

A Leg-Up in Style

World Equestrian Center – Ocala is nothing short of a passion project for all involved, including Roberts Design head designer, Ric Owens.

Ric has worked side-by-side with the Roberts family throughout the planning and design process of the state-of-the-art equestrian venue and he gives us an inside view on what it took to create the unique facility.

by
Emily Papa

PHOTOS BY MAVEN PHOTO + FILM



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efore starting Roberts Design, Ric Owens owned and operated Owens Planning + Design in Miami, Florida for 25 years with a focus on high-end homes across Florida including builder's developments and the most prestigious condominiums in South Florida. Ric met Mrs. Mary Roberts in 1999 and was hired to design her personal home, as well as Golden Ocala Golf & Equestrian Club, the current Spa, and most of the models and homes during those initial early years. Ric's connection with the Ocala area flourished as he began designing high-end interiors for some of Ocala's most prominent horse owners.

Ric had minimal experience in the horse industry as a child; he jokes while reminiscing, "I grew up in Virginia around horse people, and my first job as a kid was cleaning stalls and cutting grass at a farm. I think I was 12 years old. I remember getting kicked and bit by horses and saying that I would never do anything with horses because of the smell and the shavings. It's ironic, considering how important the horse industry has become in my life."

Through the years, Ric became increasingly immersed in the horse industry. He recalls his experience at the All American Quarter Horse Congress saying, "I was showing Mrs. Roberts fabric swatches while she was getting ready to show. I was always running around the horse world. I've learned a lot, including how passionate people are about their profession and their (equestrian) disciplines."

Mrs. Roberts was a client of Ric's for 18 years prior to contacting him regarding the World Equestrian Center project. She invited him to join her team and establish a design company in Ocala to fashion the new venue and Hotel. Ric agreed, and Roberts Design was born.





A New Arena

Ric has been hands-on throughout the entire construction and design process at World Equestrian Center – Ocala. Ric consulted various organizations across a wide variety of disciplines to establish that the requirements of each was met. “As a designer, we have to take on different opinions,” Ric explains. “This experience has given me an education on different aspects of the horse world. I know the industry better now from the inside out.”

Each aspect of World Equestrian Center – Ocala holds its own unique elements but, without hesitation, Ric pinpoints the chapel as his most beloved portion of the project, “On a spiritual level, the chapel is my favorite thing I have designed at WEC – Ocala.” Ric and Mrs. Roberts both selected the sheets of glass to use in the stain glass, and had the pews custom made for the space from Vietnam.

The chapel church was designed around the one hundred year old antique bell, and is surrounded by lush gardens that provide an unexpected spiritual experience. “It is beautiful on multiple levels – it holds a quiet calm and offers an



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escape from the hustle and bustle of the event venue,” says Ric. “It has a non-denominational feel and provides a place where everyone can be at peace and share what they believe. I think the chapel is a really special and unique spot.”

Additionally, Ric is enthusiastic about the interiors of the Equestrian Hotel, as well as the many restaurants, bars and specialty shops on the property, “The hotel is inspired by neoclassical French architecture. The goal is to make it look established – it’s not a style that’s here today and gone tomorrow. The Yellow Pony bar inside of the hotel has the feel of a true English pub, which is very fun. I’ve custom-designed all the furnishing, bar and the custom stain glass panels for the Yellow Pony. All the furniture in the rooms and throughout the hotel has been custom designed by our new line, the Estate Collection by Ric Owens, and the Roberts design team, all transitional to traditional design.”

Ric’s signature ambiance at World Equestrian Center – Ocala is a partnership of his and Mrs. Roberts’ personal styles. “It can be a masculine haberdashery classic style, but done with a bit of a modern interpretation,” says Ric. “The animals are important. You know a job is done by Mrs. Roberts and me if you see the dog portraits. We are both animal lovers and enjoy including the dog artwork in the spaces that we design.”

Ric & Prince Harry

For the past six years, Ric and Mrs. Roberts have shopped at the New York Design Center. Each year, they see a Labradoodle named Hudson lying in the hallway. In 2018, Ric and Mrs. Roberts took a typical shopping trip to New York and, being an animal lover, Mrs. Roberts could not help but stop to rub Hudson’s belly on her way down the hall. She concluded that Hudson was the perfect-type dog for Ric, who did not have a dog at the time. At that moment, she picked up the phone and called Hudson’s breeder in Maine who had two six-week-old puppies. Ric was caught off guard in the moment but realized the next day that he did, in fact, fancy a dog. Mrs. Roberts could not bear the thought of the two puppies being separated, so she declared that the other puppy would join her family in Florida with his brother. The puppies were flown down from Maine and met Ric and Mrs. Roberts in New York City. Together, they decided that the tradition of “H” names needed to be honored, so Mrs. Roberts named her puppy King Henry, and Ric named his puppy Prince Harry.

“I probably wouldn’t have survived the move to Ocala without having a dog,” says Ric. “Dogs change lives. He has helped me love this journey.” Harry is now two and a half years old and goes to work with Ric as often as possible. He also visits his brother Henry every day. “He lives a pretty good life,” Ric says.





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Living the Dream

Ric treasures the experience he has gained through working with Mary Roberts 20 years and designing for and World Equestrian Center – Ocala. From propositioning companies in Paris to fabricating his own branded furniture line, Ric has explored avenues far beyond his initial expectations. However, Ric's fondest memories throughout his experience on the World Equestrian Center – Ocala project include the Roberts family. "Everything I have experienced during this project is nothing short of a designer's dream, and it has all happened because of the trust and the belief that Mary Roberts and the Roberts family had in me," says Ric. "I always know Mrs. Roberts will be working harder than everybody, and that motivates me to work even harder. I am blessed that I have had the opportunity to work with the people that I work with. I have my drapery person here that I've worked with for 15 years on multiple homes and hotels, my tile guys from North Carolina that I've known for six years and all the best artist and artisans around the country are here working in the hotel. We know and trust everyone working on this project, they are all here to produce the vision which Mrs. Roberts and I share, which makes it particularly special. It is a family of people who all want to be a part of the bigger picture. Mrs. Roberts has trusted me throughout the entire process and, when someone believes in you, that's the ultimate part of any career." ©



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