



If wishes were horses

WISHING WELL FARM, AND ITS INTERIOR CONCEIVED BY CASABELLA INTERIORS, IS A TRUE REFUGE FOR ITS OWNERS AND THEIR HORSES

Unicorns are all the rage these days. Within the zeitgeist of the current decade, the mythical creatures have come to represent the exquisitely rare, the unobtainable, and the exceptional. The Guardian, in 2017, called the unicorn “the emblem of our times.” They’ve become ubiquitous—depicted on cereal boxes, in children’s cartoons, and used to describe rarities as wide-ranging as one-of-a-kind NBA sensations and tech start-up businesses valued at over \$1 billion. Target released a new flavor of ice cream in 2018 called “Unicorn Magic.” They seem to be everywhere, hiding in plain sight.

Unfortunately, despite—or perhaps due to—the amazing qualities of unicorns, the animals present a number of insurmountable challenges to anyone who has dreams of domesticating, stabling and training them. First, their independent spirits run counter to the confines of paddocks and corrals, and second, their shy and modest demeanors preclude them from participating in any type of show event. They find even steeplechase too pedestrian and shun the ring, preferring the seclusion of hidden groves deep within the forest. Third, it takes a lot of work to maintain a working rainbow, and most farmers and ranchers are simply unprepared for that level of commitment. At the end of the day, the unicorn, while it may captivate the attention of this generation, is simply too magical to tame. Miniature horses, on the other

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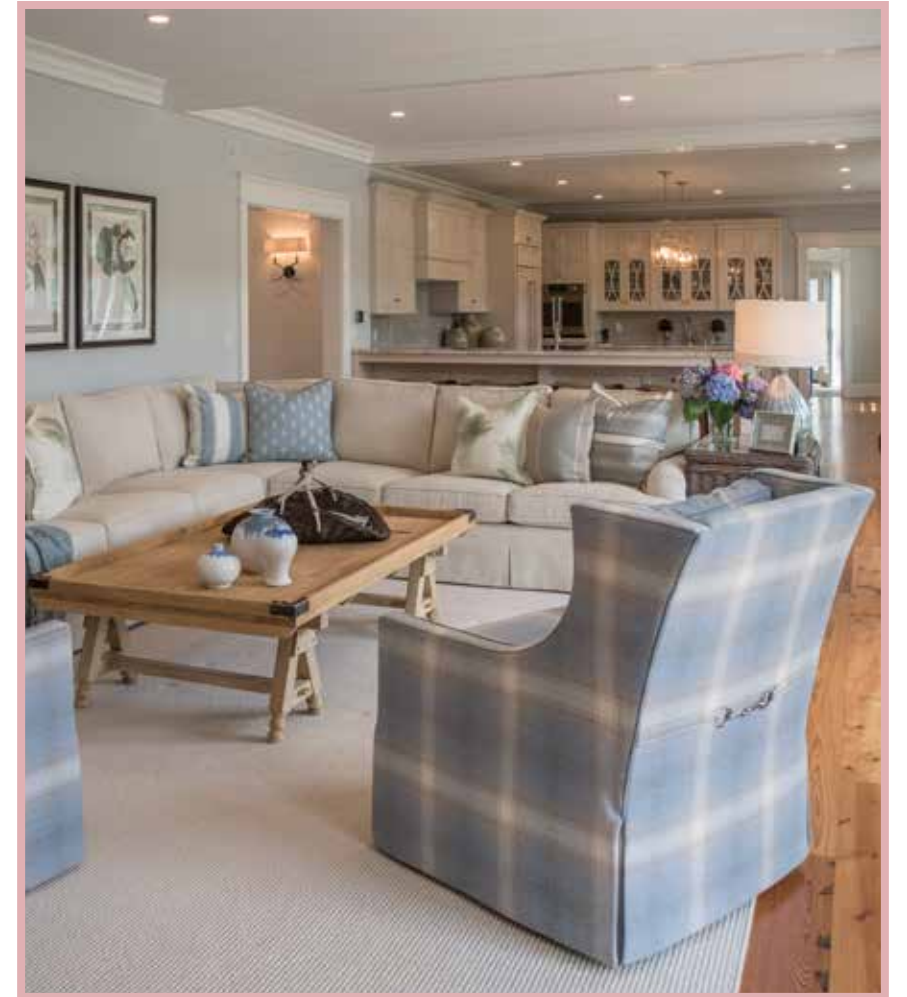
hand... Now, here's a fairyland creature that one can give a home, and at Wishing Well Farm in Falmouth, the husband-and-wife owners have created a refuge for this diminutive equine cousin of the unicorn within the grounds of a former vineyard.

Ponies are cute and have long held the cliched center of girls' letters to Santa Claus, but ponies are not miniature horses. They're stockier, for one thing, and often shaggier. While there's nothing wrong with either quality, miniature horses are exactly proportioned to a full-sized horse, so they possess a certain element of illusion. A person standing next to a pony still looks like a regular person; a person standing next to a miniature horse, however, appears giant. The observer's mind struggles to process such an image—the horse should tower over the person, after all. Perhaps this confusion is due to the relative uncommonness of the mini, but regardless, these animals project and inspire delight and whimsy, qualities that fit perfectly with Wishing Well Farm.



To officially qualify as a Miniature Horse, the animal's height may reach a maximum of only 34 inches; they're about the size of a Great Dane. Therefore, minis are both less intimidating than full-sized horses and are more easily transported. The owner of Wishing Well Farm can take her animals to places where a full-sized horse would simply be too large for any practical use. While unicorns are known for healing and purification powers, the magic of miniature horses is their propensity to inspire joy and to delight. Thus, the mini is an ideal therapeutic animal, and those at Wishing Well Farm spend much of their time administering happiness to the elderly and to children. Their owner, a former pediatric nurse who had spent years volunteering for a therapeutic riding center, combined her life experience with her love of horses in her inspiration to establish the farm. According to her website, "The farm hosts gatherings for children of all abilities, including birthday parties, educational farm visits, as well as off-site visits to schools, health facilities and community events. The Wishing Well Farm also helps in the effort to re-home Miniature Horses through the Northeast Miniature Horse Club, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to the rescue and re-homing of Miniature Horses." All of Wishing Well Farm's proceeds are donated to the Northeast Miniature Horse Club.

Wishing Well Farm is an ongoing project that began in 2013, when the owners decided to make Falmouth their primary residence.



Prior to this, they lived closer to Boston for most of the year but maintained a summer home on Falmouth Harbor, where their "family life revolved around aquatic pursuits." They decided that they would enjoy having more land, however, and their interests led them to purchasing an old winery, which they would convert to this unique farm. With his background in construction, the owner built their new home and farm himself, over the course of about five years, using subcontractors, and plans developed by Marion architect Will Saltonstall. Originally, there were seven buildings on the winery, so some of the initial work included demolition. He says, "We had to pull all the grape vines, too, and





we repurposed all of the posts for fences.” The first building they completed was not their home, but the barn, which allowed them to set up the miniature horses while they continued with the rest of the project. In 2016, the couple moved into the main house. “Then the garage took a bit longer,” says the husband.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his classic poem “Kubla Khan,” describes an almost mystical palace called Xanadu, where “there were gardens bright with sinuous rills, / Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree; / And here were forests ancient as the hills, / Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.” While Wishing Well Farm is architecturally dissimilar from Xanadu, it

The spacious and elegant kitchen (above), designed and fabricated by Kitchens and Baths of Mattapoisett, offers plenty of spots to sit, prep, chat and enjoy. Throughout the home, Casabella Interiors has subtly placed just the right accents to set the stage for the charming fairytale that resides in the barn just outside.



embodies some of its grandeur and seclusion, nestled atop a hill, and Michele Chagnon-Holbrook, president of Casabella Interiors, notes, “They did an exceptional job with the plantings, and the overall landscaping.” The overall effect of the farm, which the miniature horses emphasize, is that of an enchanted destination. And yet, the husband says, “The idea of the house was to make it a working farm, so we didn’t want it too pretentious.” To this end, Casabella Interiors added features like a functional mudroom with a brick floor, and nearly all of the furniture is upholstered in performance fabric so that the owners could worry less about dirt or fur from their dogs. Chagnon-Holbrook says, “Things had to be practical.”

Unlike some projects where Casabella Interiors is involved from the initial stages, at Wishing Well Farm, Chagnon-Holbrook says, “The house was built, then we came in, with Shannon Heritage from my team heading up the project, to provide the finishing touches such as the tiles, mirrors and furniture. We picked out beautiful lighting to go with the overall feel and look of what the homeowners wanted to achieve.” The floors were constructed with reclaimed wood, and Casabella worked in a trellis pattern. “Nothing screams farmhouse,” says Chagnon-Holbrook, “but every room has something that you could spin as farmhouse; every room has something special.” For example, the formal living room features caned chairs updated in white, and the master bedroom contains



a traditional dresser updated with mirrors, “so it’s not really overly rustic,” explains Chagnon-Holbrook. Much of the effect is in the details, and there’s an emphasis on subtle whimsy. Roosters inhabit the pattern on the kitchen drapes, for instance, and re-creations of horses’ bridle bits create a buckle-like effect on the backs of upholstered chairs. Initially, the owners of Wishing Well Farm approached Casabella Interiors with the idea that maybe they would be able to use pieces

from their former home in their new one, but it soon became apparent that it made better sense to start fresh in order to maintain the vision. While the openness and larger spaces of the home provide an almost Western ranch feel, the soft colors and textures are more in keeping with Cape Cod than with, say, Wyoming. Casabella paired Ralph Lauren styled floral patterns with striped textures in different rooms, and the table in the kitchen contrasts two tall chairs at its head



and foot with bench seating along the sides. “This keeps it low, so you can look out on the fields,” says Chagnon-Holbrook. “We chose these benches for cleaner lines, for how long the table is, and for simplicity.”

The bulk of Casabella’s work with Wishing Well Farm spanned about nine months, wrapping up in 2018, but the overall project continues to evolve. The farm currently includes a steel building that houses heavy machinery and a garage with an attached apartment for visitors. Here, the husband maintains his collection of vintage British automobiles—Triumphs, Jaguars, Mini Coopers. He says, “Since retiring, I’ve been working on restoring cars and do most if not all of the work myself. I just got a Morgan 3 Wheeler that was originally built in 1910. It’s a three-wheeled vehicle with a motorcycle engine in an ash frame wrapped in aluminum.”

Despite these side projects and the elegance of the farmhouse itself, the



focus of Wishing Well Farm remains on the miniature horses and their domain—a corral and their stables. “The barns are gorgeous,” says Chagnon-Holbrook. “You could sleep comfortably in them.” The owner, who had horses when she was growing up says, “The goal is for personal enjoyment, but we also hope to receive donations to help with the rescue of miniature horses. We do educational visits, and people come to the farm as well.” Wishing Well Farm has worked with the Fresh Air Fund, Cape Cod Child Development Head Start programs,

The miniature horses (above) are all rescues, but now they have a chance to live out their days in a beautiful, safe home. Opposite: Despite being a horse farm, the touches of elegance certainly aren’t left behind. Shannon Heritage, one of the members of the team at Casabella Interiors of Sandwich, made sure that every last detail is warm, inviting, clean and elegant.



and also with the Clarkes Schools for Hearing and Speech. “One cannot help but smile when meeting a miniature horse, and their small stature and gentle personalities are a perfect combination for fun and safe activities,” claims Wishing Well Farm’s website. Though her minis have not been trained for riding, children and adults alike interact with them in a variety of ways. “One of the minis can pull a cart,” says the owner, “but the kids often like to pull the carts.” Other activities include discussions about horse safety and care, grooming, decorating the horses, games, and obstacle courses. The animals typically live into their thirties, and the five at Wishing Well Farm have a wide range of ages. “We have two senior citizens that are about 25 years old,” the owner says, “and the youngest is five.” Two of the minis came from rescue, but from good homes. She has also fostered others that had been in bad situations. “Seven fosters have come through,” she notes. “They stay for three to four months at a time and sometimes come in pairs.”

At Wishing Well Farm, work is never complete, but the owners’ retirement home is nearly as they had dreamed. Says the husband, “We have almost everything in place, but it will always be a work in progress.” One can imagine magical miniature horses will always be trotting and cantering about, that the projects will continue, and that visitors will continue to experience delight from their shared experiences.

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