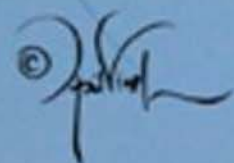




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20 IN PRAISE OF ARABIANS

“Maintaining a successful horse operation like Valley Oak Arabians requires a combination of passion, science, art, business sense, and good luck.”

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In Praise OF Arabians

BY MANNY VIERRA | PHOTOS BY APRIL VISEL AND TODD GARDNER

For as long as I can remember I've had a love for horses and in 1979 acquired a chestnut-colored Arabian filly named Karess. She was too young to ride, but I would groom her, care for her, and exercise her. I owned the horse for a couple of years, but even though that particular animal was a temporary part of my life, the experience invested me with a permanent love for Arabian horses.

Two years later, I undertook what would become a central passion for buying, breeding, and showing these splendid animals. I began with two horses. One of them was like a pet, but I dedicated the other to serious breeding and showing. These early activities have led to my current vision of breeding horses of a quality that is acknowledged superior by competent judges of good horseflesh in America and around the world.

A WORLD-CLASS FACILITY FOR HORSES

Breeders, owners, and lovers of Arabian horses are beginning to make their way

to our Valley Oak Arabians facility. Through the Internet and other communication channels that operate among members of the extensive global horse-loving sub-culture, people from around the world are learning about the Arabian horses in Brentwood, California. Breeders and horse people from Belgium, Poland, Holland, Australia, Brazil, Israel, and from locations throughout the United States have been coming to visit our farm in order to look at our inventory of horses and foals.

This hasn't happened by luck or coincidence. I set out to make my facility a destination for lovers of Arabian horses.

My horse breeding-and-showing activities hit high gear three years ago when I put the final changes on a state-of-the-art horse facility located on a 20-acre property off Marsh Creek Road. If horse stables had ratings similar to hotels, Valley Oak Arabians would be five-star. Each of our 35 stalls has plumbing and automatic fly systems as well as powder-coated stall partitions made with imported Brazilian hardwood. Two indoor wash racks have porcelain tile. The facility itself is longer than a football field, and has a 16-stall mare motel where we can monitor animals' heat cycles for breeding purposes, plus a facility with all the equipment needed to collect semen from our stallions for artificial insemination purposes. This year 30 foals will be born at our facility. Many will be available for purchase. Others will be retained for breeding. Still others will be reserved for the show circuit.

The area around the building includes a covered arena, a large barbeque area, a large lighted horse presentation area, ten outdoor turn-out paddocks where horses can be rotated for daily exercise, and a 2,000 square foot reception area equipped with flat-screen TVs, a large granite counter-top bar, and a seating area for viewing videos. The whole site is located on eight large irrigated pastures.

Serious planning and research went into the design before we dug the hole for the first footer. I toured horse facilities throughout Europe and studied the design of beautiful old barns, some of which were more than a century old. My goal was to create a facility that would combine features of old-world design, a Tuscany Southwest style, and state-of-the-art utilities and equipment.

The final design grew out my collaboration with a Brentwood architect named Don Stirling. I've worked with Don for years on a number of projects and have always been delighted with the results of our efforts. Don has always done a great job — continually working with perfect integrity and seeking the best for all concerned. Don and I sat down at our initial meetings, during which I described the size, layout, features, and the look-and-feel of the facility that I intended to create.

Then he began to generate draft floor plans, layouts, and elevations in an iterative process that eventually led to what seemed to both of us to be an ideal design. Seven months later we moved into the completed facility.

MY LIFE AMONG HORSES

I entered the construction business in 1979 in Santa Clara County. For years we had a summer place in Discovery Bay; in 1991 we made that secondary residence our primary residence, but before long moved into a ranchette on Valley Oak Drive in Brentwood that sits on five acres of land.

I make my living as a general contractor, but have made my life among horses. I am part of a global community of Arabian horse lovers. My love for the breed has

other owners and breeders, meeting new friends, reacquainting with old friends, and just generally participating in the sub-culture of people who share a love for these magnificent animals.

The Arabian horse culture is worldwide and besides attending these American shows, I travel extensively to other countries, visiting places that purchase, breed, and sell Arabian horses — going to anyplace where I can find top-of-the-line animals including serious Arabian horse-breeding communities in Israel, Jordan, Iran, Holland, Poland, and Italy. I often make the trips with a good friend, Raymond Mazzei, who has been in the industry for five decades. The two of us have located some of the finest Arabian blood in the world, meeting with people



brought me together with people from around the world. We meet periodically throughout the year at horse shows. For example, the prestigious U.S. Nationals are held every October at the Expo Square in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The world's largest annual Scottsdale Arabian Horse show is held every February. This is followed in April by the Las Vegas World Cup Show. Many of the finest Arabian horses trace their bloodlines back to Egypt, so an annual event is held for these horses every June at the Lexington Kentucky Horse Park.

These events provide opportunities for us breeders to show our horses to the public, compete for prizes and awards, offer horses for sale, and purchase breeding and show animals for ourselves. The events also provide opportunities for mingling with

who are famous in the industry including such destinations as the Forelock Arabian Farm in Holland, the Ariela Arabians Stables in Israel, and a number of large state-owned stud farms and private breeders who are part of an extensive Arabian Horse industry in Poland. I've done business with a Brazilian named Lenita Perroy, who is one of the world's most respected breeders. In Belgium we do business with Jadem Arabians.

Any horse purchased abroad is flown to Southern California and then stabled in quarantine facilities at UC Davis for a month or so, but much of our buying and trading of Arabian stock is conducted with domestic breeders in the United States using the services of top-in-their-field professional trainers like David Boggs, Greg Gallun, Andy Sellman, Greg Knowles, and Mike Neil.

Some of the best Arabian horseflesh in the world make their home at my Valley Oak Arabians. For two years I had possession of a famous Polish mare named El Dorada. When I showed her at the US National Championships, she won a unanimous first place prize. I was able to get three foals from her — one of them a prime mare that I still have at my stable.

In 2008 I negotiated the purchase of a Polish stallion, who was appropriately named Emigrant. My friend Raymond had his eye on that stallion since he was a foal. Emigrant became famous throughout Europe and is destined to become one of America's leading Arabian sires. Emigrant and El Dorada are half-siblings, both of them out of one of the world's most famous female breeding

high on their back. When I look at one of my splendid animals, the only thing I can think is that they are like living breathing works of art.

Arabians are extremely intelligent and have the ability to form affectionate bonds with those who will be gentle and kind with them. They will resist bullying, however; they have high spirits, and you don't want to fight with them, but if you win them over, they will give you their heart; they will do anything for you.

Along with the other wonderful traits of the breed, Arabians are great saddle horses. They have earned the nickname, "Drinkers of the Wind," because they hold almost every endurance record and can go without water for a long time. Arabians make great pleasure horses

nominations for special programs, as well as processing invoices — many of the essential parts of the daily operations. I don't know what I would do without her.

We are establishing ourselves as one of the world's premier Arabian facilities. We don't yet have the panache that comes from the legacy of some of those famous old European stables that I've visited, but I am sure that 100 years from now people will still be coming to Valley Oak Arabians to tour this marvelous facility and to see these magnificent animals. **110**

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lines, called "E-line." As with Emigrant and El Dorada, the offspring of this line are indicated by names that begin with the letter "E." By the end of the 2010 breeding season, I had ten Emigrant foals. In October, one of Emigrant's foals, Euscera, won Third Place at the prestigious United States Nationals.

MY HORSES

I am engaged in an ongoing love affair with these magnificent animals. They aren't as large as some breeds, nor as fast as others, but they have refined features — like exotic women in a beauty contest. Their heads are small, their nostrils large, and their faces have much more definition than other breeds. They are spirited animals, with tails that set up

adaptable to any style, whether Western, English, Hunt/Seek, or pulling buggies.

Maintaining a successful horse operation like Valley Oak Arabians requires a combination of passion, science, art, business sense, and good luck. Choosing the right horses to purchase for improving bloodlines, which ones to sell, how much a horse we want to purchase is actually worth, how much a buyer would be willing to pay for a horse we want to sell.... These are only some of the issues that we have to confront in managing Valley Oak Arabians. Besides all the other responsibilities, our horses require a lot of time and attention. I do the acquisition, selection, and breeding, but fortunately my wife, Diana, handles all paperwork, registrations, entry fees,

AGE
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OCCUPATION
General Contractor

PLACE OF BIRTH
San Jose

LOCAL RESIDENCE
Brentwood

LIFE GOAL
To live a good, healthy, and comfortable life surrounded by family, friends, and my Arabians.