



Om El Arab
The Strength of Diamonds



OM EL ARAB

The Strength of Diamonds

by Evie Tubbs Sweeney

*Special thanks to interviewees Janina Merz, Doug Dahmen, Greg Gallón, Scott Benjamin, Diane Brown, Emma Maxwell, Jeff Wallace, Elisa Grassi, Marieta Salas, and Lenita Perroy. Sigi Siller quotes taken from a variety of personal tributes she wrote about her beloved *Estopa and *El Shaklan.*

May we continue to find direction, courage and inspiration from Sigi's life well lived. This story is dedicated to her, and her daughter, Janina.

"You're a Diamond, my dear. They can't break you." | Anonymous

The historic Om El Arab sign beckons me to turn onto View Drive. I pass what was once the pasture of *Sharem El Sheikh on my right, then on my left the former home of one of the greatest breeders in the history of the Arabian horse, Sigi Siller. The road takes a right and winds down a moderately steep hill, unveiling a panorama so beautiful it tempts my eyes off the road ahead, with only the steep drop-off on my right forcing me to double my driving efforts. As I approach the bottom, I drive by the gravesite for *Estopa. *El Shaklan's memorial is not far from it. I begin to feel a lump in my throat, overcome by the continuous rotation of life as well as the inescapable truth of loss this breeding program has experienced over its near sixty-year existence.

I round the vineyard-lined bend, now in full view of the radiant beauty of this special place. The barns, open stalls, lobby and presentation arena are all a nod to its European heritage. I park the car and walk into the hallowed aisle of the stallion barn. The last stall on the left is set aside for the patriarchs of Om El Arab ... a throne, if you will, for the king. Plaques on the stall leave record of its former residents: *El Shaklan's name is first, followed by *Sanadik El Shaklan, then Om El Shahmaan, and now Om El Bellissimo. I picture seeing these different faces looking out at me, with Sigi no doubt standing next to them, and I'm overcome by the conflicting feelings in my heart. Part of me feels humbled as I stand in the presence of greatness; the other feels the pain of loss and grief that is inherent to great breeding programs such as this, and I begin to choke back a few tears. It is an overwhelming feeling.

With a deep breath, I turn and walk into the lobby. Calling it a 'lobby' doesn't feel like an accurate term. It's friendlier than that ... almost motherly, like a comfortable living room. In walks a young, vibrant woman who carries all of those past horses, as well as her mother, inside of her. She is Today. She is also the promise of Tomorrow. Her warmth runs as deep as the history she represents, and she introduces me to stallions like Om El Sinon, Om El Al Azeem, and the current patriarch of the last stall on the left, Om El Bellissimo.

Janina ushers me to the mare barn where I am introduced to two one-day-old foals and their exquisite, doting mothers. I smile with a warm heart, soaking in the fullness of Om El Arab, and I feel my excitement building.

With new life abounding in every corner, this program's history continues to write itself. Here is its story.



The Strength Behind The People

She was only twelve years old, but already a refugee. Liane Huniar, her baby brother, and her parents walked on foot from the Banat in Romania to Rastatt, Germany, prior to the Russians invading Romania during World War II, ultimately concluding in the Iron Curtain.

The family landed in the small baroque town of Rastatt, on the Western German and French border. Liane did not receive any further formal education after twelve years old, but did enter a three-year seamstress apprenticeship. During that time, she married Franz Siller, and had their first child on November 12, 1950 when Liane was just seventeen. They named their daughter Siegrid, ("Sigi" for short), which means "She who rides to victory." Shortly after finishing the apprenticeship, and with a new baby at hand, Liane identified a niche that would bring the family some good fortune—albeit not a glamorous one. She went door to door, picking up dirty laundry, and returning the next day with freshly laundered, freshly pressed clothes.

Growing up, young Sigi had always loved horses, and desperately longed to learn how to ride. But the family couldn't afford lessons. Instead, they gave her a tennis racket, hoping to appease her. It didn't go over well.

Sigi never did anything with horses until she was 18 years old, when her father, Franz—an accomplished rider himself—arranged for a six-week apprenticeship at Marbach Stud in Southwest Germany.

The state stud was comprised primarily of Warmbloods, as one would expect in Germany. But they also had a significant and important Arabian horse breeding division. The horse Sigi was charged with caring for was an Arabian stallion named Hadban Enzahi. Sigi fell in love with his beauty and presence, launching what would be a lifetime love affair with the Arabian breed.

The Beginnings Of The Om El Arab Dynasty

It was here at Marbach, that 19-year-old Sigi met Heinz Merz in 1970. The two shared a passion for the Arabian horse, and that same year traveled together on a buying spree to Spain, Egypt and Poland. During their momentous trip to Spain, they purchased 18 mares from five different farms. Among the mares was one that would change the course of Arabian horse history.

"The day I met *Estopa, she was dirty, covered in scars, and very thin," said Sigi Siller in her tribute to the mare. "She had some wounds on her legs from the hobbles she wore daily to keep her from escaping the unfenced fields. There was a special radiation about *Estopa, even in that condition."

Later that fall, Heinz and Sigi traveled to Egypt because they wanted to incorporate Egyptian blood into their herd. They found the *Morafic son, Shaker El Masri (translated "thankful to Egypt" in Arabic) along with five other mares, including one mare from Dr. Sayed Marei, father of Dr. Nasr Marei, named Om El Arab. The mare's name touched Sigi.

"I named our new horse business 'Om El Arab,' said Sigi, "which in Arabic means 'Mother of Arabians.'"

The young couple hardly knew the impact this program would have on the future of the Arabian horse.

Heinz and Sigi married in 1971 while both were students at University in Berlin in Rasatt. With Liane's health deteriorating from Hodgkin's disease, it prompted Heinz and Sigi to purchase the family dry cleaning service, and Franz and Liane to procure a second home in the country, primarily as a healthier alternative for Liane. They found a parcel in the Black Forest of Germany, about an hour and a half outside Rastatt which would become their permanent home.

1973 was a year of highs and lows for Sigi. Liane lost her two-year battle to cancer and passed away that February, leaving the family in shambles and Sigi wracked with sorrow. Liane was only thirty-nine; Sigi only twenty-two.





Janina & Ben with *Estopa



Sigi & *Estopa

"My mother had been the focal point of our family," said Sigi. "I was grief stricken."

In a twist of fate, *Estopa delivered her first foal shortly thereafter, a beautiful filly by Shaker El Masri named *Estasha. The filly provided a ray of hope for things to come in the midst of Sigi's anguish. An intense bond between Sigi and *Estopa was formed during that time that would remain till the end.

(Estasha's influence would continue on for generations, and would later become additionally valuable because it is one of only two *Estopa lines from Germany that Sigi was able to retain. In fact, this Spring, a filly was born at Om El Arab that goes back seven generations directly to *Estopa through *Estasha. The filly will undoubtedly never be sold for her cherished pedigree).

"It may have been partly from my feelings of losing my mother," recalled Sigi, "but *Estopa, with her kind character, her fierce protective nature and strong sense of nurturing with Estasha, had found her way into my heart."

Sigi and Heinz purchased the Black Forest farm from Franz and moved several of their horses to the property, spending their weekdays running the dry cleaning business and weekends in the Black Forest.

*Estopa continued to be bred to Shaker El Masri the following few years, as the match clearly worked. In 1975, a colt was born that would rewrite history.

"I was in awe of this colt," said Sigi. "He was the most beautiful colt I had ever seen."

Taking the "E" from *Estopa and the "Shak" from Shaker El Masri, Sigi named the colt *El Shaklan.

Over time, it became apparent *Estopa had a transcendent ability to out-produce herself. Her combination with Shaker El Masri produced sheer magic.

*Estopa was a big mare for her time, around 15.1hh. She was admittedly a bit long in the back. Her face, "like the Mona Lisa," Sigi would say, was arresting, enchanting and seductive. Her eyes were large and round and soft black. Her character was a contradiction of terms. She could have, at times, the nature of a nurturing babysitter; other times the fierce demeanor of a warrior. *Estopa was also very people-oriented and loved being the center of attention.

Shaker El Masri on the other hand, was much smaller, finer boned and somewhat standoffish. The combination of these two different individuals produced offspring that were taller than both, more exotic than either, and with shorter backs and longer hips.

"It is my belief, that *Estopa was the dominant parent," said Sigi, "with Shaker El Masri adding refinement and his dose of fiery character."


Together, *Estopa and Shaker El Masri produced a new dimension of Arabian horse for Europe, a dimension that had previously only danced on the pages of books of artists or were frozen in bronzed animation on coffee tables.

The *Estopa dynasty was taking shape, and the Spanish/Egyptian "Golden Cross" had begun.



E
L
S
H
*El
Shaklan





The Reign Of *El Shaklan

Sigi nearly left Heinz two times in the first four years of their marriage; once when he tried to sell *Estopa, and the other when he tried to sell *El Shaklan. Both times, and in credit to her foresight, Sigi adamantly denied the sales.

As a counter offer to the sale, *El Shaklan was leased to prominent breeders Pat and Johanna Maxwell's Lodge Farm Stud in England from 1976 to 1978.

"*El Shaklan was a complete sensation in the United Kingdom" recalls Emma Maxwell, daughter of Pat and Johanna Maxwell, "which had never really seen a horse like him before."

He was only beaten once, winning two national championships and scores of smaller shows. Foals from his first foal crop continued to win over all of the United Kingdom. His final foal in the U.K., Maleik El Kheil (out of Muneera by *Fakhr El Kheil, the first Egyptian horse to come to the U.K.) became the foundation homebred sire for Lodge Farm Stud. Maleik was Supreme National Champion as a yearling and also won the first ever World Championship for Junior Colts in Paris in 1980 with the highest score of the show. *El Shaklan had already returned to Germany and his career too, never looked back.

Additionally, the Maxwell's first foal by *El Shaklan was Amir El Shaklan, who was exported to Australia in utero. "Australia has always had a love affair with *El Shaklan," said Janina. "And it's due in large part to Amir El Shaklan."

*El Shaklan returned to Om El Arab with several show titles including British National Junior Champion Stallion. He had become a stallion of international acclaim.

As was standard practice in Germany, all breeding stallions were required to go to the German Koerung (stallion licensing exam) in order to maintain the quality of breeding animals in Germany. If he did not pass the exam, he was not allowed to breed. Not only did he pass, he was awarded the highest marks of any stallion given the exam.

Less than one year later, he was taken to Marbach State Stud for the 100-Day Stallion Performance Test, in which a Marbach rider tested the horse's abilities and suitability as a riding horse in rigorous tests in dressage, jumping and cross-country. During the cross-country test, *El Shaklan pulled up with a bowed tendon. Even then, he was awarded the highest score of the test for rideability and disposition, even over the German Warmbloods.

*El Shaklan returned home to the Black Forest and enjoyed enormous popularity and success in shows across Europe and Australia.

"The Om El Arab bloodlines became the foundation for many other breeders searching for a particular look," said Emma, "with the type and attitude of the *Morafic sire line and the wonderful eyes and fluid motion of the Spanish bloodlines. That original cross was unusual in that it melded well with many other bloodlines, not just its constituent parts of Egyptian and Spanish, but also Crabbet lines in England, the Russian horses across Europe, the American domestic horses in the U.S. and later even in the State Studs of Poland."

Om El Arab & *El Shaklan In America

Heinz Merz flew to Scottsdale in 1981 in search of a U.S.-based trainer to campaign several Om El Arab horses, including *El Shaklan. By this time, *El Shaklan was widely considered the most popular horse in Europe, and Heinz and Sigi felt he needed to expand his campaign to the United States. A mutual friend suggested Heinz talk to a young, up-and-coming trainer named Doug Dahmen at the show.

"Heinz was telling me about El Shaklan," said Doug, "but he was concerned about how horses were being shown here, saying the training and presentation style was too regimented. He said a horse like *El Shaklan had to be allowed to be himself in the ring."

The two got along well, and the decision was ultimately made to send *El Shaklan and a few other horses to Doug. *El Shaklan arrived to the United States in February 1983, and stood with Doug in Santa Ynez, Calif.

"The first time I saw him, I was awestruck," said Doug. "He was so different. There was no doubt, this horse would attract huge attention in the United States."

He was spot on. That year, *El Shaklan enjoyed an extremely successful show ring campaign, ultimately being named 1983 U.S. Top Ten Champion Stallion. And though he came in third to Arn-Ett Perlane and Ruminaja Ali, all three of these magnificent stallions were first on at least one judge's card, and all three had huge fan clubs behind them. It showed in the breeding shed. That year, *El Shaklan bred a remarkable 97 mares with a strong stud fee of \$10,000. The following year, 100. And the next, 107. Heinz and Sigi, quickly recognizing the

impact he was making in the United States, decided to purchase property in Santa Ynez as a second location for Om El Arab. On August 15, 1984, Sigi, Heinz and their (now) two kids, Janina and Benni, permanently moved to Santa Ynez from Germany.

And though all seemed to be falling into place, the first three years in the United States would challenge Sigi in ways yet unseen. Heinz and Sigi separated in 1985. Sigi not only suffered the loss of her farm in the Black Forest, but also the forced sale of her beloved *El Shaklan to Brazil the following year.

"El Shaklan's departure was the loss of my biggest joy in my life as a breeder," said Sigi. "It was *Estopa, with her unconquerable spirit, that helped me rekindle my love for breeding."

With two young children, a relatively new home and farm, and just five horses—four mares, including one-half of *Estopa, and one-quarter of the young *Sanadik El Shaklan—Sigi started over. And like her mother, Liane, Sigi displayed tremendous fortitude, courage, and focus to overcome incredible odds, relying on her instincts as a breeder, belief in her program, strength from *Estopa, and joy from her children.

*El Shaklan's influence continued on in Brazil and later Argentina with Count Federico Zichy Thyssen.

"It was very difficult for my family when *El Shaklan was sold," said Janina. "But as an adult, I can now see that it was a way to share him with the world. He would have never been able to influence South America in the way he did had he not spent the majority of his life there."

World Junior and Scottsdale Champion, ZT Shakfantasy, for example, was bred by the Count. And Lenita Perroy's Haras Meia Lua in Brazil found great success with *El Shaklan daughters as foundation mares for her program, crossed with Ali Jamaal. Great stallions from her respected program like Ryad El Jamaal, Ludjn El Jamaal and Ninja El Jamaal are either out of *El Shaklan daughters or have *El Shaklan in their blood.

Back in the United States, Sigi placed all her hopes and dreams for the future on *Estopa and the exotic but relatively unknown four-year-old *Sanadik El Shaklan, as head sire, continuing the Om El Arab dynasty. He was tall and exotic like his sire, but more finely made and very elegant. It is worth noting he is also a "Golden Cross" of Spanish/Egyptian lines. Remember Hadban Enzahi, the stallion Sigi cared for at Marbach that caused her to fall for Arabians? Mohena, *Sanadik's dam, is a Hadban daughter that Sigi herself bred.

"The fact that she had the innate ability to breed to that stallion and produce something that is still important even today, is utterly amazing," said Janina. "It's a beautiful full-circle story to know that *Sanadik was a result of the horse that got her started in Arabians."

Over the course of his lifetime, *Sanadik sired national champions in England, Spain, Germany, France, Belgium, Sweden, Finland, The Netherlands, Denmark, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Poland, Australia, Chile, the Czech Republic, Morocco, and the United States, including World Junior Champion Filly Om El Sanadiva, who became one of Germany's most successful producers of champions. And one cannot fail to mention the incomparable *El Dorada, born in Poland via frozen semen, who earned the coveted titles of Polish National Champion Mare and U.S. National Champion Senior Mare.

Om El Arab and the blood of *Estopa and *El Shaklan reach into the pedigrees of some of today's most illustrious sires, record-breaking show horses, and prominent broodmares of globally respected breeding programs. The list of examples is staggering, the breadth of influence utterly stupefying. The Om El Arab program is one of the most well-loved programs in the history of the Arabian breed. But what is perhaps most amazing is how a six-decade breeding program not only has defied phenotypical bias, but has actually *defined* it.

For example, of the eighteen champions (bronze through gold) at the 2017 Arabian Breeders World Cup, fourteen of them carried Om El Arab blood. That equates to 78%!

"With a dash of Om El blood incorporated into a program," said Emma, "breeders of all flavors of Arabians and all types of modern sires get what they want, while keeping the distinctive good expressive eyes and an overall balance. Providing a baseline of balanced and attractive type for breeders to add on other characteristics and bloodlines as they please, is the great attraction of Om El horses for now and the future."

In a world where changing phenotypes typically render older programs obsolete, Om El Arab has never been in a stronger position than it is today. It is a truly remarkable, and nearly inconceivable feat.





The Power Of The *Estopa Tail Female Lines

*“Quantifying *ESTOPA’s influence in the Arabian breed is akin to measuring the impact of sunshine to life on earth,” said Scott Benjamin. “Since her first foals in the 1970s, her descendants have been blessing the breed with an abundance of extraordinary qualities and positive attributes, creating a dynasty of international champions and invaluable breeding horses, and a remarkable legacy that is unsurpassed by any mare born in the last half century. Most fortunately, that unmistakable ‘*ESTOPA look’ is all around us, in every remote corner of the globe: the authentic, classic type that defines the Om El Arabian horse. Wherever progress is being made with world-class Arabian horses, you can be assured that the enduring legacy of *Estopa and her innumerable descendants are at the forefront.”*

There is no doubt the stallion line of Om El Arab is potent and weighty. But one would be remiss to overlook its equally powerful group of females, set in motion by *Estopa. The royal broodmare band of Om El Arab is considered not only one of the most beautiful, but also most genetically vigorous in the world. Breeders seek out Om El Arab-bred mares for their programs because they are unusually capable of incorporating potent type.

“Some farms are stallion-driven,” said Janina. “We are mare-driven.” Does this detract from the influence of the great Om El Arab stallions, both past and present? Not in the least. More so, the reason they are what they are is because of the strong tail female lines in their pedigrees.

“Breeders often come to Om El Arab for broodmares because they can breed the mares to pretty much anything and get something beautiful,” said Janina. “This is because our mares are often intentionally line bred to *Estopa, so their genetic pool is quite tight.”

This tightness creates a hybrid vigor to produce themselves, and it is amplified when bred to outcrosses. It is essentially a breeder’s broodmare dream.

Case in point: Om El Erodite, now a household name around the world as the filly that sold at the 2017 Marquise Invitational Auction for \$1.55 million. Om El Erodite was produced when Janina and Sigi decided to outcross the exotically beautiful Om El Excella—line bred with a tail female line to *Estopa—to the exciting Marwan Al Shaqab son, EKS Alihandro.

It not only creates a dream scenario for breeders, but demonstrates the essence and advantages of true generational breeding programs, of which few remain in the world. This alone puts Om El Arab in a league untouched, and empowered indefinitely for the future.

A Diamond For The Future

In 2006, Sigi was diagnosed with breast cancer. Like most things, she fought and won, as the cancer went into remission in 2007. But to everyone’s shock including her own, it returned in 2014.

Sigi and Estopa were so similar. They were both nurturing at the core, but warriors when the battle call sounded. Sigi battled her enemy with all her might—physically, spiritually and emotionally. On May 10, 2016, Sigi transitioned surrounded by her family. Physically she lost the fight, but spiritually she was unconquerable; unbreakable like a diamond.

If one visits the farm, they immediately recognize that her spirit luminously shines on in the horses, the barns, her big Oak tree, her beloved Santa Ynez mountains, and most of all, in her children and their families, who are all carrying on Sigi’s vision. None more so than Janina, who has managed the farm with her mother for more than a decade, and is showing the same fortitude as her mother, and her mother’s mother.

Scott Benjamin summarized it perfectly. “Sigi and Janina inspire me each and every day to do more, learn more, discover more and be more for this ancient breed, the Arabian horse that enriches our lives and expands our existence in infinite ways. Most profoundly, Om El Arab has become the ‘Mother of the Arabian horse’, nurturing the breed, and in turn all of us, with inspiration, with compassion, with understanding and with love.”

There is something special about the ladies of Om El Arab, horses and human. They are strong, they are courageous. They are nurturing, they are game changers. They lead in quiet strength that softly rumbles in undeniable rhythms that are more felt than heard, like refracting light through an unbreakable diamond.

And thankfully for us, diamonds are forever.

Om El Shaina

*Camargue x Estopa
Dam of Om El Shahmaan*



Larry



A Few Words From The Leaders...


"We have had a front row seat in witnessing the commitment to the breed by Om El Arab. I have been lucky to show and see some of their best for many years. There is little doubt that the Om El name stands alone in terms of worldwide renown and respect. We know the next chapters are going to be just as special." | **Greg Gallón**

"The determination of fixing a type of wonderful Arabian horse, Sigi was a master of inbreeding and line breeding. Her knowledge of her horse pedigrees made her one of the best breeders in history." | **Marieta Salas**

"Someone recently asked me, 'Who is the most loved horse, yet deceased, in the world?' I said, hands down, *El Shaklan. He is the most beloved Arabian horse of all time. The reason I know that? My historical Facebook posts on *El Shaklan garner the biggest responses by far. *El Shaklan in Santa Ynez in the 80s are images that people cannot get enough of. Throughout the world, the blood of *Sanadik and *El Shaklan live on." | **Jeff Wallace**

"When I began breeding Arabian horses in Brazil at my farm Haras Meia Lua, I was able to acquire the most wonderful collection of *El Shaklan daughters as a big part of my foundation. He was a magnificent beauty and his daughters were treasured broodmares here, giving me stallions such as my spectacular sire Ludjin El Jamaal. I admire the breeding program of Om El Arab very much and even added an exquisite maternal granddaughter of their stallion *Sanadik El Shaklan a few years back named *Elle Dorada. When mated with the stallions from my own program, she has given me a plethora of true beauties. I applaud this precious blood always." | **Lenita Perroy**

"Sigi's horses are her legacy. To have built up a herd of such consistent type, beauty, genetic strength, and prepotency which, after half a century has its own distinct look and is true to the original vision, is quite remarkable. The statistics speak for themselves; at the 2016 Aachen All Nations Cup in Germany, of the 18 championship winners, 14 carried the blood of Om El Arab in their pedigree; at the 2016 World Championships in Paris of the 18 championship winners, 12 carried of the blood of Om El Arab in their pedigree, and at the 2017 Arabian Breeders World Cup in Las Vegas, of the 18 championship winners, 14 carried *El Shaklan alone in their pedigree! So, fifty years of dedication to breeding a complete, stunningly beautiful, genetically prepotent, instantly recognizable breathtaking group of horses that are as relevant and current now as they were fifty years ago. I would also have to mention and single out *El Shaklan as he was Sigi's greatest love and he changed everything within the Arabian breed. There are three breeders other than Sigi that I have always greatly admired; Lenita Perroy, Marieta Salas and Sheila Varian, and they are all linked by recognizing the immense value of *El Shaklan and infusing his blood into their breeding programs. But Sigi's most valuable gift? For me personally, I would have to say her daughter, Janina." | **Diane Brown**



“Sigi was one the world’s most significant breeders. Her goals in Arabian horse breeding were admirable—while many people have goals, very few fulfil them as completely as she did. Her single mindedness was unwavering and she created generations of Arabian horses that were immediately recognizable, both as classic Arabian horses and as the product of her personal vision.

She kept the thread and direction of her breeding program unbroken, while weaving in what she needed to keep going forward. She had the rare fortune of having a second generation to keep her dream alive and Om El Arab has passed into the very capable hands of her daughter Janina, supported by Bryon and Luca. Janina shares her mother’s passion and dedication and has the amazing opportunity to guide the breeding program for the upcoming generations.” | **Emma Maxwell**

“Sigi was an amazing lady who had passion for Arabian horses as few others have had. She had life struggles, but lived hers to the fullest. Her horses and children were what drove her. Her horses were her means to live. She had to make it work, and make it work well. No one in that position would have done it so well as Sigi. She studied the changes and nuances of the market, then evaluated and directed her horses in such way that she could follow the market, but still with her own touch and the distinctive Om El look. She mastered that concept. To me, Sigi’s greatest lesson is a simple set of three things: perseverance, determination, and joy of the process and the final result. I like to look at Sigi today as a person who enjoyed waking up every day—good or bad—and ready for it. In today’s world, the Om El horses continue to have a place, because Sigi believed in the future; she believed in tomorrow and she most certainly had all the life lust in the world to be a part of tomorrow. That’s the reason why and how they are as important and successful today as they were 40 years ago with the original cross of Shaker El Masri to *Estopa. But Sigi also knew and believed in passing on; therefore, she nurtured Janina to be a bright young and visionary breeder to follow her. Sigi polished the leads and carefully placed them in the best hands possible; another reason why the Om El legacy has just only finished Volume 1, with Volume 2 about to be written.” | **Bart Van Buggenhout**

“The story of success of the Arabian horse over the last half century is inextricably intertwined with that of Om El Arab and the breeding vision of Sigi Siller and Janina Merz. The Om El Arabian of today offers to breeders worldwide exactly what it has from the very beginning: an elite-quality breeding horse, show horse and equine athlete that uncompromisingly reflects the authentic desert Arabian horse of legend. Synonymous with Om El Arab are terms such as aristocratic, exotic, refinement, quality, presence, classic, size, scope, substance, inspiring, dynamic, unforgettable, influential, prepotent, consistent, unmistakable and legendary. This is what the Om El Arabian offers breeders and enthusiasts: an authentic uncompromising link to the true heritage of this noble breed, all the elements necessary for success in any equine endeavor today, and most essentially, hope for a brighter future and lasting legacy for the Arabian horse into this century and beyond.” | **Scott Benjamin**



Did you know?

These Stallions Have Direct *Estopa/*El Shaklan

Breeding:
Versace
DA Valentino
WH Justice
Ajman Moniscione
Abha Qatar
Da Vinci FM
Titan AS
Shanghai EA
Odyssey SC
Vitorio TO
FA El Shawan
FA El Rasheem
Vervaldee
Eternety
AJ Mardan
Ludjn El Jamaal
Ninja El Jamaal
Ryad El Jamaal
Mirage V
Excalibur EA
Malcik El Kheil
ZT Shakfantasy
RFI Farid
AJA Angelo
Luigi
Falah Al Shaqab
D Seraj
Pharaoh HBV
ES Harir
Fadi Al Shaqab
Sultan Al Shaqab
Antaris OS
Ascot DD
Kanz Al Nasser
Al Khatab al Thani
Aj Azzam
Alexxanderr
Om El Al Azeem
Aja Justified
FS Bengali
Sahm El Arab
... And many others

These Mares Have Direct *Estopa/*El Shaklan

Breeding:
Om El Sanadiva
*El Dorada
El Sanadika IA
Precious as Gold
Om El Erodite
Giavanna
Navarrone-P
Om El Bernadette
Venetzia
Panarea By Palawan
Ladi Veronika
Om El Excella
Essteema
Belladonna AT
Bess Fa'izah
Eagleridge Passionata
Gloria Apal
Najdah Al Zobair
Tehama Ballalina
Donna Molta Bella SRA
CR Jasmeeah
FM Gloriaa
... And many others

Scott Benjamin, respected international judge and consultant, believes in five uncompromising 'musts' that all influential and enduring breeding programs are anchored in:

1. They understand the essence of the authentic desert Arabian horse
2. They search the world over for foundation breeding stock that fit that ideal
3. They trust their breeding intuition and instincts
4. They take risks with bloodlines and horses that appeal to them
5. They never stop learning about other breeding programs and discovering quality horses all over the world

"The Om El Arab program continues to pave the way with each of these criteria," he continues. "First Sigi, and now Janina, have never compromised when it comes to breeding the type of horse that appeals to them, yet remains true to the classic Arabian ideal. In an ever-changing world of show fashion and fads, the Om El Arabian endures as the most appealing, the most desirable and the most relevant. This has not been accomplished without great risk and unwavering faith in the positive outcome and commitment to their ever-evolving long term goals. With great risk comes great reward. Fortunately, that reward continues to reap reward not only for Om El Arab, but for all of us and, most importantly, the Arabian breed worldwide."



Om El Shahmaan

*Sanadik El Shaklan x Om El Shaina (Camargue x *Estopa)*

photo: Jennifer Ogden



Transitional Times: Janina Merz

with JEFF WALLACE



What does it feel like to say goodbye to a mother, best friend, soulmate, business partner and yoga pal all in the same moment?

It's gnarly. It's really gnarly. And it hits you every day in a different way. Sometimes I miss her because I'm going to yoga, and I'm in the parking lot and she is not sitting next to me. When I went back to yoga that first time just a month ago, I sat in the parking lot with that empty seat next to me and thought 'I don't know if I can go in.' Now, a month later, I'm ok doing it. It's the same with the business stuff. Most of the time I'm ok. But pretty much every single day, there is a moment—or two or three—where it's like something just rams into my chest. It can happen when I walk past the family photo wall and see her picture, or when I look at one of our beautiful horses. It totally catches you off guard, and is the feeling of grief that people have when they experience loss. And I have to take a deep breath and just breathe through the wave till it passes.

How do you feel Luca has affected your emotional transition?

I'm so grateful I have him. If I didn't have him, I could have easily been inclined to wallow. But having a two-year-old just doesn't allow you that, which is a good thing. And holding and cuddling him and feeling the love from him ... it definitely helps.

Do you feel your mom when you are with him?

Not really. They are separate feelings to me. I think of her when I'm with him a lot though. We would always talk about when 'we' have a child, how we would raise it, my mom and I. We would travel with him. We would feed him organic food. And he would be the sweetest child ever... 'our' child. Sometimes he does cute things and I'm like, 'Oh Mommy, look at our child.'

Where has this event left you emotionally and how do you find comfort when this brutal reality "comes calling"?

I feel like I have grown more this year than in my 40 years of life prior. I wish it wouldn't have taken the loss of my mom for that to happen, but I've grown in every single way: mentally, spiritually, and professionally. It's crazy how an event like this can really push you to be 100% of who you really are inside. I didn't have to be all those things before. But now that she's gone, I do ... just to get through the day in a positive manner. I have to be a better person than before. And I am.





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WILL-WORSHIP

Om El Shahlimar

(Sanadik El Shaklan x Om El Shaina)

& JANINA



Fighter

Matriarch



Friend



Mother



Mentor



People say the same thing about becoming a mom, how that process brings out new levels in yourself than you ever thought possible. You've gone through both steps—motherhood and losing a parent—in a short window of time.

I became a mom at the same time I found out my mom was sick. It's interesting you say that. It's like the happiest time of your life and most difficult, all at the same time. A fascinating thing to learn from life is that it doesn't have to be black or white. It can be both. I have had some of my happiest moments this year and then also some of ... well, THE darkest as well. It's interesting to realize that life is both of those things ... and that doesn't make it a bad life, you know?

How do you deal with it?

All through my life, I've tried to meditate. But I never really had an actual meditation practice. This experience has forced me to commit to one. And it's been key in my ability to cope through my grief. If I do it, I feel great. If I miss a day, that'll be a day that I'll feel really sorry for myself at the end of it. And the only way to get myself out, is by meditating. All it takes is 15 minutes and I'm good for the rest of the day. It has become a really important part of my life and is one of the key reasons I am where I am right now. It's so important just to take care of yourself during these transitional times.

Have you had to explain to your sweet and young son yet about where Omi (i.e. grandma) has gone?

Not yet. But that's partially because I feel like she's around him all the time. And I feel like if I explain to him where she's gone using my words, I'm going to limit him from whatever he's experiencing right now. I don't want to put my adult limitations on him. For example, when I ask him in the morning what he dreamed about, he will frequently say 'Omi.' Often. Or, soon after she passed, he would look up at the sun, point and say 'Omi'. He talks about Omi's car, or Omi's house ... he talks about her every single day. And then the other day he said in half German and half English, 'Maybe, morgen (tomorrow), our Omi will come.' And then he said, 'Frage sie (ask her)'. Trying not to cry, I thought 'Okay, how do I deal with that question?' He is only two, but there is going to come a time where I am actually going to have to talk to him about that. But the time hasn't really been right yet.

Define what the term "hunker down" means to you. I assume it is maybe different than it once meant. How does that term apply to getting through that experience in one piece?

I have a little gratitude practice that is important to talk about. In fact, I mentioned it in our Christmas letter. Especially on days where I'm feeling grief wash over me, I practice gratitude even on really little things. For example, I'll lay in bed and think about how much I love my pillow and am so grateful to have it. If you can feel good about the simple things, you can grow that into the bigger picture. Other days, it is big things. For example, I'm grateful for this breeding program. But it starts with the little things, especially on days that are tough. While I certainly believe in the process of grief to heal, I try not to let myself wallow. And the antithesis of wallowing is gratitude.

Do you find solace during a stroll through the barn?

Yes. I love every single one of our horses, and their unique personalities. I will stroll through the barn, give them kisses, scratch their faces, smell them. It does give me lots of solace.

One thing I have always appreciated about Om El Arab versus many other barns is that the horses have not become a commodity. You actually still emotionally love the experience of horses.

Totally! And part of the gratitude thing too, is that I go through the barn and thank them. I thank them for anything and everything. All of this is because of them. I thanked Excella for Erodite [laugh]. A BIG thank you!

Did you make your breeding decisions for 2017 alone or with someone?

I made them alone. My mom and I always made them together. We'd bounce ideas off of one another, and never spent a ton of time making them. It was more from the gut. So I did the same thing. My mom and I always kept our breeding decisions close to our hearts. And actually, it feels like this is the second season of doing this exercise by myself because my mom passed away last May, and we bred mares until August.

But even though I make the breeding decisions myself, I do have mentors; people I bounce things off of. Sometimes I feel like you need to just talk about stuff in this business. In the process of verbalizing it, the answer becomes clear. The people I talk to are Darryl Larson, Doug Dahmen and Diane Brown ... all friends of my mom, and also friends of mine. I trust them unequivocally.

Om El Justadorable
Wh Justice x Om El Shahuandura



© [Signature]



Janina, who was and still is, Sigi Siller?

She was a mother first and foremost. [Pause.] That's a hard one to answer actually. She was a lioness. It was interesting because she was so strong, yet so vulnerable. She lived this incredible, blessed life, and yet had to fight for everything. She was a warrior.

Was she an exquisite Arabian in her previous life?

If so, which Arabian would you liken her to? Estopa. The Matriarch. The founder of the family. No question.

What new thoughts do you have for Om El Arab that have resulted from this transitional time? Are there any goals or plans that have come into focus resulting from this time of transition?

Even before the transition, we happened to breed this fabulous filly that, to me, has become the bridge to the next chapter of my life, and that of Om El Arab. It was the summer of 2015. We wanted to breed Om El Excella to a particular stallion, but his semen wasn't available and she was ready to be bred. I came up to the house and I said, 'Mom, you know we have that [EKS] Alihandro semen in our freezer. I think we should breed Excella to Alihandro.' And she said, 'I think that a really good idea ... I was thinking the same.' It was an idea that was completely outside of the box. The fact that I thought of it, and she'd also had the same thought, and that the resulting filly, Om El Erodite, is so spectacular, was really huge for me. It gave me permission to do some things that are different from what we've done in the past. So it is huge.

How is Om El Erodite a game-changer for Om El Arab?

Our breeding philosophy has always been 'like to like.' Even when we've brought in new blood to outcross our mares on, they've always been similar styles to our program, or had some Om El blood in their pedigrees. For example, Al Lahab is straight Egyptian, like Shaker El Masri (sire of El Shaklan). WH Justice is Spanish/Russian with El Shaklan in his pedigree. But Excella and Alihandro are not like to like, which is interesting, and stepping outside our normal box.

Will that fundamentally change part or all of Om El Arab's philosophy going forward?

No, it will not change our philosophy, but I will do it periodically going forward. That is historically what people have done from us. They will buy something that is Om El Arab-bred, and then outcross it with something else. The hybrid vigor comes through, resulting in these fabulous show horses. It is why Om El Arab horses are so successful as breeding animals.

For example, Al Thumama Stud bought an Om El Shahmaan daughter named Om El Bellatrix from us. They bred her to Wade Al Shaqab. The resulting filly is Belladonna AT, who was Gold Champion in Qatar, bronze in Aachen, and fourth in the World Championships. She is a total modern show filly. And so, for these reasons, I will continue making sure the Om El Arab horse stays the Om El Arab style. But I'll also periodically infuse it with some Alihandro-esque horse. Om El Beladeena is in foal to FA Al Shawan for this year (in partnership with Greg Gallún), which again is completely stepping outside the box, Om El Arab's 'out of the box' foal for 2017, much like Erodite was for 2016.

Do you feel like Om El Arab is poised to be an even stronger leader going forward?

I'm very lucky that I was left with this foundation of horses. I mean, what an amazing group of horses that are walking around down there at the barn right now. And Erodite is my most favorite filly we've ever bred. Ever. I would have loved, loved, loved to have kept her. But she needs to go out into the world and do her thing. She can be the flagbearer of Om El Arab for a while. Her timing is impeccable to represent the next big chapter of our breeding program. When I walked into that foaling stall moments after she was born, I immediately realized how special she was. And I just knew she was a gift from my mom.

She is a gift to me in so many ways. For one, she's going to have huge show success around the world. But most importantly, she gave me permission to follow my gut alone. She is the quintessential example of what is to come.

The Coke brand has always used the word "siempre" (always). If you had to pull one out of the air, what is the word you'd choose that most aligns itself with Om El Arab? Strength. My mom was strong. Estopa was strong genotypically and phenotypically ... her influence comes through all those generations and is still strong today in horses around the world. The breeding program has been through a lot, but strength is what has gotten it through. And strength is something I work on—and lean into—every day. So it's pertinent.

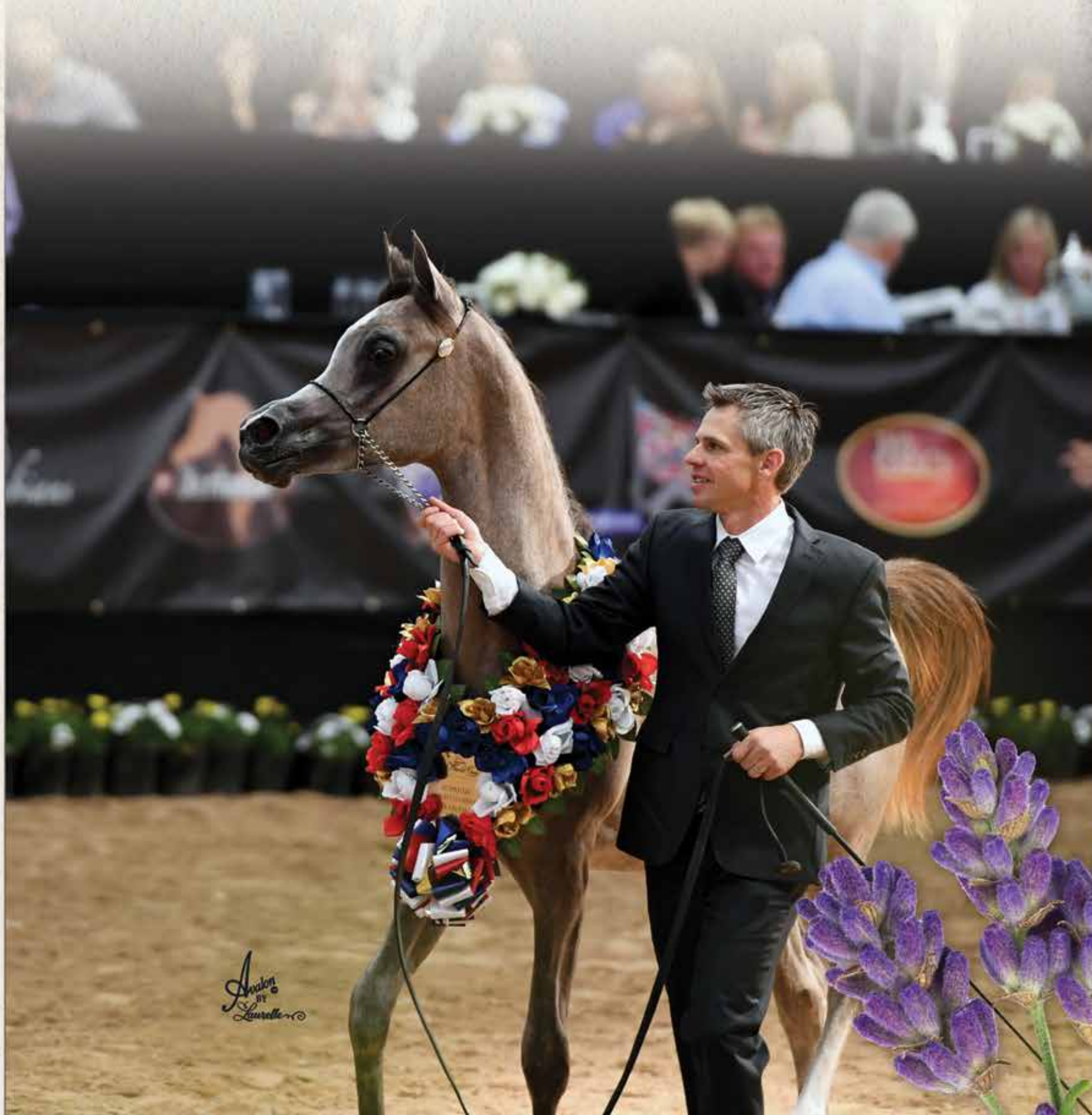
What did the sale of Erodite mean to you, professionally and personally?

It was really a validation that this almost 50-year-old breeding program is as current today as it always has been. And personally, it gave me permission to trust my own gut as a solo breeder in this first year without my mom. I actually felt like it was a gift from her to assure me I could do it without her. It was the perfect stepping stone for this next chapter.



Om El Eroditte

EKS Alihandro x Om El Excella



*Arden
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Laurelle*

2017 LAS VEGAS BREEDERS WORLD CUP
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