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a breed apart

In the multi-million dollar racing industry, Darley Australia is a showcase for equine excellence. Architect John Ladd-Hudson designed the *ultimate lavish stud* in the NSW Hunter Valley.

Text **Kirsty de Garis** Producer **William Dangar** Photography **Anson Smart**

Standing proud

this page The stallion Exceed And Excel, a champion sprinter, is one of the top thoroughbreds at stud at Darley Australia, near Aberdeen in the NSW Hunter Valley.

opposite page The stallions' stable is the crowning glory of the estate. Architect John Ladd-Hudson angled the roof dramatically to ensure cool breezes in the stalls.





Country comfort

this page Interior designer Adelaide Bragg furnished the renovated Kelvinside homestead with timeless pieces and soft colour. The painting is *Thornton Gumtrees* by John Earle, with three smaller artworks by Helen Ogilvie.

opposite page A generously proportioned American oak dining table and chairs were made by Charles Hewitt and upholstered in ticking from Mokum Textiles.



The interior has the feel of a sumptuous antique residence with 21st-century technology.

WHEN THE GODOLPHIN INTERNATIONAL HORSE STUD BUSINESS decided to invest in 525 hectares in the beautiful Hunter Valley in NSW, the project called for specific experience in building design. Specialist equine designers Ladd Hudson Architects were brought on board to design a stud complex from the ground up for owner Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum. The company, headed by John Ladd-Hudson, has worked in equine architecture for more than 25 years. Taking control of the design and placement of roads, cottages and stables alike, the firm designed a stud farm that, Ladd-Hudson claims, is "the best in the southern hemisphere bar none".

With stallions valued at up to \$20 million, at Darley they are treated like five-star guests. Last spring nearly 2000 mares visited the stud for servicing, many from interstate and overseas. Arriving at the property at all hours of the day, the horses are housed in the lavish and elegant purpose-built barn – the "cathedral point" of the stud farm – positioned for its access to cooling evening breezes. "We could tell that the evening air drained down towards the Hunter River," says Ladd-Hudson, "so we were able to site the building based on the air flows. We haven't had to install airconditioning." Keeping the horses' comfort in mind, the 4.5-metre square stalls are made from pre-

cast concrete and Australian hard woods. "You can't have any bacteria breeding inside the joints," Ladd-Hudson explains. Lively horses can be prone to get restless at any time, so 1.5-metre high synthetic cushions line the stalls, designed to absorb some of the impact of a wayward kick. Mesh has been used on inner and outer barn doors to aid ventilation and allow a clear view of the horses, while the barn is easy to wash down. It's a reliable blend of design and durability that, Ladd-Hudson explains, comes from building on past successes and knowing what works in equine architecture.

But the housing for pampered thoroughbreds is only one part of Darley's design; with more than 46 kilometres of fencing and countless roads, staff cottages and auxiliary barns in the pipeline, the project is enormous. Practicalities like mixing exercise space with vehicle crossings required meticulous planning. And the centrepiece for the business operations needed to be as impressive as the property's five-star stables. Interior designer Adelaide Bragg was given the task of transforming a rundown 19th-century homestead into a high-tech conference space, while remaining faithful to its pioneer atmosphere.

Originally the homestead, which dates from 1898, was called Kelvinside. With 3.6-metre high ceilings, structural work wasn't needed, but the process >



Star Studded

this page, clockwise from top left Thoroughbreds enjoy the luxury of 4.5-metre square stalls; the imposing tree-lined drive; a view of the stables, designed to keep horses comfortable without airconditioning.



of modernising the building to cope with wireless office space for 14 staff, as well as providing generous entertaining space for clients and a full working kitchen, took meticulous planning. The dining room was a challenge, says Bragg, because 'the room is very square in shape'. Being a naturally dark room, she chose to contrast the wall colour and curtains to lighten the space. A large square oak table, with chairs to match, was made to order. Built-in units disguise heating and airconditioning as well as video conferencing equipment. A soft, pale rug anchors the room, while there are strawberry accents in the curtains and upholstery. The interior scheme, which features down-filled sofas, Colefax & Fowler fabrics and Persian rugs, gives the feel of a sumptuous antique residence with 21st century technology.

William Dangar & Associates were given the task of landscaping the area immediately around the homestead. Says principal William Dangar: "We wanted to give the garden a country feel but not too frilly – so we planted nice big trees and planned simple structures, with a mix of evergreen deciduous and non-native species for low maintenance."

The colours of native plants are used in paint finishes inside and outside the homestead and barn areas, to blend the stud farm with its environment. "It's a bit like an Arthur Streeton painting," says Ladd-Hudson. And when clients park their cars outside the lovely old mansion, with its cooling verandah, he says: "It speaks Australian. It's 2005 technology-wise, but the feel of the property is very boom time Australia."

Ladd Hudson Architects, tel (02) 9610 1778, www.laddhudson.com.au. Adelaide Bragg & Associates, tel (03) 9682 7969, www.adelaidebragg.com.au

Bygone Splendour

The renovated homestead has been adapted for use as offices and for entertaining clients, with the gardens around it landscaped by William Dangar & Associates.

Design notebook...

furniture Three-seater **sofa** and **armchairs** (in living room) made to order by Crallon Furnishings, tel (02) 9344 9106. Dining **table** and **chairs** made to order by Charles Hewitt, tel (02) 9565 2050. Stitched leather **tray tables** (in dining room) from Decorator Trading, tel (02) 9331 1442. **soft flooring** Persian **rug** (living room) from Whitecliffe Imports, tel (02) 9692 8522. Floor **rug** (dining room) from Premier Carpets, tel (02) 9310 4455.

accessories (all in living area) Red lacquer **box** and black tealeaddy **lamp bases** from Geraldine Cooper, tel (03) 9810 3900. Brown paper **lampshades** by Vaughn from Brook Street Trading, tel (02) 9363 2600. **Vases** and **candles** from Decorator Trader, tel (02) 9331 1442.