

Sabine Schut-Kery and friend Adriana Popovich of Castle Rock Winery in Napa, California, celebrated a new line of wines called "Dressage" that came out in 2022. Photo: Courtesy of Sabine Schut-Kery



A poignant moment for Sabine Schut-Kery following a phenomenal performance with Sanceo at the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. Photo: Eurodressage



# a CONVERSATION with US OLYMPIC DRESSAGE RIDER Sabine Schut-Kery

by JENNIFER WOOD

Sabine Schut-Kery stepped into the international spotlight in the lead-up to and during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, which were postponed to 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic. She and Sanceo made headlines in the world of dressage when they helped the U.S. Dressage Team win the silver medal. The pair also finished fifth in the Grand Prix Freestyle to Music to become the top-placed U.S. combination individually.

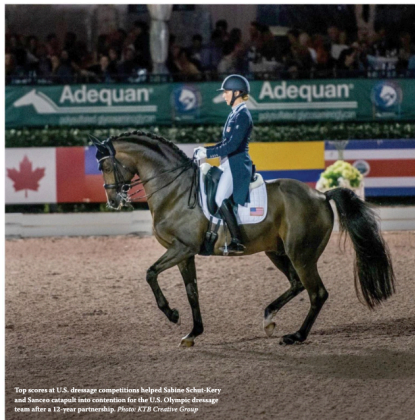


U.S. Olympic Dressage team silver medalist Sabine Schut-Kery. Photo: Elena Lucetti

While the pair had also won a team gold medal at the 2015 Pan American Games in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, the Olympic experience propelled the modest rider and her stunning Hanoverian stallion into the spotlight. Sanceo, owned by Alice Womble and Dr. Mike Heitmann, has since retired from competition and Sabine continues to work with young horses and students in California. Sabine traveled to World Equestrian Center – Ocala for the first time in April 2023 for her "Through the Levels Masterclass"

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Scene at WEC: A Conversation with U.S. Olympic Dressage Rider Sabine Schut-Kery



Top scores at U.S. dressage competitions helped Sabine Schut-Kery and Sanceo catapult into contention for the U.S. Olympic dressage team after a 12-year partnership. Photo: KYB Creative Group

symposium to impart decades of dressage knowledge and horsemanship experience to riders and auditors. We sat down with her for a conversation about growing up in the barn, the horse as a partner and what she aims to teach in clinics. Read on to learn more!

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**WEC:** How did horses come into your life?

**Sabine:** Equestrian sport is big in Germany where I grew up. My sister took me to the barn for pony club when we were little and I just got hooked. I think as a kid I really connected almost more with animals than with people. I was often known to be shy and I always felt really comfortable around horses and animals in general. I was very fortunate to grow up with a lot of various horse activities. We did dressage, jumping, and then, as a teenager, I learned how to

teach horses different tricks like to bow. Spanish walk or to rear on command. We learned to ride in sidesaddle and drive four-in-hand. It was a lot of variety, which, looking back, I really enjoyed.

**WEC:** How has that breadth of knowledge helped you in your riding career?

**Sabine:** Each horse has a different personality and a way they learn best. When the horse has a difficult time, how else can I make it easiest for them to understand? You have to go a little bit outside the box, which my background helps me do. A lot of people are so attracted to dressage because of the beauty and the harmony and the

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partnership with the horse and it's the goal that you don't see the communication that it's invisible. The training is a long road, especially with a grand prix horse, but that's really a fun and super interesting aspect.

**WEC:** You moved to the United States from Germany in 1998 to work for Proud Meadows in Texas with Friesian horses and became a U.S. citizen in 2005. While you brought two Friesians up through the levels to Grand Prix, how did your focus evolve to include the Olympic Games?

**Sabine:** Sanceo actually brought that dream to me. His owner, Alice Womble, bought him as a three-year-old and I started training him. We didn't specifically buy a horse to go to the Olympics, but the scores and the results bring you in that direction, so it happened naturally. It's the dream of everybody of course, but yeah, it happened!



**WEC:** When you came to the U.S., did you think you'd be an Olympian?

**Sabine:** No. Never. I always thought that was for others.

**WEC:** What do you enjoy about teaching and giving clinics?

**Sabine:** Sometimes, I wish somebody would have told me the things that we have to figure out with hard hours of work. I think it's rewarding to pass on what I have learned. It's also just as rewarding to see somebody succeed and to see a good horse trainer as it is to succeed in riding yourself. I enjoy the challenge of working with new horse-and-rider combinations at clinics.

**WEC:** What did you focus on in your Masterclass clinic at WEC?

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**Sabine:** It's always really important to me to have a good foundation, meaning I'm big on the basics and teaching the rider how to best have the horse go in balance. A good rider's position is always important because that's the language we use to talk or communicate to the horse with. It is an ongoing thing, even for me. I still, to this day, ride without stirrups sometimes and I look out for my position so that I have the best communication with my horse.

**WEC:** What are your thoughts on visiting World Equestrian Center – Ocala for the first time?

**Sabine:** When I saw WEC, it made me want to move, and because the area around it in Ocala is beautiful, with the big trees and Spanish moss. I understand why it's called World Equestrian Center; it's an equestrian paradise. It's also very conveniently and thoughtfully built. In our sport, behind each horse is a whole team so it's important as riders to include, celebrate and spend time with them. Here at World Equestrian Center, you can totally celebrate, having access to different restaurants, different hotel options—with the new hotel coming—and you can also really spend quality time with your team. You have good food for everyone that works behind the scenes, but also owners and sponsors, so that's a huge aspect and to have all that in one facility is unheard of. Plus, obviously, it's so beautiful here at WEC. 🐾