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Actress Annie Heise

ON HORSES AND
"THE BLACKLIST"

CARLITOS GRACIDA
AND HIS FAMILY LEGACY

EQUESTRIAN LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECT LOVES LAND
AND HORSES



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For the Love of the Land & Horses

DEBORAH CERBONE TODD AND EQUESTRIAN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

By Britney Grover

It doesn't take long when talking to Deborah Cerbone Todd to know that she's extraordinarily passionate about two things: horses and landscape architecture. Though it's taken years of growth and development, Deborah has now found a way to combine her passions — while helping others by using everything she has learned along the way.

"When I was a kid, I was infatuated with horses," she recalled. "My whole room was decorated with horses, but both of my parents worked and the closest stables were way out of town, so with the logistics of getting me there for riding lessons, it just never happened."

With her love of horses on hold, Deborah set out to pursue another passion: plants. "I've always been in love with plants, so I got a degree in plant science first from Rutgers," she said. "I

Deborah loves her job as an equestrian landscape architect. Designing gardens includes a steel horse sculpture which graces the front terrace of a New Jersey estate to celebrate the client's Thoroughbred horses.

used to see their pretty drawings of landscape architecture on the wall, so I got special permission to take one of their courses and that was it: I found my niche, combining art and science. I love the science of the plants, biology and environmental science, so it was a way to combine my artistic talent with my passion for the science."

Deborah was beginning to experience the satisfaction of finding her unique niche, combining her interests. But it didn't stop there. After college, she was finally able to pursue her lifelong interest in horses. "As soon as I graduated from college, I started taking riding lessons, and that was it. I was mucking stalls in

addition to my full-time job to pay for my horse habit, and was leasing horses and then bought and boarded my horses.”

RIDING AND SHOWING

For a while, things seemed perfect. She rode hunters, working with a trainer and showing in small C-rated shows. The last horse she owned was 4 ½ when she got him, and they jumped 2' to 2'6" in the pre-green hunters. “I started doing a bit of dressage with him to work on his balance,” Deborah remembered. “He was a big, beautiful horse, but a bit clumsy.”

That horse went on to do very well in amateur classes with his new owner, after Deborah sold him due to the downturn in the economy. From there, life took a bit of a departure from what she might have liked. “I got married and had children, and that kind of put my riding on hold for a while,” she shared. “I got divorced when my kids were young; they were 1 ½ and 3 ½, so then I had to turn my landscape architecture business into the sole provider for the family.”

In 1992, Deborah founded her own landscape architecture firm, Deborah Cerbone Associates. She worked diligently, developing her practice — which led to meeting and

marrying John Todd, owner of The Todd Group, a large landscape construction company. Their New Jersey offices are on the same property, and the two companies do a lot of work together — even when John and Deborah are at their second home in Montana.

Meeting John also introduced horses back into Deborah's life. A casual trail rider with many horse friends, John had purchased a ranch

Many equestrians don't think about all the aspects that need to be considered in laying out a functional yet beautiful horse property.

in Montana and two horses. “It wasn't until I met my husband 10 years ago and we started going out to his place in Montana that I got involved in the day-to-day care of the horses, and the workings of the farm,” said Deborah, who had always boarded her horses.

Deborah had worked on the design of a few

horse farms during her career, but it wasn't until after learning about the care of horses at home in Montana that she realized there was a need for equine specialist landscape architects. “The next horse project I worked on I thought, ‘Wow, these people have no idea what they're getting into.’ The majority of my clients that are new residential clients building a horse farm at their home, or buying a new property and building the whole house and horse farm, they've always been boarding their horses at other facilities. They've never had them at home, so part of my job is educating them in things like pasture management.”

EQUINE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Many equestrians don't think about all the aspects that need to be considered in laying out a functional yet beautiful horse property — and most landscape architects don't think about the unique aspects horses require in a property.

“One of my clients had just started and they said, ‘I just want to look out my window and see all green grass,’” Deborah related. “I said, ‘Well, you're not going to see green grass because the

Deborah in Montana with Diego and Kidd
Photo by Freddy Terranova



way the engineers laid out your property, you've got your gate right here. So if the horses know that someone's going to get them at that gate at the end of the day and they're going to get grain in their stall, then they're going to be hanging out at that gate all day and wearing the grass down.' They said, 'Oh, I never thought of that, why didn't anybody tell us that?' Well, it's just that nobody really thinks about all of that."

But for Deborah, thinking about 'all of that' isn't just her job, it's her passion. In Montana, she takes lessons on her Quarter Horse/Paint named Kidd, and she and John go on trail rides. "He likes it — he's not as infatuated with it as me," Deborah said with a laugh. "I feel like I need to ride every day. I spend so much time back in New Jersey dreaming about my horse that when I get out here, I want to spend as much time with him as I can. Having them, I've started to do so much research on horses and I'm just infatuated now. That's what I do in my downtime — I'm always researching horse care, and reading about barn design and things like pasture or manure management."

Over the last few years as she's specialized in equestrian site planning, Deborah has sought out other qualified landscape architects who live and breathe horses — others who she hopes will carry on the business someday when she retires.

"I've been very lucky in my practice," she said. "I've had some very wonderful clients. But I look at this as the last stage in my career, so being able to do what I love, I'm just getting so much enjoyment out of it. Knowing that I have this knowledge to share with people that need me and appreciate what I do ... when the client says, 'Wow, what a great idea, I never would have thought of that,' it's just so satisfying to me. To take all these 30 years of study and my career, now I'm applying it to something I really love. It's just so rewarding to be able to help people." **SI**



"We designed this steel arbor to support apple trees that line this cross axis between two barns at a jumper facility in central New Jersey," Deborah said.

3D studies of master plans help the client and the zoning board visualize the site design.

Deborah's horse enjoying his pasture at their Montana ranch.

Photo by Freddy Terranova