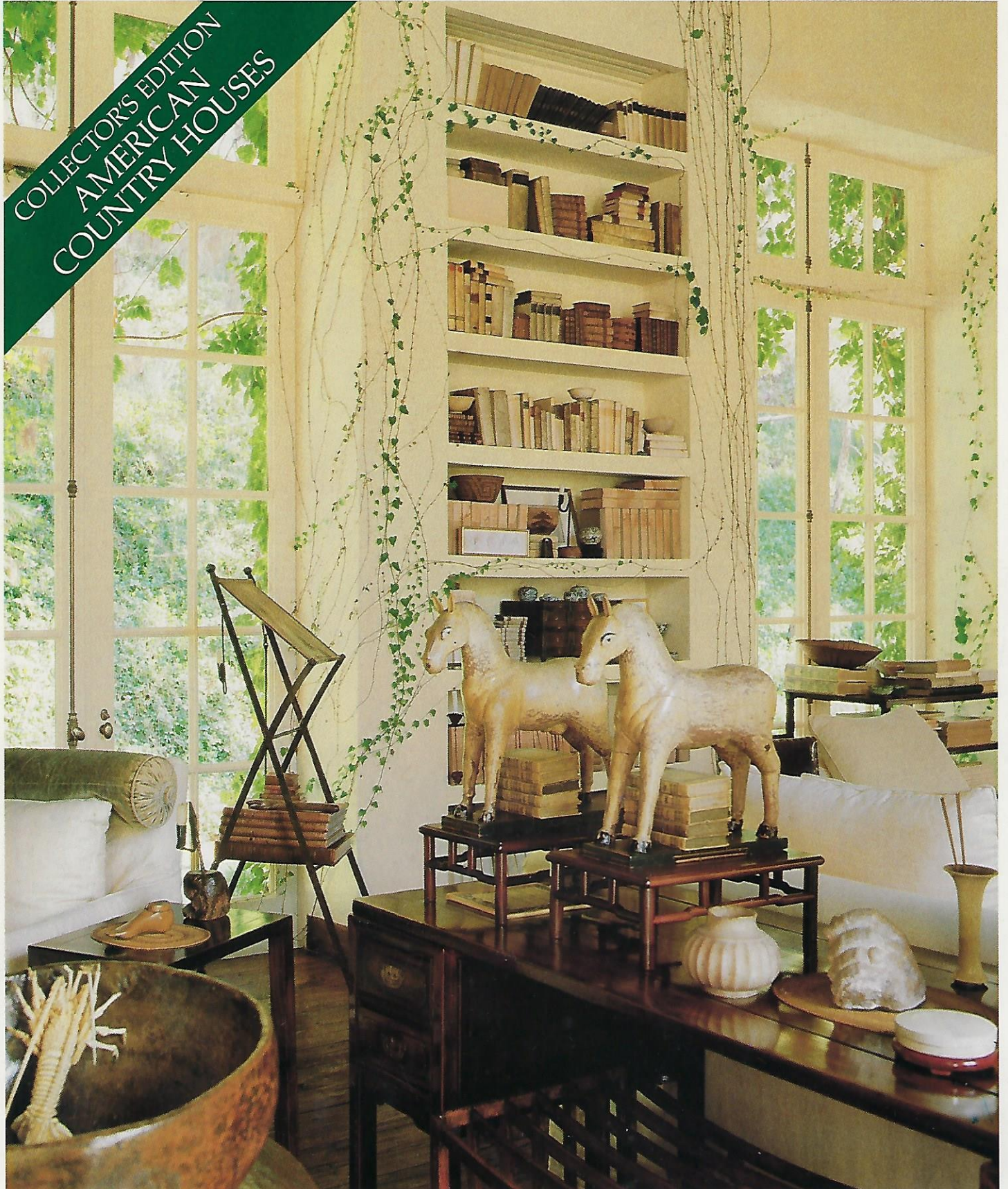


ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF FINE INTERIOR DESIGN

JUNE 1991 \$5.00

COLLECTOR'S EDITION
AMERICAN
COUNTRY HOUSES



Green Meadow Farm

An Informal Equestrian Haven in Dutchess County

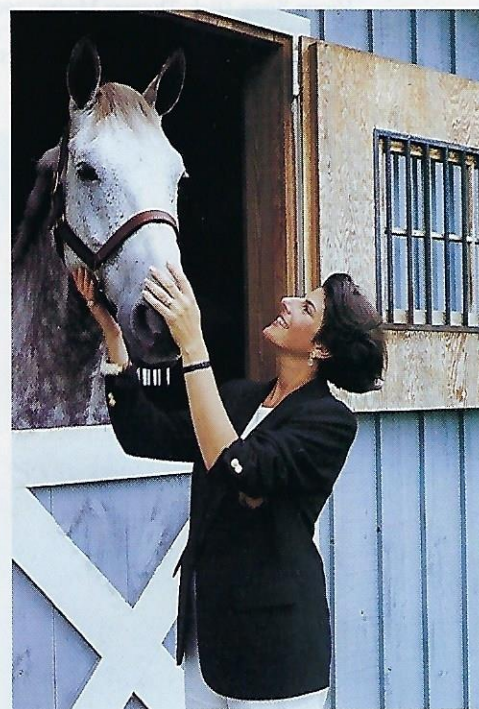
INTERIOR DESIGN BY SUSAN ORSINI
TEXT BY JOHN TAYLOR
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"We chose a traditional style to complement indigenous architecture and to give the site a sense of history and time," says Susan Orsini of Green Meadow Farm, the private stable she designed for Gary and Carole Beller in New York's Dutchess County. Gary Beller, a polo player and fox hunter, is executive vice-president and general counsel for American Express. **BELOW:** Pine paneling offers gleaming accompaniment to the saddles and bridles in the tack room. **BELOW RIGHT:** The designer, herself a horsewoman, at the farm.

SUSAN ORSINI KNOWS her horses. She began riding with her father when she was five years old. As a teenager she assisted trainers and gave riding lessons; later she taught a college course in stable management. When she set up her own interior design firm twelve years ago, it seemed natural to put her equestrian experience to use. "I wanted to meld my love of horses with my knowledge of design," she says.

Since then, while also working on everything from sleek executive offices to stone country houses and grand Manhattan restaurants, Orsini has designed nine stables. And that was how she came to the attention of Gary and Carole Beller.

Gary Beller, executive vice-president and general counsel for American Express, is an avid horseman who owns ten polo ponies and four hunters. The couple's daughter, Jessie, also an enthusiastic rider, has three ponies



OPPOSITE: A cathedral ceiling soars above the main room of the owners' wing—"an airy expanse of space and light," says Orsini. "It serves primarily for relaxation and entertainment after a day of riding. It was meant to be indestructible." An Irish pine table and bench are set before the windows. Kravet sofa fabric.



"The site is very exposed, with gorgeous views."



that she uses to show and to hunt.

For years, the family kept their horses at a friend's stable near the Mashomack Fish and Game Preserve, a private club north of New York City where Gary Beller plays polo. Then, in 1987, the Bellers acquired forty acres of farmland a few miles

from the club and asked Orsini to create a private stable for them there.

The designer had to start from scratch. "When the Bellers bought the land it had no buildings on it and no roads," she remembers. "It was used for growing corn. In fact, we had to wait for the harvest to be com-

pleted before putting the road in."

Gary Beller had precise ideas about the functions for the various buildings on the farm. Their visual style was important as well. The Bellers thought Green Meadow Farm, as they named it, should blend into the hills and woodlands of the Dutchess

County countryside. Orsini, who has a house in the area herself, agreed.

"I wanted something traditional, with a sense of history and a sense of place, that would be consistent with the architecture in the area," she explains. "The site is also very exposed, with gorgeous views, and I wanted to take advantage of them."

With the aid of architect Harold Spitzer, Orsini created a two-bedroom caretaker's cottage. Set in the middle of the property, it commands a 360-degree view of the paddocks and stables. The cottage has a clapboard exterior and, like all the farm buildings, is painted gunmetal blue. Gaslights and hunter-green shutters add traditional elements. As Orsini says, "It's a cozy little saltbox."

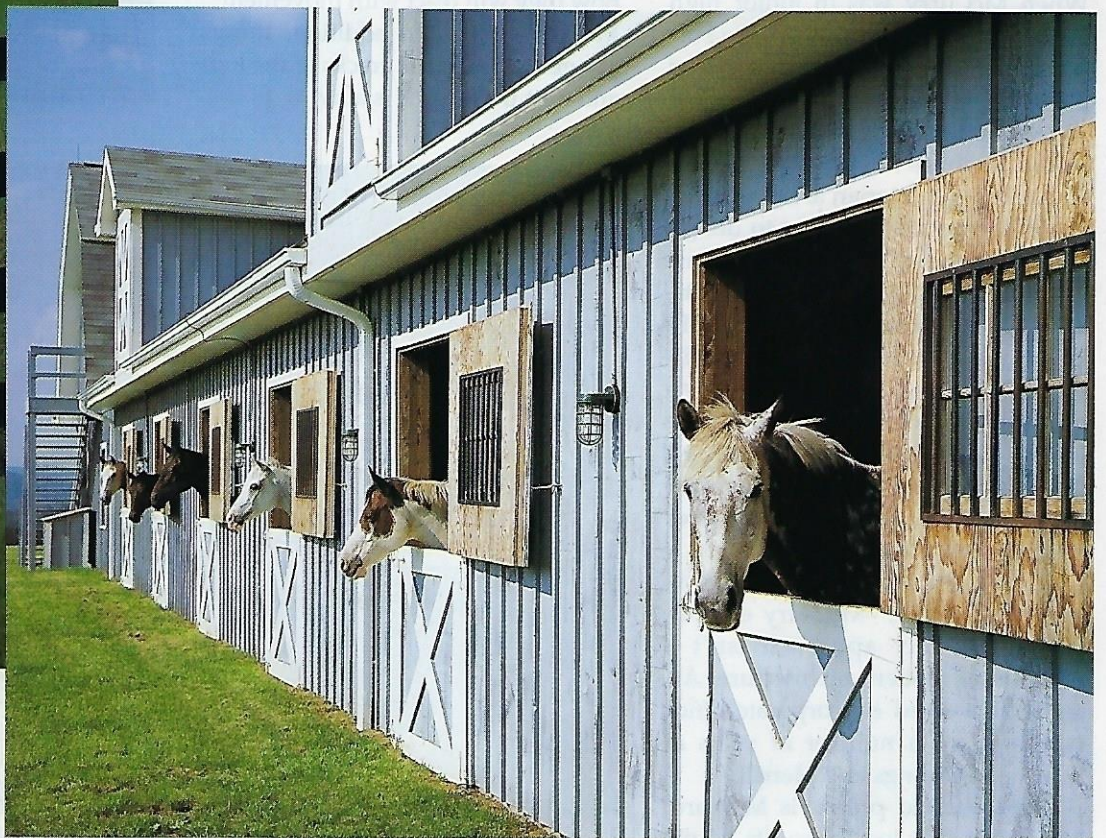
Orsini designed the rest of Green Meadow Farm herself. She began with the main stable: Since it would contain quarters for the Bellers as

well as for their horses, Orsini and her clients thought it should enjoy a certain distinctiveness. "We wanted grand proportions," she says.

The designer situated the stable at the farm's highest point, providing it with sweeping views. A gambrel roof creates a generous silhouette. "It's very graceful, like a Dutch barn," Orsini observes, "and the eaves and high roof pitch gave us more room for the grooms' apartments."

She emphasized the scale of the stable, which has board-and-batten siding, by installing French doors and oversize arched windows. Such a level of detail is remarkable enough for a farm building, but Susan Orsini went further. All the windows, even in the stalls, are divided into small panes by delicate mullions. Their visual complexity prevents the expansive structure from appearing blank.

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ABOVE LEFT: Lush paddocks extend over the 40-acre farm, for which Orsini also designed a 13,500-square-foot indoor riding arena and a summer barn for stabling up to 12 horses. ABOVE: A gambrel roof and board-and-batten siding distinguish the main barn, which contains the owners' wing and grooms' apartments, as well as 12 stalls for the Bellers' hunters and show horses.

Environmental Ethos near the Roaring Fork
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Lewis recalls. "But I wanted to retain that feeling I'd had camping out in the tepee, that sense of one big open space." The solution: The walls were cut down to six-foot-high partitions, defining the rooms without isolating them. One benefit of the unobstructed sight lines is the extraordinary natural lighting, provided in part by the rows of windows high in the vault.

Heating all this space would have been prohibitive without high-tech conservation measures such as heat-absorbing solar glass and the network of hot-water pipes that warms the stone floors. But the finish is resolutely low tech; the partitions are real plaster, the floors gray schist flagstone or pine, the cabinets a yellow pine that ages with character.

Both architect and client rolled up their sleeves and got involved in the construction work, and the experience underscored Conger's belief that architecture is fundamentally an art of personal relationships. "Richard and I became friends for life," he says. "I view architecture as a psychic phenomenon, a manifestation of an inner reality. To design a house I have to presume an inner reality on the part of my client. A lot of people are scared of that. You can't do something like this without a client who has vision and self-confidence."

Lewis found Conger equally congenial. "This was the first time in my building experience that I've worked with someone who didn't let his ego get in the way," he says. And perhaps the most compelling feature of Conger's design is that the architecture, as dramatic as it is, can also get out of the way and let nature perform. Even Lewis, after all his time spent camping out on the site, found some surprises when he moved in. "Sitting in our living room and looking out toward Independence Pass, Donna and I discovered these incredible reverse sunsets. The sun has already set behind us, but it still illuminates the mountains to the east. Eventually all we can see is the sun on the tops of those three peaks." □

An Informal Equestrian Haven in Dutchess County
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The stable's central section has twelve stalls, each with its own Dutch door, and is flanked by two wings. Orsini located the office, tack room and grooms' apartments in the north wing; the south wing became the owners' quarters.

Since the Bellers' country house is in nearby Millbrook, they didn't need a lavish residence at Green Meadow Farm. But they did want a place where they could relax by themselves or entertain casually.

Orsini created an informal living area with a double-height cathedral ceiling, a sleeping loft, a kitchen and a bath. "It's a wonderful place to spend lazy weekends, especially in the summer," she says. "The Bellers sometimes use it to put their guests up, and after a day of riding they often give a party there rather than drive everyone back to Millbrook."

The living quarters have an airy, freshly scrubbed atmosphere. The walls are white, the draperies are natural linen, and the floor's wide pine planks are hand-rubbed with what the

underscores the casual atmosphere, is durable and solid. An Irish pine table stands before the arched windows—"good for large hunt breakfasts," Orsini notes—while overstuffed armchairs covered in brown Ultrasuede flank a ponderosa pine sofa from New Mexico. The low table, from South America, was constructed out of planks and iron. "You can put your boots up or spill drinks on it without a worry," says the designer.

Orsini also took care to install a powerful air conditioner. "When twenty-five sweaty polo players come in, any room can get hot and stuffy very quickly," she points out.

Since the Bellers often have guests who bring their own mounts along, Green Meadow Farm needed to accommodate as many as twenty-four horses at any given time. So Orsini designed a second stable, the summer barn. She also devised a 13,500-square-foot indoor riding arena for training and exercising the horses during bad weather. "You could fit all the other buildings on the site

Since the main stable would contain quarters for the Bellers as well as for their horses, Orsini thought it should enjoy a certain distinctiveness.

designer calls "a white-birch finish."

"The Bellers used to have a summer house at the beach," she explains. "Mrs. Beller wanted to make these rooms beachy—open and light. The pale finishes accomplish that and give it a peaceful feeling."

Despite the predominance of white, Orsini made sure the living quarters could be treated roughly and cleaned effortlessly. The floors never need polishing. The beaded-board walls in the kitchen and bath can be wiped down. "Easy maintenance is the key," she says. "This is a place where ten polo players will come tromping in with muddy boots."

The furniture, an eclectic mix that

inside it," Orsini says with a laugh.

But because the arena was so big, it threatened to overwhelm the other buildings and obstruct the views of the surrounding woodlands. To prevent that from happening, and to protect the arena from the north winds that scour the region in winter, Orsini had it recessed into the slope that descends from the main stable. As a result, the building has a negligible presence when viewed from the main stable and cannot be seen at all from the road.

It is the sort of striking innovation that indicates that Susan Orsini understands design as well as she does horses. □