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ISSN 1684-4084



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WITH THE CHANGE OF SEASON

"The Client had wanted a 'traditional' barn for his house - in addition to space to house his precious Harley Davidson 'horse'. This design was something of surprise to him - but we have been friends for a long time, and so not a bad surprise. The real surprise came when we told him that upon submitting the project as 'unbuilt' to an architectural competition, we have received an award, so he must now finish the project!" recalls Zoltan Pali of Studio Pali Fekete Architects (SPFA), the architect behind this multi-award winning barn structure that takes a more poetic approach to storing hay and provides shelter for an equestrian programme.

Steve Sharpe, a dry wall contractor who had worked with SPFA for a number of years as a subcontractor, and now a friend, approached the same architects to design his new house and barn.

The prime 40-acre site was located in a gated equestrian community of large estates in Somis, California (Ventura City), a secluded location that is an hour's drive from any major city and recognised for its private ranches and estates in a semi-coastal region blessed with a warm and sunny climate for most of the year.

Steve's initial design programme included a 10,000-sq. ft. (930-sq. metre) home and a barn to accommodate that could comfortably house his four horses, tractors, tack room, and other farm equipment needed to maintain the 40-acre (162,000-sq. metre) lemon grove covering the entire site. The barn was completed before the home.

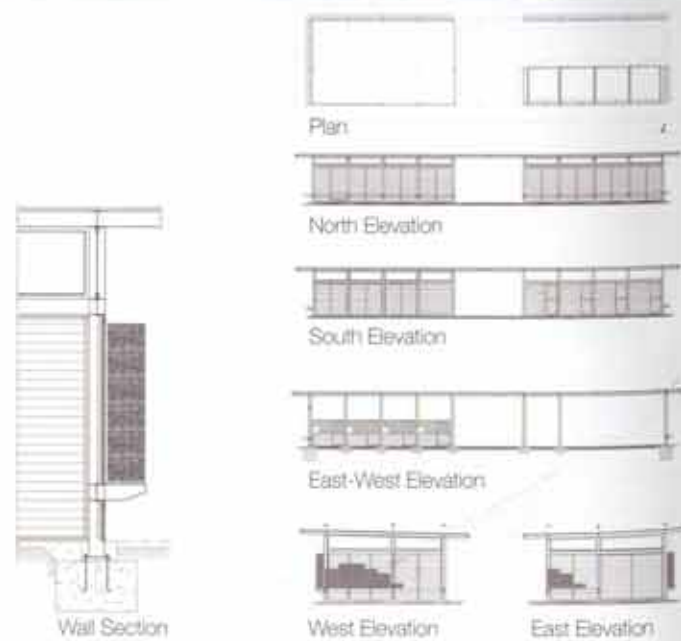
Excited by the opportunity to rethink the standard hay barn typology, the architects began exploring a more poetic and architecturally »

efficient solution to a historical puzzle. And what began as trying to solve a storage problem for the hay ultimately became the exterior expression of the project. "It just happened to collide, perhaps subconsciously, with my attraction to Asian philosophy of Wabi-Sabi, which has to do with providing a framework for observing the fleeting beauty in nature," cites the architect.

The design is simple and ingenious in addressing the programme. Positioned on the 400-acre (162,000-sq. metre) flat site to take advantage of the natural breezes and wind patterns, the building's orientation allows for maximum natural ventilation. The structure is based on a standard 12 ft by 12 ft (3.65 metres by 3.65 metres) requirement for equestrian stalls while the design reverences the changing of the seasons and their importance to the agricultural world by cladding the barn with the hay that will change in colour and shape over time: when the hay is stacked along the external storage shelves in the winter, it is green; as the season unfolds, the hay turns yellow, and the caretaker removes it from the shelves and it is then used for feed. This perpetual cycle keeps the façade in a constant state of evolution; a metaphor for life, death and birth, common seasonal themes in agrarian society.

Energy conservation was not really a driving force to the project as most barns are by nature environmentally friendly. This one is perhaps more energy conscious and sustainable as it uses the horse feed as insulation. Moreover, how many barns actually provide insulation in the first place? When discussing electrical lighting, the architect is quick to point out that this is kept to minimal requirements and only turned on at night when the client is working on his precious Harley! »





The project surpassed the expectations of the architects. "It was not until the actual process of stacking the hay on the building that it hit me: the smell, the imperfection and the roughness of the material! The sense of the passage of time and the passage of even my own life had tears welling in my eyes as I looked on it for the first time. The beauty of the imperfection and the impermanence is at the centre of Wabi Sabi, the centuries-old Japanese philosophy that is less a system of formal rules and more consciousness and a way of seeing the surrounding world. To cherish and understand, even in a small way, what Wabi Sabi is, and then to express it through my work is extremely important to me," opines Pali.

"Steve [client] loves the barn and is very proud of it. But I'm not sure he has the same emotional response that I do. It is more of a fun oddity to show people, something he finds humorous in a sense. But he is proud to have won an award for it. I'm not sure he sees the poetry in it that I do. But that's really fine," he concludes. **Text: Rashid Taqui & Zoltan Pali, SPF:a, images: John Edward Linden. Edited Architecture+**

