

LIFE AS UNIQUE AS THE HORSE

CHROME™



FEATURES

38 Crafting Spirits

Fueled by flavor, Sarah Venge uses her knowledge and energy to make a lasting impact.

48 Founded in Family

Todd Gralla combines his love of horses and architecture worldwide.



Building Dreams

A career in equine architecture helps Todd Gralla make his mark around the globe.

Founded in Family



THE GRALLA FAMILY
Lauren, Todd, Nicolas and
Tonya, with A Sudden Legacy

Todd Gralla's homegrown love of horses helps him connect with others around the world.

By Betsy Lynch



Todd Gralla likes living on the edge: the edge of town, where he and his wife own a 70-acre farm; the edge of his saddle, as a polo player preparing to take his next shot; and the edge of the world, as he travels the friendly skies to oversee multi-million dollar equestrian projects.

Living on the edge requires an extraordinary sense of balance. And it is Todd's wife, Tonya, his two children and his Paint Horses that help the renowned and highly sought-after architect maintain the necessary equilibrium. Todd's calm, quiet demeanor belies his underlying drive.

"I only do things one way, which is all the way."

"I only do things one way, which is all the way," he said with a laugh. "I want to win, and I'm going to put every ounce of effort into everything I do, whether it's designing a building or showing a horse. I'm going to do everything within my means to be successful."

It's hard to know where tenacity originates, but Todd certainly has it.

Two Mules

Born in Oklahoma City in 1969, Todd is a native of the Sooner State, thanks to his father. Originally from Massachusetts, Stan Gralla longed to live in the West: he fell in love with big-sky country while attending Boy Scout camp in New Mexico. Stan studied architecture at the University of Oklahoma, kindled a romance with an Oklahoma farm girl and put down roots.

When Todd was 7, his family moved 40 miles south to Lexington, Oklahoma, onto the farm where his mother, Mary Ann Conley, had been raised. The original homestead had been in the family since 1891, when Todd's great-grandfather traded two mules for the 160-acre parcel. It was two years after the Oklahoma land run, and two good mules were worth a lot at the time. Historically, the Conleys raised chickens and livestock, planted crops and grew hay—somehow managing to hold tight to their land through thick, thin and the Great Depression.

In Lexington, Todd's father quickly set up his architectural office in the small farmhouse and began renovating barns, outbuildings and pastures in order to indulge his fascination with horses. He acquired running-bred mares and began to raise colorful race and show horses; the family's Paint stallion, the 1980 bay tobiano Jim J G, was by the highly respected sprint Thoroughbred Jim J., who stood at Windward Stud in the 1970s. While Mary Ann and his eldest son, Shawn, were immune to the equine spell, Stan's youngest—Todd—was mesmerized by the horses' magic; he liked everything about their new enterprise.

Todd began showing Paints at age 9, and as a youth, he spent summers at trainer Ron Horn's place in Yukon, Oklahoma, where he was given free rein to ride every horse in the barn. A tough taskmaster, Ron taught Todd how to pilot different types of horses. The young man learned to groom, feed, fit, train, doctor and show horses; along the way, he developed a keen eye for conformation and especially enjoyed showing halter horses. It's a trait he shares with his dad, who had an affinity for beautifully constructed horses, too.

Todd also learned the importance of form to function, growing up in an era when Youth all-around horses were still the norm. Horses shown at halter were also broke to ride, and they were used in pleasure, trail, horsemanship, Western riding—and anything else for which they demonstrated an aptitude. Among his favorite mounts were HF Skips Ms Twain, Titans Dude and Sonnys Super Dot. "Ms Twain" was his first all-around show horse and she taught him a lot, Todd says. Titans Dude had outstanding conformation and won a pair of 1984 national championships in halter. Sonnys Super Dot was Todd's last Youth horse, and the pair earned a Register of Merit in Youth showmanship and a Superior in Youth halter.

"She was one of the most beautiful horses I've ever seen," Todd recalled wistfully. "Our personalities really meshed, and I often wonder where she went during her show career. I've always meant to look her up."

Sonnys Super Dot was just 4 years old when Todd graduated from the APHA Youth ranks, and the mare was sold. The 1983 sorrel overo mare by Sonny Dee Bar (QH) and out of Super Dot later became an APHA Champion and enjoyed much success with Kathy Phillips Bauer, with whom she earned nearly 1,800 Amateur points, a world championship, two national championships and a reserve world title.

Todd has always appreciated the relationships he develops with his horses, which comes from caring for them on a daily basis. In fact, it was with this thought in mind that he and Tonya decided to buy their farm seven years ago. Although they are contented town dwellers, they wanted their children—Lauren, 12, and Nicholas, 9—to benefit from the day-in, day-out experiences of working with their own horses. It's an "organic" way to grow a lifelong interest, Todd says, with kids gaining greater knowledge and a deeper understanding of what it takes to care for and develop lasting bonds with animals.



It's an "organic" way to grow a lifelong interest, with kids gaining greater knowledge and a deeper understanding of what it takes to care for and develop lasting bonds with animals.



Like Todd, Tonya also grew up riding and showing horses; her grandparents, Virdin and Renna V. Royse, were avid Paint enthusiasts and legends in the breed. At the Royse R Ranch in El Reno, Oklahoma, Virdin felt the magnetic draw of racehorses, while Renna cheerfully channeled her efforts into breeding a string of show champions. Little wonder Tonya's ambitious grandparents catapulted her into the show ring at the tender age of 3. It wasn't long before she, too, was excelling under the guidance of Ron Horn. Todd and Tonya first met at the trainer's ranch, and they sometimes even squared off against one another in Youth classes.

"She'll tell you that she always beat me, but she didn't *always* beat me," Todd said with a laugh.

A five-year age difference precluded any romantic notions at that stage in their lives, but that didn't stop Tonya's grandmother from teasing her that one day she was going to marry that red-headed, freckle-faced boy. While Tonya was mortified by the thought, Renna was prescient.

Todd and Tonya went their separate ways when Todd quit showing at age 16. Tonya, then 11, was still just a kid in the eyes of a teen with a driver's license. She, however, continued to show and win national and world championships throughout high school and college; her top mounts included Kings Chrome, a 1980 sorrel overo gelding with whom Tonya earned a 1987 world championship in Youth Hunt-Seat Equitation and a pair of reserve world championships in hunter under saddle, and Rinky Dinky, a 1986 bay overo gelding with whom she won a 1993 world championship in Amateur Western Riding.

When the two finally reconnected, Tonya was a head-turning college junior and Todd was a handsome, green-eyed, 6 foot tall businessman preparing to take over his father's architectural firm. What a difference a decade can make.

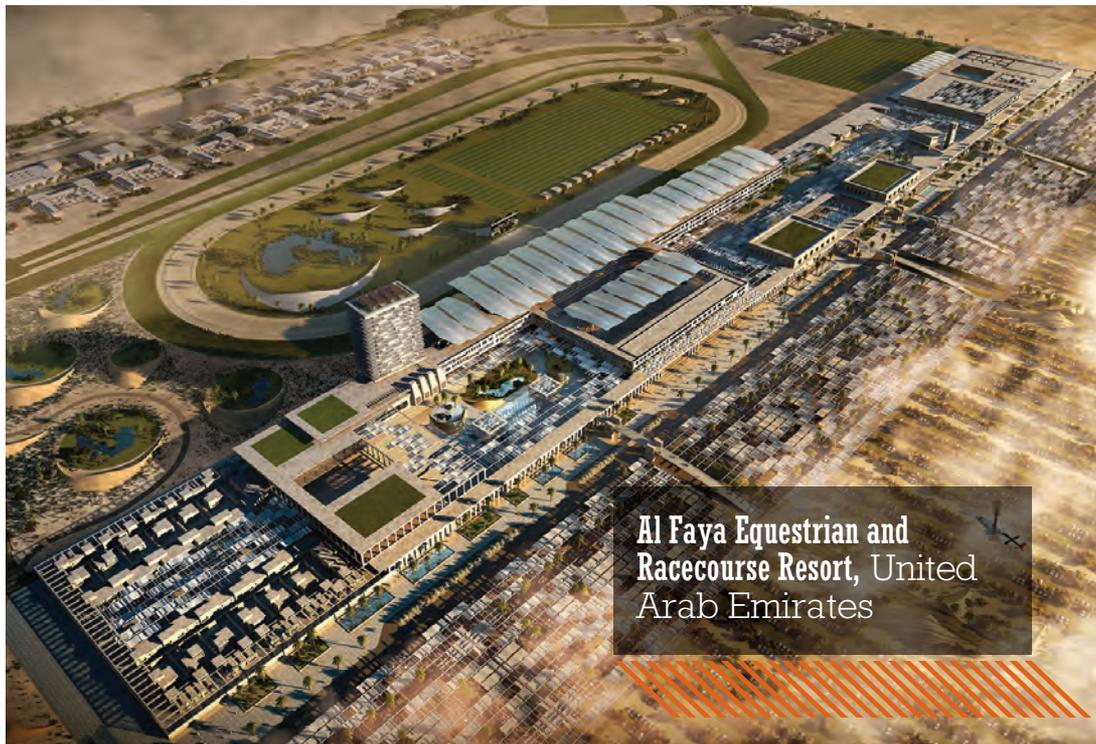


“My favorite quote is one that Will Rogers said: ‘A polo handicap is a passport to the world.’ And I’ve found this to be true.”

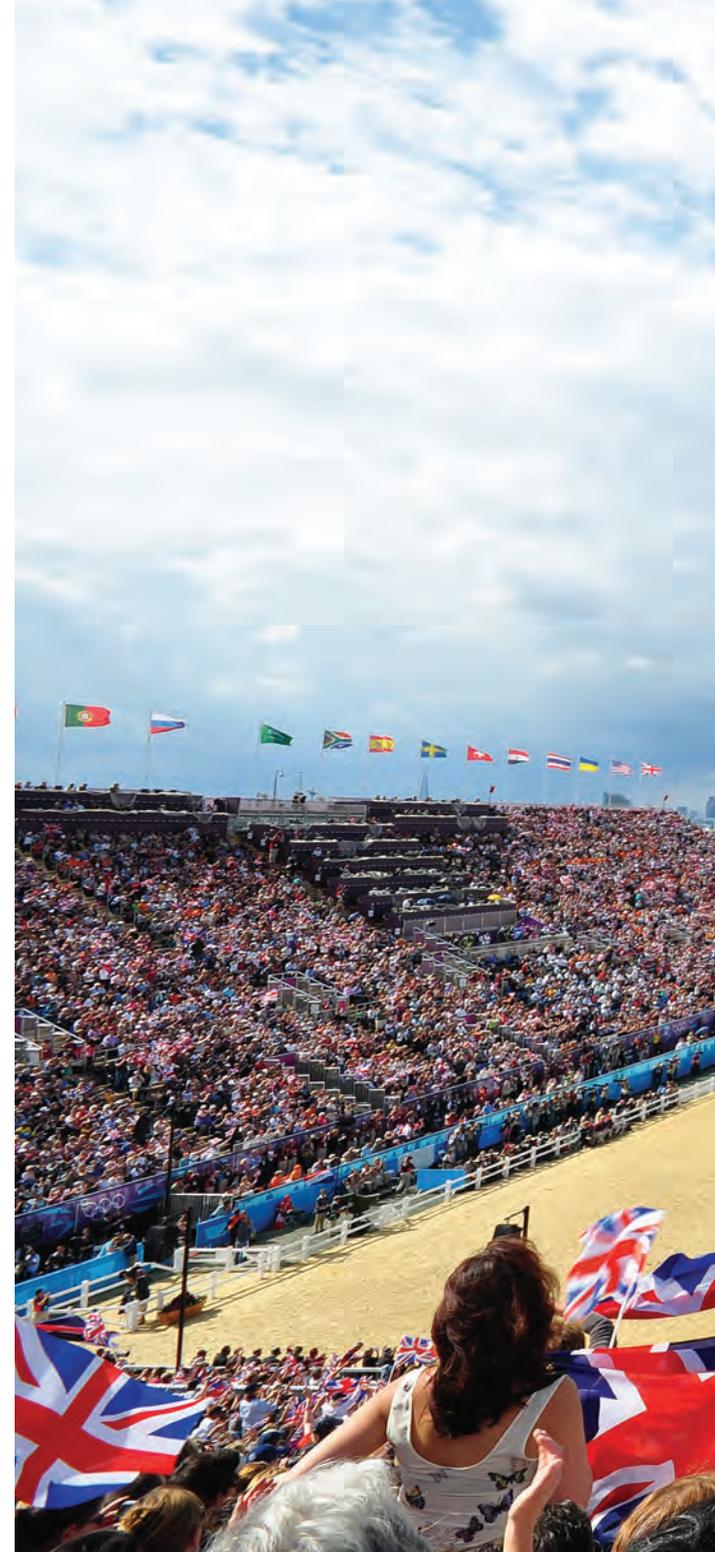




Taking the Lead Todd Gralla on the job at Populous



Al Faya Equestrian and Racecourse Resort, United Arab Emirates



Passport to the World

Although Todd's interest in showing had waned when he went to college, he hadn't lost his passion for horses. When a buddy, Mark Moore, invited him to play polo at the Broad Acres Polo Club in Norman, Todd jumped at the chance. The speed and agility required by the heart-pounding sport was exhilarating, and he was instantly hooked. What's more, Todd's carefully cultivated show-ring skills gave him a competitive edge on the polo field. He could put a handle on his polo ponies that often allowed him to outmaneuver rivals.

Todd and Mark recruited other players, and in 1988 they founded the University of Oklahoma's

polo team. Todd had no idea the doors the sport would ultimately open for him, but he was certainly having fun on the back of a horse.

"My favorite quote is one that Will Rogers said: 'A polo handicap is a passport to the world.' And I've found this to be true," Todd said. He has received spontaneous invitations to play chukkers in such far-flung places as Singapore, Moscow and Buenos Aires—horses, helmets and mallets provided, of course.

Between games, Todd studied business and marketing, and upon completing his degree in 1992, Todd went to work at Stan Gralla Architects. His business acumen was a strong complement to his

father's expertise in equestrian architecture. They specialized in designing horse farms and training operations, and the duo had already spent long hours discussing and experimenting with innovations in design. Many ideas, in fact, were tested at the family farm.

But the younger Gralla had new ambitions. He wanted to tackle major equestrian venues, such as fairgrounds, racetracks and event centers. Because Todd had competed at so many different facilities, he had identified design flaws and had strong opinions about how they could be improved to benefit horses, competitors, spectators and managers alike.

2012 Summer Olympic Equestrian Stadium, London



“The problem is that many of these venues were not designed by horsemen or livestock people,” he said. Issues surrounding health, safety, arena size, layout, efficiency, flow, comfort and aesthetics needed to be addressed by someone who understood the unique demands of equestrian sport.

Over the past two decades, Todd has diligently pursued this niche. He honed his craft within his family’s company, and six years ago brought his talents to Populous, the world’s largest sports architecture firm. As principal and director of Populous’ equine practice, his architectural design team’s portfolio is impressive. It includes such venues as the 2012 London Olympic

Equestrian Stadium, WestWorld in Scottsdale, Arizona, equine and exhibition venues at Oklahoma City’s State Fair Park, the United Kingdom’s Ascot Race Course in Berkshire, England, the Kentucky Horse Park, the Russian Polo Club in Moscow, Xincunsha Equestrian Club in Shanghai and countless others.

His specialty often takes Todd to faraway lands that are hard to pronounce and even harder to find on a National Geographic world map, but he loves the adventure. Foreign clients often want venues that “tell a story” about their horses, their history and their heritage. Functionality is important, but designs also offer a cultural sense of place.

Built Right

For more pro tips from Todd about turning your dream barn into reality – including how new APHA Corporate Partner Polylast might factor into your plans – check out the September 2015 *Paint Horse Journal*.

Learn More

apha.com/phj



Rocking Horse Revival

Fortunately, Todd has Tonya on the Oklahoma home front to manage the family and the farm. Todd says he owes this bit of good fortune to Tonya's grandmother, Renna.

While at the Oklahoma Festival of Horses in the mid 1990s, Todd ran into Renna on his way to play in a celebrity polo match. Their families had been longtime friends through horses, so they happily caught up with one another. Renna told the horseman that Tonya was attending nearby University of Oklahoma and suggested he look her up. A few months later, Todd ran into another friend who had seen Tonya and proposed the same idea. Todd didn't need a third prompt; he called the equestrienne and the rest is history—the couple will celebrate their 17th wedding anniversary in September.

Their mutual passion for horses was a natural bond, but at the time they wed, neither Todd nor Tonya owned a horse. Tonya had sold her Amateur mount while finishing her degree in occupational therapy at the University of Oklahoma. Todd was fully engaged in his career, taking his financial responsibilities as a future family man seriously. The two remained horseless until their daughter, Lauren, came along.

When she was 2, Lauren was gifted a custom-made Stevenson Brothers rocking horse.

"She rode that rocking horse like crazy," Todd recalled.

Lauren was instantly smitten with horses. The precocious tot noticed her home was filled with all the accouterments of her parents' equine success—saddles, tack, trophies, photos and the like.

"But where are the horses?" she wanted to know. Good question.

"So we bought her a little pinto pony, 'Dinky,'" Todd chuckled. "Lauren stuck to that pony—she rode him everywhere. Her interest just exploded, so then we decided to get her a horse."

That was just the beginning. Next came the bumper-pull trailer, trips to horse shows and a more competitive horse. Like her parents, Lauren

was competitive by nature, and she started setting goals for herself. Mom and dad were, of course, supportive. They'd been there, too.

When Todd and Tonya decided to buy the farm where they had been boarding Lauren's first show horse, it seemed like a good idea for myriad reasons. It's five minutes from their home in Norman. It has a 20-stall barn, an indoor riding arena, an office and living quarters, pastures, paddocks and equipment storage. The 70 acres is in an urban area surrounded by houses, but the tree-lined property feels like a secluded country retreat, especially since it is no longer a bustling boarding operation.

The Grallas spent the next three years beautifying and renovating the farm. More important, the investment was a conscious choice about values. Todd and Tonya wanted there to be more to the horse experience than simply arriving at the show in time to take the end of the lead shank or warm up for an under saddle class. Feeding, cleaning stalls, grooming, bathing, exercising, turnout: it's all part of building lifelong equestrians, Todd insists. The future of the horse industry depends upon such fully committed relationships.

"I get a lot more out of my horses than just taking them in the show ring. I love to have our show horses at home as much as I can."



"I get a lot more out of my horses than just taking them in the show ring," he explained. "I love to have our show horses at home as much as I can. When I'm able to go from my office to the farm and be with the horses, that's my greatest time, my most rewarding time. That, to me, is crucial."

At the farm, Tonya, Lauren and Nicholas do the bulk of the daily chores, with the help of a young woman who keeps her two horses on the property.

Todd pitches in, too, whenever he's home.

That's not so say they don't seek professional help. Todd, Tonya, Lauren and Nicholas all work with trainers to achieve their competitive goals, and they have several horses in training. But with a half-dozen more at home, there's plenty to satisfy everyone's need for hands-on horse experience. The show string includes: R Mark In Time, a 1996 sorrel overo gelding nicknamed "Deuce;" RL Sudden Style, a 2000 chestnut overo gelding called "700;" the leased 2004 chestnut overo gelding A Sudden Legacy, better known as "Checks;" Milton Hershey, a 2012 sorrel tobiano gelding affectionately named "Milty;" The Only Alibi, a 2008 sorrel overo gelding called "Oscar;" and KRK Little Sugar (QH). Two others—Imprinted Conclusion, a 2005 sorrel overo gelding named "Elvis," and Red Hot Fancy Fire, a 2004 red dun overo mare called "Harley"—are now retired and "living large," as Todd puts it. The family also owns several trail riding horses just for fun, along with a handful of ponies, four donkeys, three show sheep, and Belle, the pet goat.

"Buying the farm was definitely not the cheapest path," Todd said with a laugh. "But it's the path we chose."

There's obvious joy in his voice, and a hint of pride that comes from the legacy his family has created with horses. The farm's crest brings that history to light, too—it's an adaptation of the Gralla family coat of arms, originating from

Majorca, off the eastern coast of Spain.

Showing Paints, playing polo and getting back to his roots on the farm help keep Todd personally connected to his work. That passion takes tangible form in the farms and equestrian centers he helps to create both. He marvels at the places he's been, the people he's met and the cultures he's experienced, all because he inherited a love for horses shared by so many others around the world. 