



At Home In Somis

Country Meadow Ranch In
Southern California Horse Country
Is The Creation Of A Designer
Whose Barn Is Her Castle

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LEFT Gail Claridge turned this fifty year old barn on her property into a family home. The wood was artistically antiqued and brick flooring was added throughout. ABOVE The long, 1800s French work table holds two rugged antiques candlestick lamps from France. Equestrian oil paintings, like those found in Claridge's shop, keep to the horse theme.



Approaching Country Meadow Ranch for the first time via a long, winding, Santa Barbara stone path, you feel as if you have been transported to another time and another place. There's the large red barn, two wooden cottages built in 1937, an old smoke house, an ancient filling station, carriage house, and forty five acres of wide open space surrounded by eucalyptus and fruit trees.

This is the world that Gail Claridge of Gail Claridge Interiors in Westlake Village has created for her, her husband Joe, and their grown children and grandchildren. The home is in Somis, a ranch community inland from Westlake, just north of Los Angeles County in the County of Ventura.

Christmas is an especially festive time for family, and a time she relishes. The home, a 1949 horse barn that she made livable while still keeping to the structure's rustic roots, is resplendent in reds, greens and golds.

"There was no main house on this horse property when we bought it," Claridge says. "I was going to build a New England style house and a structure for my husband's motorcycle, car and helicopter collection." And she was qualified to do just that since she is a general contractor and AIA affiliate, as well as a designer. "I can envision it, design it, build it and decorate it," she says. Her son Joe is also a general contractor and worked with her on the project.

ABOVE The Santa Barbara stone fireplace was added by Claridge. The fallow deer antique chandelier is from England while the new, large red area rug ties the room together. French antique paintings adorn the walls. OPPOSITE An American Windsor pine settle bench is near the door, along with other American memorabilia.





OPPOSITE The long brick hall runs down the center of the barn which looks especially festive at Christmas. The Scottish library cabinet in the dining room to the left holds one of Claridge's porcelain collections. Claridge kept the original stall doors wherever she could, as evidenced here. LEFT The barn is just one of the buildings on the forty five acre horse property which has views from every angle. BELOW The kitchen has tractor seat bar stools beneath a whimsical reproduction painting Claridge liked. She added a pantry to this room.

Claridge and her husband lived for more than two years in one of the cottages on the property that, while comfortable for two, did not work for a crowd. "I love to entertain in a big way, and since my daughter's married to (the professional wrestler) Hulk Hogan, and my other son-in-law is six foot five and my son is six feet I needed a big space quickly," she says. With that in mind her focus turned to the knotty pine barn. Originally it was going to be a giant rumpus room with space for storage. "One day I looked at the barn and thought that I could turn the tack room into a master bedroom and then one thing led to another so that today the barn is our home." The ability to switch horses (or houses for that matter) mid-stream, give up the idea of a custom house and make a barn a home, takes a special vision and high energy. These are qualities that Gail Claridge has in abundance.

Although the barn is more than fifty years old, she made it look even older by having the red and white paint artistically scraped and then sealed to keep the antiqued look. She added a stone fireplace for the living room, a bathroom for the guest bedroom, a pantry off the kitchen and a brick floor throughout.

Claridge kept the original sliding doors for the horse stalls intact wherever possible, which adds to the feeling of authenticity. Not many houses have rooms measured in stalls. "The living room is three stalls, the dining room was the birthing stall, the kitchen is the vet's room and the master bedroom is the tack room," she says.

Although it is basically a barn, it is quite an upscale one. "I decided to go with a Ralph Lauren thoroughbred horse barn look. I have some very fine things here and some things that just look good," she says. The




house is full of antiques and mini-collections: Staffordshire pottery, chintz ware, majolica, even antique English silver horse hoofs on the wood coffee table. In homage to the horses that once lived here, Claridge has tack hanging from the walls, saddles on the wood beams, horse paintings, polo mallets, sleigh bells and, framed on the wall, the silks that Seabiscuit's jockey wore. In fact, the horse ranch where Seabiscuit once lived adjoins Claridge's property. But horses are not the only animals represented. There are pictures, pottery and silver commemorating dogs, cows, and chickens, among others. With all these collections, it is fortunate that Gail Claridge also owns a retail store in Westlake Village. But does she have any actual animals? No. She points to an antique mechanical horse and says, "That's the only horse I ride."

The stone fireplace is the centerpiece of the living room, while the large reproduction double secretary, made from aged walnut, holds many of her collections such as the Staffordshire figures. The furniture is overstuffed and comfortable in Ralph Lauren fabrics, ultra suede and leathers. The dark woods are contrasted by one wall which has gold framed pictures and an antique gold mirror.

An eleven foot long pine table in the dining room is the site of many family meals, with an old children's wheelbarrow often acting as a centerpiece. "I'm a closet blue person," she says. "I don't like blue fabrics but I like a touch of blue and white porcelain in a house." Blue is found in the English tobacco jars, dishes and pottery. A Scottish library cabinet in this room holds her china and antique glass collections.

"I call the family room the American barn. I had a green tint applied to the pine to age it and then added American flags, miniature wood barns and houses and a needlepoint painting of George Washington." Next to this room is a guest bedroom and extra bath.

Across the hall is the master bedroom where Claridge put the pine horizontally. "When wood is horizontal it is more relaxing," she says. "I had the carpet custom hand woven from men's wool suits. A barn doesn't warrant regular wall to wall carpeting." The colorful carpet, which resembles a multi-colored rag rug, adds more warmth and texture to an already cozy room.

This sophisticated barn with its nuanced nostalgia and contemporary craftsmanship is testimony to Claridge's talent for lush livability. And, it is the livability that she prizes most. "I know what it means to lose material things because that has happened twice to my homes, once in the Northridge earthquake and once in a fire. This ranch is a perfect place to create and re-create memories for my family and friends." 

The master bedroom has a red, white and black color scheme. Here is found a custom made bed with a red and white buffalo check bedspread. An American antique trunk is in the foreground. The pine was placed horizontally in this room because Claridge feels that's more restful.

