



A TREE HOUSE FOR HORSES

Photos by Sharon McElvain

Of all the barn designs that HC has come across over the years there is one that stands out for its striking use of materials, specifically logs and actual trees. Located in Lemitar, New Mexico, the McElvain barn is truly one of a kind. HC sat down with owner Guy McElvain, grand prix rider, sporthorse breeder, and co-founder of the Grand Prix de Santa Fe, to talk about the vision he and wife Sharon had for this barn and how that vision became a reality.

HC - Why did you decide to build with logs?

GM - Pioneer Log Homes began a sponsorship of the Grand Prix de Santa Fe. I saw the logs Carsten Heyer had brought to use as jump standards at our show and we began to think how beautiful they would look as the barn posts instead of the 12 X 12 pine posts I had been using. I like the post and beam construction and have used it a lot in the past. It works well with adobe, which I like as well. The reason it works well with adobe is that you don't have to use a bond beam on top of the adobe if the posts

support the structure. That gives you lots of flexibility with the adobe walls.

We wanted to build something grand but subtle, if that is possible. We designed it to be functional, but once we saw the logs in person everything had to be raised up to standard. It was a work in progress - lots of fun to build and we designed as we went along. We tried to combine some of Old Mexico (I took a lot of pictures of doors, colors and architecture from Queretero, Mexico), New Mexico, Germany (the stall fronts), and Canadian timbers.



HC - It appears that an entire tree trunk was used for some of the main outside support posts. Is this the case?

GM - The trees support the whole barn! It is really quite amazing. Carsten Heyer, of Pioneer Log Homes of British Columbia, and I designed the layout. Then the Pioneer engineers drew up plans and then they essentially build the whole frame in Canada where their yard is. Then they shipped the whole log package and rafters down by truck with their crew (really four guys), and a crane with operator, and they put up the whole frame in ten days complete with rafters. We had poured the concrete

pilings to set the logs on the stem walls and the whole frame fit together perfectly down to the last centimeter.

HC - Have you noticed any benefits to the log construction? Is it cooler in the heat of the New Mexico summer?

GM - The adobe construction along with the high ceilings and breezeways made it amazingly cool in the summer (that is why they used adobe construction in NM for centuries). Traditionally they are cool in the summer and warm in the winter. When you close in the barn in the winter the heat from the horses is enough to warm the whole barn.





HC - What is your favorite part of the barn?

GM - I have several. I like the wine cellar. It is double-walled adobe for extra insulation. We made it like one of those lounges that you see in Europe - when you are looking at horses and everyone has a little lounge where you all crowd in to have coffee or a beer after riding. It's very cozy and a good place to cap off a great day.

I also love the wash rack/groom stall. We made three groom stalls and a double wash rack. I love this part because they really get used. I like to walk through when the barn is busy, a horse in each rack, and although they are overly extravagant they are functional. Some have old Mexican Mesquite doors and some have ornamental iron forged by the brother in law of our farrier, John Prosser.

HC - What does this barn say about who you are?

GM - I guess you could say the barn is representative of our family's experience with our horses. All of the people we met, who worked on this project, and most of the ideas, originated through our horse experience. We raise German horses in New Mexico and have shown all over the US, Canada, and Mexico, and our barn is a piece of all those places the horses have taken us. 🍷

