

BEHIND THE SEAMS: CRINIÈRE LIFE

FALL/WTR

HORSE & style

M A G A Z I N E

World Equestrian Center Ocala

FEATURE: THE IMPORTANCE OF AN EDUCATION
STYLE RIDER: MAYA SCHNEIDER • **STYLE PROFILES:** BACK TO BASICS
GREEN LIFESTYLE: HUNTSMEN & HOUNDS

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ON the COVER

by Jump Media
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OCALA:

World Equestrian
Center Becomes
*Center of the
Equestrian World*

The Roberts family broke ground on its new venture, World Equestrian Center – Ocala (WEC), nearly five years ago, and upon its official opening in January 2021, the property will become one of the largest and most spectacular horse show facilities in the world. With nearly 40 years in horse show development and management at the World Equestrian Center's primary property in Wilmington, Ohio, the Roberts family has devoted itself to building the World Equestrian Center brand into an entirely new experience.

Situated amid the beautiful farmland that makes up the area's well-known horse country, the property is roughly eight miles west of downtown Ocala and features 22 outdoor rings, four indoor arenas, and has capacity for 2,200 horses within the 20 barns and 250 paddocks on-site. At the center of the action is a five-star hotel overlooking a grand prix stadium purpose-built for international competition. Directly across from the hotel on the main plaza sits a statue of decorated warhorse, Sgt. Reckless, who fought with the United States Marine Corps during the Korean War.

While the property for equestrian competition is impressive, it is what's outside of the show rings that truly sets World Equestrian Center – Ocala apart from any other equestrian venue in the world. Chefs from across the globe will create truly authentic dining experiences within the restaurants on the property, offering everything from Italian fare at Viola & Dot's and traditional French-inspired baked goods from Emma's Patisserie to Filo's Mexican Cantina and genuine British pub, The Yellow Pony. There's even a high-end steak and seafood restaurant, Stirrups, featuring a 1,500-bottle wine cellar. The whimsical Mrs. Tilly's Lollipops candy store, Ralph's Burger & Sandwich Shop, the general store-style Commissary featuring a Starbucks, and high-end shopping all make World Equestrian Center – Ocala a city unto itself.

The Roberts family has also created an atmosphere that welcomes exhibitors of every level and their families. The staff throughout the venue engender that familial feeling into the experience. When the horse show is over, the fun continues with dog shows, drive-in movies, concerts, additional recreational sports, a spa, and much more that make up the ultimate horse show experience at an unmatched equestrian destination.

"When you're treated like family, you feel like you're home," said CEO Roby Roberts. "It's not just a horse show; it's an extension of home. We've watched so many people create special memories through the years at World Equestrian Center – Ohio. We like to think we've been a small part of their lives."

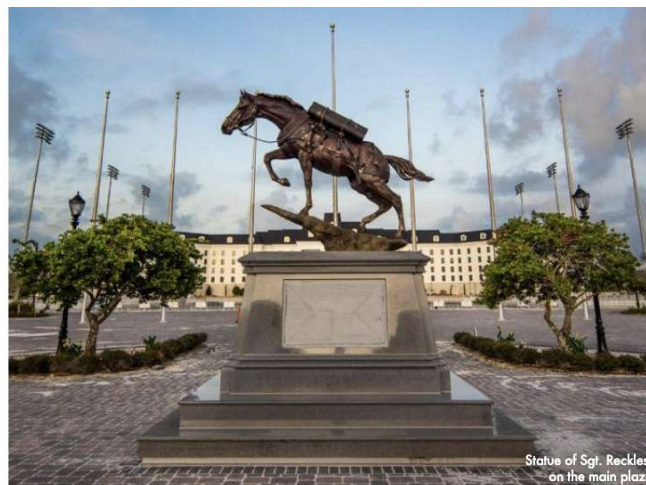
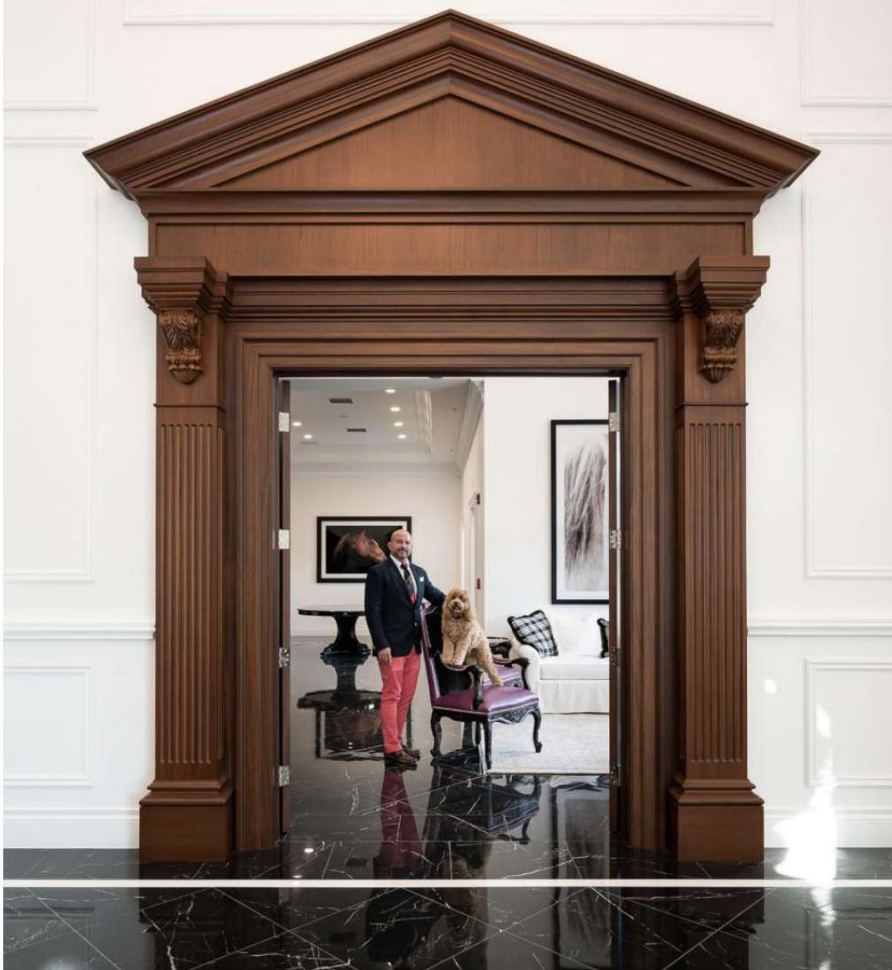
Decades ago, World Equestrian Center – Ohio was the Roberts Arena, known as "The Showplace of the Midwest" and host to primarily Quarter Horse competition. Roberts met his wife, Jennie, at an event held on the property, and WEC has been deeply rooted in their family ever since. Roberts' own parents, Mary and Ralph L. Roberts, who moved to Ocala several years ago, have led much of the development of the new facility on the ground. As CEO of the family-owned truck line R&L Carriers, Roby Roberts oversees the progress from a distance while his parents and his wife have stepped forward to help make the family's dream a reality. Ralph Roberts handled the construction management and found the



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– RIC OWENS, DESIGNER



Statue of Sgt. Reckless on the main plaza



ultimate team to break ground and build the remarkable facility. His wife, Mary Roberts, managed all of the design and landscaping, personally handpicking every tree and shrub, with the aim of making it feel like a mature property. No detail was too small when planning the experience.

FROM DIRT TO A DISTINGUISHED FIVE-STAR EXPERIENCE

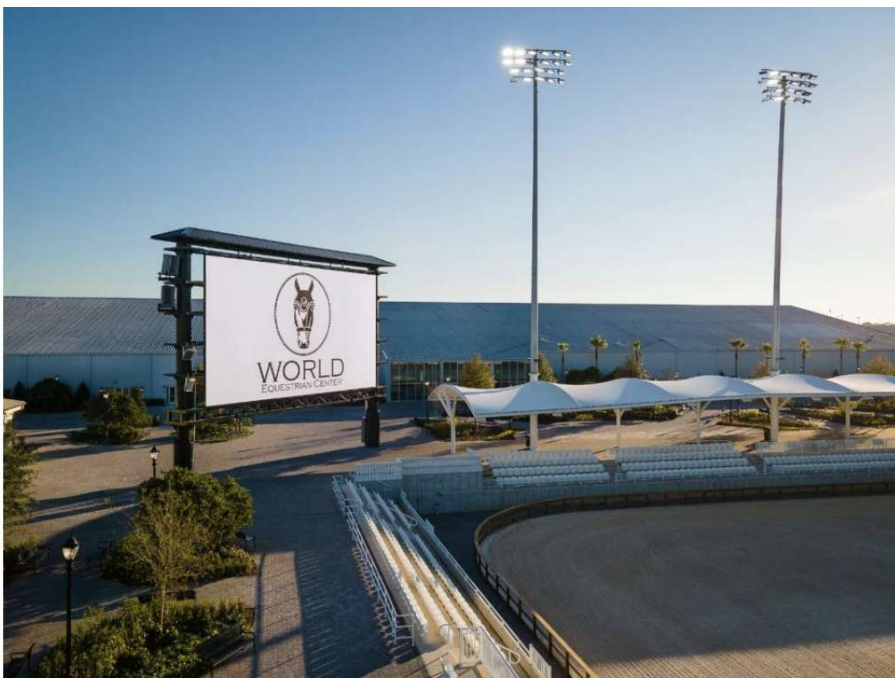
If dreaming up the world's ultimate equestrian lifestyle destination was the Roberts family's goal, then taking that vision and making it a reality was the directive for interior designer Ric Owens of Miami, Florida. Although he did not come from an equestrian background, Owens accepted the challenge when assigned the task of designing the look and feel of World Equestrian Center – Ocala with Mrs. Roberts. Owens has worked with Mrs. Roberts for nearly 20 years and was intimately familiar with her style, having designed her personal homes as well as houses at the Golden Ocala Golf & Equestrian Club in Ocala, also owned by the Roberts family.

“Mrs. [Mary] Roberts' style is very Parisian; it's traditional with an equestrian lifestyle twist, like something you'd see in a French chateau,” said Owens of the aesthetic he was aiming to achieve.

Everything in the hotel was custom designed by Owens with the equestrian lifestyle in mind, even down to the bespoke tiling that imitates burlap and other farmhouse textures. Working closely with Mary Roberts, Owens designed all of the interiors, from the hotel rooms to the public restrooms to the VIP areas on the show grounds, from scratch.

“World Equestrian Center – Ocala grew from a sketch on a napkin into the city it is today,” said Owens. “We didn't just need a horse show; we needed a five-star hotel, golf, a pool, the chapel, and other luxuries to make this the ultimate experience. The original concept was a showgrounds with stalls, and it evolved into a center of the equestrian world.”

Together with Mrs. Roberts, Owens oversaw the unmatched level of detail that goes into creating a world-class horse show facility from the ground up. The development team consulted world-renowned experts on every decision, from the padding in the stalls to the patterns of movement and traffic



flow throughout the facility. Of utmost importance was safety for both horse and human and ensuring an unforgettable experience for everyone, including riders, families, and the larger Ocala community.

Adjacent to the horse show property lies the upscale Golden Ocala Golf & Equestrian Club. The influence from the Roberts Design company is prevalent there as homeowners can tap Owens for their design services. He interprets the client's vision, giving each resident an escape from the showgrounds that truly feels custom-made.

"I aim for unique touches that bring the outdoors and indoors in touch with one another," Owens said of his design style. "In every design, I aimed to incorporate the beautiful Ocala landscape, complete with the sunsets, the trees, and the horse farms."

One way he has done this is by building traditional exteriors with elements of modern style to open up the spaces and bring the outdoors in.

If Owens could use one word to describe World Equestrian Center – Ocala, it

would be "majestic." He noted of the hotel, "When you walk in, you feel like you're in a European hotel. The scale, the energy, the view, and the overall feeling are all designed to wow. I'm still in awe when I walk in the front doors of the hotel and see that view of the equestrian facility. I feel very proud that I've accomplished something never done before."

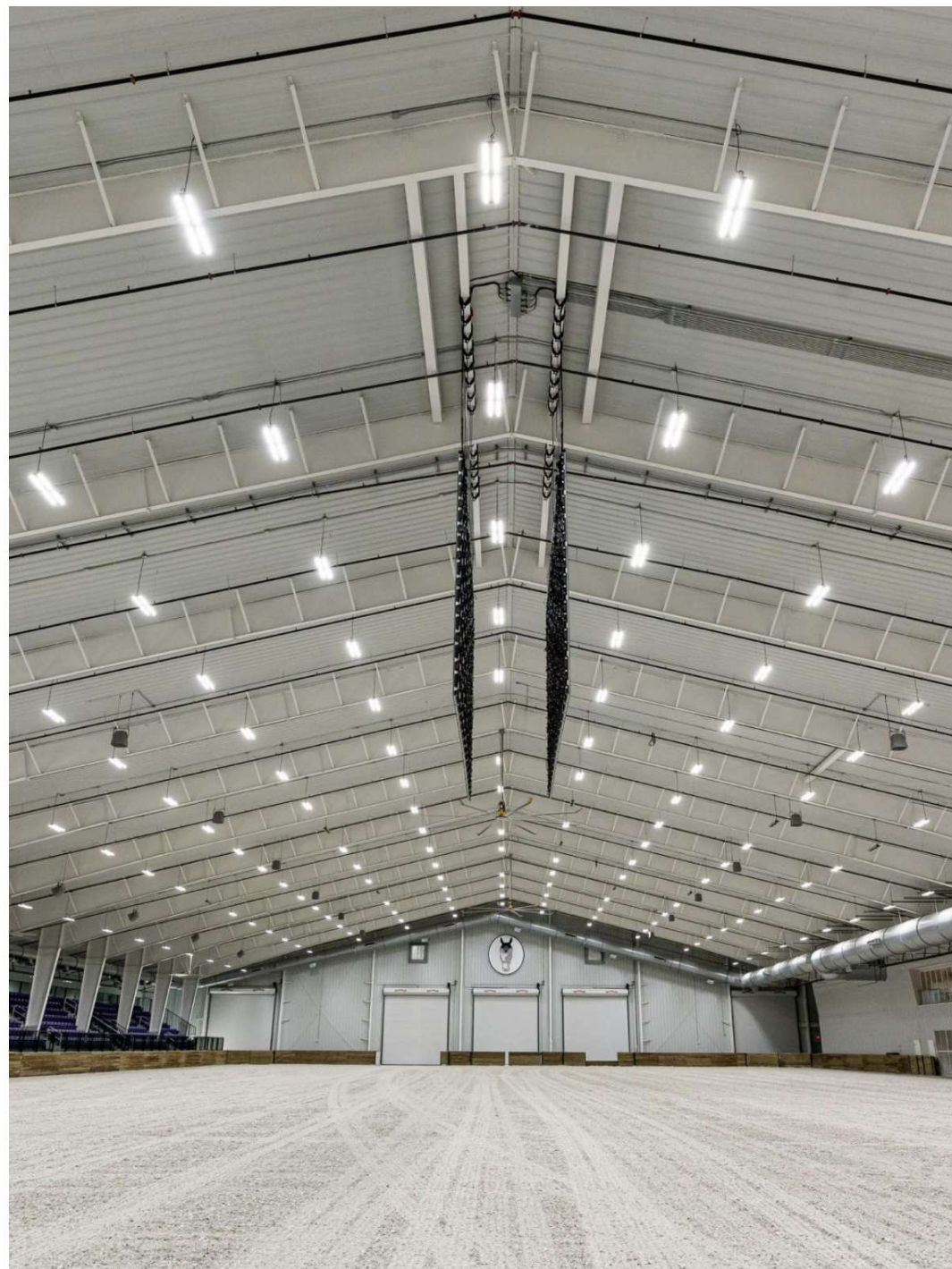
COMMITMENT TO FAMILIES, LEARNING, AND COMMUNITY

The seamless transition from home to showgrounds is a feeling rooted in the belief that the Roberts hold of inclusivity and extending opportunity within the equestrian industry. Their Cadet Horsemanship Program allows junior exhibitors to participate in seminars featuring clinicians from every part of the equestrian industry, including veterinarians, farriers, course designers, horse show management, and more. The program gets World Equestrian Center staff involved and teaches young riders every aspect of what goes into horse show and equine management. Participating in the program qualifies the young riders for a significant show bill credit, making it more accessible to those who compete on a budget.

"We have had participants in the Cadet Program who could only show once or twice a year be able to add a few more events to their yearly competition schedule," Roby Roberts said of the Cadet Program held in Ohio. "Bobby Murphy taught riders how to build their own course, and Tucker Williams taught them to design their own jumps. From veterinarians to braiders and footing experts, we have the best of the best coming to our facilities, and we like to capture their knowledge to educate the future of our sport and help build well-rounded horsemen."

In addition to chapels offering on-site services at both the Ocala and Ohio locations, the Roberts family provides thousands of small wooden crosses carved out of olive wood from Jerusalem to all of their visitors. These symbols of faith, safety, and courage remind exhibitors to feel empowered while competing and anywhere their travels may take them afterwards.

The Ocala community, a place that is near and dear to the heart of the Roberts family, will also benefit from the World Equestrian Center's migration south. Roby Roberts describes it as one of Florida's hidden gems.





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— ROBY ROBERTS, OWNER

“It's really grown a lot in the past 10 years with new hotels, restaurants, and things to do; it has changed so much,” he said. “People new to the area or returning after a long absence are going to be amazed by how it's changed.”

World Equestrian Center – Ocala will also appeal to non-equestrians, featuring amenities like high-end shopping, dining, walking and running routes, non-equestrian events such as trade fairs, sporting competitions, and weddings, as well as top-notch competition to watch.

Above all, Roby Roberts believes his team has built one of the safest horse show communities in the world for everyone involved. The traffic flow for both vehicles and horses has been precisely designed to guarantee safety, all aiseways have rubber matting, and all stalls have specialty flooring to provide the utmost comfort for the resting horses. The entire property in Ocala is under video surveillance so everyone can feel secure in knowing that their families and horses are looked after.

“Our goal is to make people happy, whether it's the short stirrup rider or grand prix competitor,” said Roby Roberts. “All events make us happy. We treat every show like it's a world-class Olympic event. A smaller show will have the same feel. As long as we have people in the gates and they're happy, we've done our job.”

While the facility and its place in the equestrian community continue to evolve, the challenge for Roberts is to maintain the same intimate experience as the original World Equestrian Center.

“We always say, ‘The French fries have to taste the same at both places,’” said Roby Roberts.

The Ocala venue is simply an extension of the property in Ohio, building upon the inclusivity and opportunity the Roberts have worked hard to create since the beginning.

As for the future of World Equestrian Center, that story is still being written. “If you make a plan for something, it turns into something completely different,” said Roby Roberts. “No matter what we plan for this place, it's going to have its own story to tell. All we can do is build it, hire the right people, manage it the best we can, and then let it tell its own story.” ^{11.8}

For more information on World Equestrian Center, visit www.WEC.net.