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July 2005

**Tom Selleck**  
on Horses, the West  
& Cowboy Culture

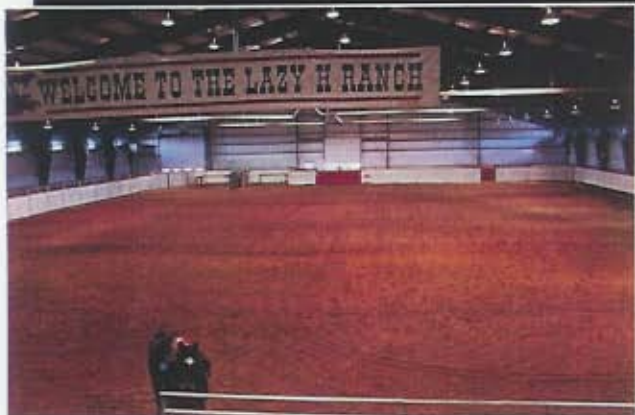
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## Horse Properties

Five things trainers and recreational riders want most when they purchase a horse property, and the five things any seller can do to better market his place.

Article by Fran Devereux Smith • Photographs Courtesy of Ranch Marketing Associates

**R**on Morris, Johnstown, Colorado, a longtime horseman with a ranching background, also is a real-estate professional. He'd handled commercial and industrial properties nationwide for almost 20 years but, by 1995, Ron was ready for a change.

"I wanted a different direction in my career, just for personal satisfaction," he

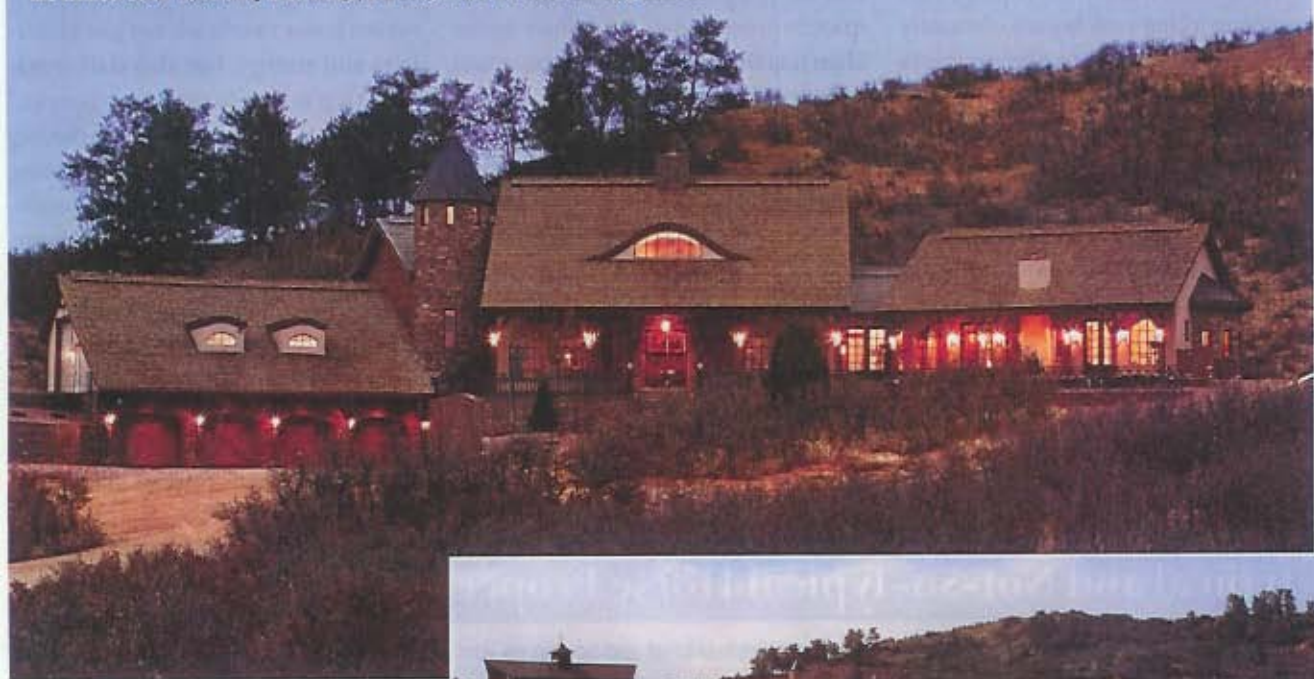
says. "I figured I'd work another 20 years and wanted to do something I'd thoroughly enjoy. I'd always wanted a ranch from the time I was a kid working on one; that had been my dream. So I teamed my real-estate background with my passion and started the ranch brokerage."

Ron's one of the founding partners in Ranch Marketing Associates, which has offices in Denver and Aspen, Col-

orado, and Beverly Hills, California. He and partners Billy Long and David Mossler help people buy and sell ranch properties of all sizes in many locations, most often large outfits in the western United States.

"A property might be 200,000 acres in Wyoming or a 5,000-cow New Mexico, Montana or Nebraska ranch. We balance those with smaller properties — a

Red Canyon Ranch features the best of the West, old and new. The main house is a custom, yet easy-living showplace with heli-pad, and the historic two-level horse barn has living quarters upstairs with eight stalls and turnouts below. As do many RMA listings, Red Canyon also has cattle-handling facilities.



purebred operation, small horse ranch or equestrian operation – and we also handle ‘sporting’ ranches, which characterize the hunting and fishing properties,” Ron explains. “It doesn’t matter if a property’s in Idaho or Texas; the Internet’s made the world a smaller place. It’s about finding the right kind of buyer and seller to make a match, and we’re effective at doing that.”

That’s possible because Ron and his partners are savvy about recognizing a property’s appeal for a particular buyer. No matter the size, amenities or type of horse-property listing, for example, Ron’s found that people purchasing such properties tend to fall into one of two categories. One is the professional trainer, and the other is an individual who rides for pleasure. “Although everybody has his or her own discipline or event, there are some similarities in what each wants most in a horse property,” Ron says, “and also some differences.”

Location, for instance, is important to either purchaser, but often for different reasons, which appreciably affect a property’s “curb appeal” for one par-



ticular buyer over another. Here, Ron compares and contrasts five horse-property priorities from these two rider-purchaser perspectives.

Ron also offers sellers suggestions for better presenting a horse outfit to potential buyers. Presentation is key to closing a sale and, in his opinion, five improvements positively contribute to a successful property showing, a potential purchaser’s perceptions and, ultimately, a sale. Again, he notes, the size or type of operation makes no difference because “these suggestions are valid for almost anyone.”

## The Trainer-Purchaser

**1. Location.** “A professional trainer’s location must be convenient to his client base for him to provide his services,” Ron says, although the actual location “depends on the trainer, what kind of

horses and the type riding that person does. Some trainers actually prefer to be less convenient so they can be more private and one-on-one with a horse, rather than having clients come by all the time.”

Location also means different things to trainers in different disciplines. “For instance, a trainer who’s really into English riding and jumping horses wants a location with the clientele to support that. In metro Denver, for example, that’s probably in the southeastern or Cherry Creek areas, or the Boulder area, where people are more accustomed to English riding. The old buzzword in real estate always has been location,” Ron stresses, “and that also applies to the horse application.”

**2. Size.** Is there enough room for the operation the trainer wants? Does the property have turnouts? Is there pas-

ture for grazing or enough room to keep cattle? Is there room for expansion?

"A western trainer for roping, cutting or working cow horses obviously needs adequate space to pasture steers or calves, so for him space is a big key," Ron explains. "A trainer just starting out might not need so much room, but when the business gets going, and the person has a following, the trainer often outgrows the location, and typically might have to move farther out (from town) for more space."

**3. Improvements.** Almost every trainer wants an indoor arena nowadays and "that can run from A to Z in terms of style, lighting, arena surface and how it's

laid out," according to Ron. A trainer with a breeding operation might want a stallion alley, separate breeding facility or space to provide mare care. Show horses often require heated barns, an important consideration for an exhibitor-trainer.

Plus, Ron adds, "The trainer needs housing and additional housing onsite for hired help, maybe a trailer or an apartment located near the indoor arena. Utilities come into play here, too — water connections, additional septic lines and leach fields, zoning and more. Basically the extent of any improvements either complements what a trainer has in mind for the operation, or is a detriment."

**4. Efficiency of improvements.**

"That's more or less how well the property improvements work," Ron explains. "Doing things with an eye to efficiency means lower overhead, not just in utilities and energy, but also staff costs. That's a good key to time management."

First is the water system, including underground, automatic, heated watering devices with shutoffs for proper maintenance. If the property has well water, Ron recommends a backup water supply, which might be another well with a generator, or a connection to a municipal water system, particularly important for larger horse operations.

As for the electricity or natural-gas choice, Ron leans toward natural gas

## Typical and Not-So-Typical Horse Properties



A two-story horse barn is among the Lazy H Ranch amenities.

quite to the scale of the Lazy E (Arena in Guthrie, Oklahoma), but it's unique.

"The properties have unique qualities and are in first-class condition. Some of these horse properties are very western in style, and some are more in the English fashion," Ron comments. But, no matter which, when Ron discusses horse-property amenities, it's obvious his heart's at the barn, in the arena, the adjoining pasture and on the back of a horse.

Real-estate professional and horseman Ron Morris describes the typical recreational rider's horse property in the Denver, Colorado, area as "usually 10 to 35 acres, depending on what type of riding that person enjoys. Probably nine out of 10 times, the horse owner lives on the property. However, only those folks really into showing maintain their horses in stalls.

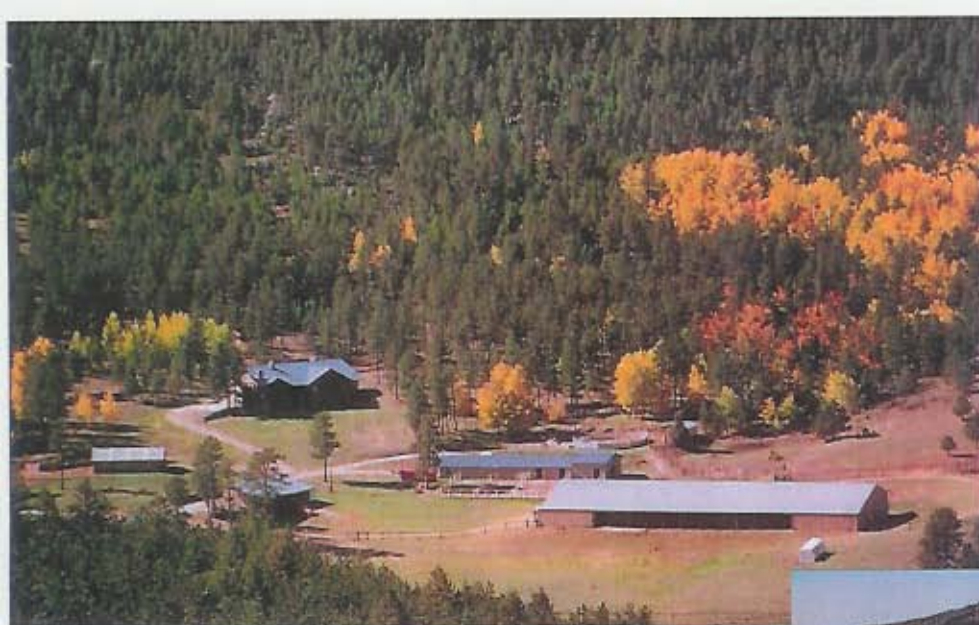
"Typically, people have a loafing shed or small barn with turnout, and in most cases," Ron continues, "the horses are turned out. Although many places have stalls, they're used only during really nasty weather or maybe to feed, groom or tack up a horse. For most people that's the ideal, and for the horses, as well, because they aren't cooped up in a stall."

As for not-so-typical horse outfits, Ron and his partners currently are handling one unique property, Red Canyon Ranch, which has a heli-pad attached to the house not far from the barn. Foothills Equestrian Estate, just west of Boulder, Colorado, borders national forest on two sides, with lots of country to ride, yet it's close to town.

Another property is a horseperson's dream. The Lazy H Ranch has a 245-by-160-foot heated indoor arena with piped-in George Strait or Chris LeDoux music. "That sets the tone and atmosphere," Ron says, much like the proverbial cookies in the oven during an open house. This property also has a viewing/judging room, complete with adjoining party room/auction area as part of the indoor arena. "You could have a roping and a shindig all in one facility," Ron says. "It isn't



There's a swimming pool at this home on Red Canyon Ranch, and a nearby heliport.



With its scenic vistas and grassy dells, Mountain Meadow Ranch is appropriately named. The ranch includes a two-level log home; barn with runs; indoor arena with sound system, two stalls, run-in shed and hay storage; hay and cow barns.



A seven-stall barn with steel pipe runs, tack and feed rooms, wash area, apartment, office and lab is central to Mountain Meadow's horse facilities. In addition, another hay barn and a log cow barn with steel-pipe corrals, squeeze chutes and scales are on the property.



"because most trainers want efficient facilities. That also means lower, dropped ceilings in heated horse barns, so they're not heating the rafters.

"Cost-effectiveness and efficiency also become key in the layout. Building efficiency means that staff doesn't run constantly to and from one building to another, or go long distances for manure management or to feed or turn out horses. Straight, open runs and alleyways wide enough for a small front-end loader, if that's used to muck stalls, are important. And there's the steel pipe-versus-wood maintenance issue. All those things are considerations when a trainer buys a place."

**5. Drainage, soil condition and manure management.** How well is the site laid out? Is the drainage adequate for area rainfall, or does water pool in unsightly low-lying areas? "Anybody who's waded mud at a horse barn during inclement weather knows that's a bad deal," Ron says. "Certainly no one wants to buy a lowland-area place that'll be a habitual problem, so the site, soil conditions and footing have a lot to do with how well a property shows, and a lot of problems with those are correctable.

Manure management always goes along with the site location. If multiple horses are on the place, there's a manure problem."

## The Recreational-Riding Purchaser

**1. Location.** "Location for a recreational rider is more a matter of personal preference," Ron says, "dictated by that person's priorities and the kind of riding he or she enjoys."

A trail rider, for example, might want property convenient to open space and riding trails, possibly bordering on public land available for riding. A similar location also might suit an endurance rider, who considers Bureau of Land Management or national forest property a next-door training facility. For the showman, a small horse facility with convenient highway access might work well. The show horse probably will be stalled primarily, and convenient highways mean improved mobility for road trips.

**2. Improvements.** The size and quality of horse-property improvements weigh heavily in individual purchasing decisions. However, which particular improvement packs the most selling

impact depends on a person's riding program and the number of horses.

Ron points out that the average recreational rider lives next to the horses, so both house and horse facilities play large roles in the property purchase. Most individuals with two to four horses want at least three to five acres or more, with the horse numbers ultimately dictating property size.

Turnout ability, the amount of onsite grazing and whether a place has steel pipe, portable panels or wooden fences typically are important to the individual buyer. "And the condition of everything counts, too," Ron cautions. "Buyers don't want a cribbed-on barn that's about to fall in. Typically this hands-on purchaser feeds the horses twice a day, and looks for amenities that make the daily routine and maintenance easier. The quality of improvements is a key factor when a purchaser selects a place."

**3. Water and utilities.** Although onsite utilities aren't as critical for the individual, perhaps, as for the professional, an adequate water supply and utility choices also deserve consideration by the recreational rider. As with the trainer, the pleasure rider must weigh pros and cons of electricity and

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## Ron Morris

CYNTHIA HUNTER



For co-founder Ron Morris, Ranch Marketing Associates provides the best of both worlds – the real-estate business and the horse industry.

years, Ron combined his real-estate acumen with his enthusiasm for ranching and is one of the founding partners in Ranch Marketing Associates.

He lives near Denver, where his wife and daughter compete on Paint Horses in both western and English events. And, yes, he's a roper, primarily for recreation. He's now roping on a Paint Horse that he bred and raised and competes in American Paint Horse Association events and local jackpots.

Ranch Marketing Associates, 970-535-0881, Denver, Colorado; 970-927-3850, Aspen, Colorado; or 310-275-2222 in Beverly Hills, California; [www.rmbrokers.com](http://www.rmbrokers.com).

A Colorado native, real-estate professional Ron Morris worked on his uncle's ranch from age 4 through high school. Although he and his father, an avid hunter and fisherman, shared outdoor experiences, Ron says, "As I got older, I evolved more into cowboying."

A graduate of the University of Northern Colorado, the cowboy became a "young, single and mobile" commercial and industrial real-estate pro traveling the country. But he continued to cowboy and always kept a few horses. Then, after almost 20

of the bottom country, will drain better and simply be easier to maintain."

## The Horse-Property Seller

**1. Put a shine on the improvements.** No matter if a horse property serves as a breeding operation, training facility or recreational rider's horse-home, replacing chewed wood, painting barns, removing manure and tearing down junk buildings gives the property more eye appeal.

"Making a place presentable is the most important thing the seller can do," Ron says, "and most of those repairs are within the average person's ability. The economic status doesn't matter; I've seen junked cars, manure piles and torn-up fences everywhere, but when they're eliminated, any place has a chance to shine."

**2. Improve drainage.** Fill-dirt and road-base should be added wherever necessary, especially on roads and parking areas, so a prospective buyer doesn't "bottom-out" his vehicle in a mud hole.

natural gas. "If an individual with show horses wants to heat the barn with electricity," Ron says, "that will certainly mean digging deep in the pockets."

**4. Feed accessibility.** For the individual horse owner, easy accessibility to feed sources is a major consideration in selecting a horse property. "If an individual can purchase both hay and grain at a local feed store, that convenience plays a big role," Ron says, "because the individual owner doesn't buy in bulk. A trainer often buys a semi-load, but the individual buys a pickup-load because of limited storage facilities. Most individuals prefer to buy locally. Although that might cost a little more, it's convenient and easier."

**5. Drainage, soil condition and manure management.** As with the professional, the individual horse owner also must deal with drainage, soil and manure, "just on a smaller scale," Ron comments. "Even with only two or four horses, there's still manure, and nobody wants horses standing in 12 inches of muck. A site on a bit of hillside, instead

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"A potential buyer shouldn't have to walk through mud to the barns either," Ron adds. "Anyone can easily put gravel or road-base in those areas."

"As for horse runs, I like 'Squeege,' a small, tiny rock, about the size of a pencil eraser. A horse won't ingest Squeege as he will sand. Squeege's a good, presentable surface that drains well, and it's good horse footing; one can turn and run without slipping and sliding. Although road-base is good on walkways, it's too hard for runs, and can damage a horse's feet, just as standing on concrete can. Any gravel company carries Squeege. It must be replenished every few years, so it's not the end-all," Ron admits, "but it's a good material."

**3. Improve fencing.** Ron recommends replacing wooden fencing with steel or hot-wire, cost-effective alternatives. Well-maintained, eye-catching wooden fences are best for turnouts with plenty of grass, so a horse seldom chews the wood. "But a corral situation is different," Ron notes. "Because the horse is bored, he chews or cribs. More people prefer fixed steel panels or portables for corrals. As far as corral panels go, they're not totally ideal when several horses are close and crowded."

**4. Convert to automatic waterers.** "Nobody likes dragging hoses," Ron grins. "Automatic waterers improve a place and make it a bit more appealing and attractive to a horseperson."

**5. Maintain grass on the property.** "Don't let the place get grubbed down to dirt," Ron cautions. "That's key here in the drier Rocky Mountain country, where horses turned out on grass daily should be put up at night. When horses are out all the time, the owner will have nothing but a dirt patch. That's a prohibitive factor in the property's curb appeal."

## The Common-Sense Factor

Which sells the horseperson on a great horse property, the house or the barn? Again, that depends on the person, Ron says. "In most respects, the barn sells the

true hard-and-fast horseperson more so than the house. But that can be a coin toss. If he's a committed roper and she's a recreational rider, obviously he focuses on the facilities, and her attention's probably on the house.

"However, it's usually the woman who's more in tune with a horse operation," Ron continues. "When that's the case, she focuses on improvements and

the amenities that make maintenance easier, just about as much as the house. The guy always says whatever works for her is fine; it's her barn.

"The overriding factor in finding and deciding what to do with a horse property is that common-sense factor. That's no different from working or handling a horse. Just apply common sense," Ron advises, "and you'll be fine." 🐾

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