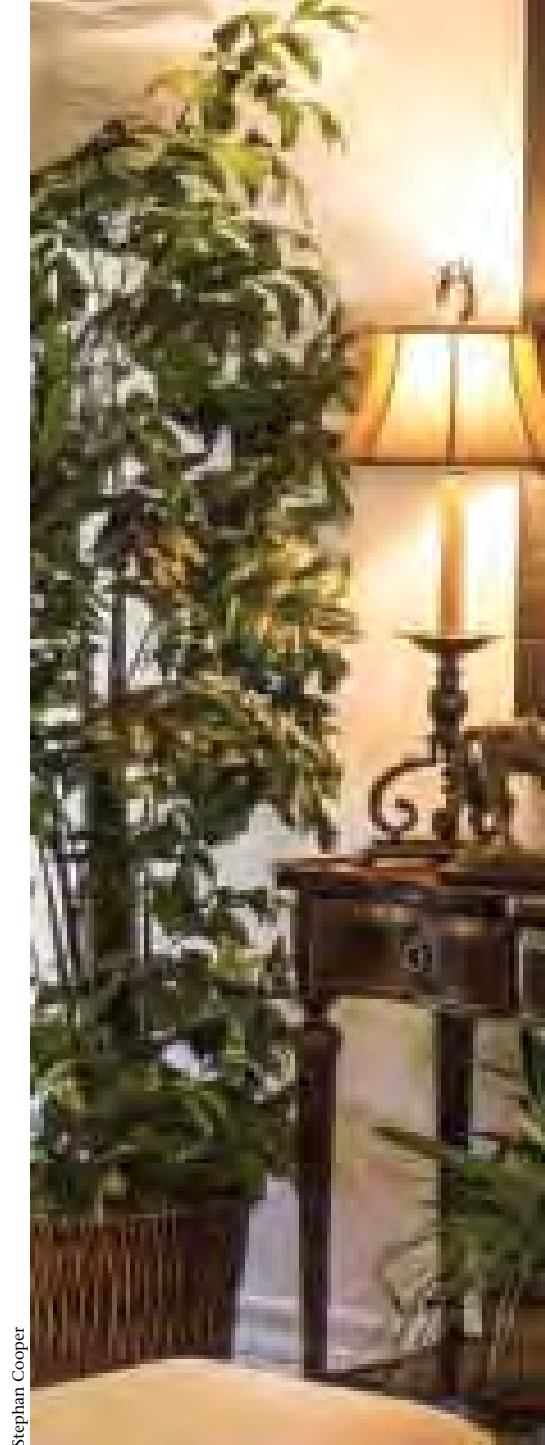
For equestrians, home is not only where the heart is, but also where the horse is. From rustic and casual to sophisticated and elegant, there is a common thread that connects the homes of horse lovers—a passion for horses woven into the interior design. When you step inside an equestrian's house, the spirit of horses undoubtedly lives there, too. Regardless of the preferred riding discipline, horsepeople take a distinctive approach when making aesthetic and functionality decisions about their living spaces. Though no two design projects are identical, the fundamentals of design that are applied to every project are the same, most importantly, creativity, balance, harmony, function, sustainability and safety.

From Saddles to Sofas

Designing to bring the outdoors in typically means blurring the lines between indoor and outdoor living spaces for the enjoyment of nature within the comforts of home. But that concept takes on a more literal meaning with horse lovers. Barn-grit-laden footwear and dog paws often tread across interior floors, riding breeches



Diane E. Barber lives in Los Angeles and is a lifestyle writer, interior designer and dressage enthusiast. She has an affinity for Spanish horses and travels to Spain regularly to train with Olympic medalist Rafael Soto. Barber and architect John Blackburn appeared on HGTV together to mentor students about equestrian design.



Stephan Cooper

leave saddles and land on upholstery and barn supplies are inevitably deposited in entryways. Dirt, dust, hay and more are unconsciously transferred from the stables to the inside of homes and can wreak havoc on the normal life expectancy of materials, finishes and furnishings. Additionally, equestrians are notorious for living, working and playing hard, which must also be considered in the design process.

The choice of flooring is one of the



This room is an example of a transitional-style sitting/piano room with an equestrian theme in a Palos Verdes, California, coastal home.

most important design decisions as it greatly impacts the overall appearance, comfort and hygiene of the home. Wood floors are favored by equestrians because they are natural, exude visual warmth, are comfortable for feet, joints and paws (they do not retain cold like tile does), and are easy to clean. To withstand the often rough-and-tumble impact of typical equestrian living, an extra-hard wood species, such as hickory or Brazilian walnut, and forgiving distressed solid

wood or engineered wood (with a minimum ¼-inch wear layer) are the way to go in case refinishing is needed later. For those who do not like the character of a wood floor that occurs with use over time, tile is a better choice for easier care and greater durability. The beauty of natural stone tile versus manmade tile is my preference. But for those who want minimal maintenance, there are many great porcelain selections on the market. As for fabrics, there are numerous

contract-grade product lines to choose from that are made to withstand public use in hotels, restaurants and other commercial applications and are excellent for equestrian design. They have come a long way from the original rough-to-the-touch materials of long ago to the limitless, beautiful options available today. Also, due to building-code requirements, unlike residential fabrics, they must go through a battery of tests to be rated for flammability, abrasion, fade-resistance

The arena and observation room at a privately owned horse farm in Weston, Massachusetts



Kenneth M. Wyner

and color-fastness. Leather, of course, is also a favorite upholstery choice for tack-loving equestrians not only for its rich aesthetic appeal but also for easy wipe-off care.

Other materials and finishes to consider are washable flat paints, especially in high-traffic areas, and durable solid-surface countertops, such as quartz, recycled glass and granite. Furnishings of rich woods and natural textures add dimension and interest, and area rugs visually and acoustically soften living spaces. When it comes to choosing a color palette, color preferences are as individual as an equestrian's preferred tack and horse breed. However, consider soft neutral walls as a backdrop for horse art, photos and collectibles. Splashes of color can be added with art, accent pillows, throws and upholstery, which are easy to change for a new look versus removing tile or anything else permanently installed during construction.

Horse Design Elements

How much is too much when it comes to incorporating horse art, accessories, photographs and even tack into the

overall design? Many people lavishly display their love of horses in their homes. However, when it is overdone, the impact of showcasing treasured paintings, antiques and professional photos is lost in the clutter. Conversely, there are those who prefer to keep their treasure chest of horse mementos and show winnings in the barn, lounge or office while reserving the interior of the home for extra-special horse pieces to make a more notable statement. Establishing a well-placed focal point, such as a painting to anchor the overall design in a space, is a good place to start. An example of this is a painting of a client's horses that I commissioned from Canadian equine artist, Elise Genest, for the entryway in a rustic, modern California home. A great craftsman and artist can make a custom experience a hands-on, enjoyable adventure, which was the case with Genest.

"When I am commissioned for a painting, I need to know about the size, style and the customer's ideas," says Genest. "So there are questions that I always ask: Do you like a particular painting of mine? Do you want a specific

horse or colors? What level of energy and what kind of feeling do you want to get from the painting? I also ask clients to send me images of their favorite paintings and horses and I send photos while I paint to share the progress."

Equestrian Architecture

Depending upon the scope of your project, the services of an architect will likely be required, particularly if you are planning new-home construction, an extensive remodel, a barn conversion or you are building a new barn. Key to ensuring start-to-finish success is enlisting the expert services of an architect who specializes in equestrian projects, such as Washington, D.C.-based John Blackburn, who has been a leader in equestrian architecture for more than 30 years and an advocate of environmental design his entire career.

When I asked Blackburn what his primary considerations are for residential equestrian design that includes barns, he said, "Many people like to blend or mix the equestrian style of the barn with the residence, so I consider the owner's preferences in the layout of the residence

For more information

visit: dianebarberdesigns.com,
blackburnarch.com, elise-genest.com
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and the barn. Some of the features may be view corridors from the residence, such as places where the owners can relax at home and observe their horses in the paddock, in the outdoor arena or with their heads sticking out of the stall windows. Often the desired visibility is for safety reasons, such as observing a child riding in the arena or for the security of confirming that horses are safely in the paddock and healthy. Sometimes it involves observation of an entrance gate or road, though that can be handled easily these days with technology. When

it comes to the interior design, I like to defer to the owner's personal taste but also prefer to work with an interior designer who specializes in residential interiors and is knowledgeable about equestrian styles. A goal of mine is to blend multiple design elements in a way that does not look overstated."

An Eye on the Environment

California has set the standards for environmental, or "green," design and building in the United States. From energy-wise appliances and lighting to chemical-free furnishings, solar heating and water-saving plumbing fixtures, the green movement is positively impacting the industry and influencing the choices of equestrians and non-equestrians alike.

"Green design is centered around many common sense principles," says Daniel Salzman, a designer in Los An-

geles who is a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-certified Accredited Professional in Green Homes and a Green Building Research Institute expert. "Choosing the right materials for your living environment has less to do with a political statement and more to do with one's well-being. I recommend materials that last a long time and are durable, so even if they are a bit more expensive, in the long run they save money. Also, choose materials with recycled content that do not waste resources and organic materials without chemicals that can affect indoor air quality and make you sick."

For Salzman, energy consumption is another important consideration. "Who wants to spend more on electrical bills?" he asks rhetorically. "If solar power is not in the cards for a client, I always make sure we use LED recessed lighting

as opposed to incandescent or fluorescent lighting. Just the thought of not having to change a bulb for 10 to 15 years alone should make that choice an easier one. Plus, LEDs are dimmable and do not give off heat and do not contain mercury like most fluorescent bulbs do.

Even if someone doesn't really care about the green movement, they usually care about living in a healthful environment that lasts a long time. These practical considerations make green a no-brainer and smart decision."

Uniquely Yours

Regardless of your individual sense of style, your budget or your particular lifestyle, creatively look at your home as a canvas for self-expression and the celebration of your life. Cheers to the love of horses and to telling an equestrian design story that is uniquely yours. 📖



A custom cabinetry conversion of a hallway closet in an equestrian residence showcases winnings.

Diane E. Barber

