

# Mike Marsh

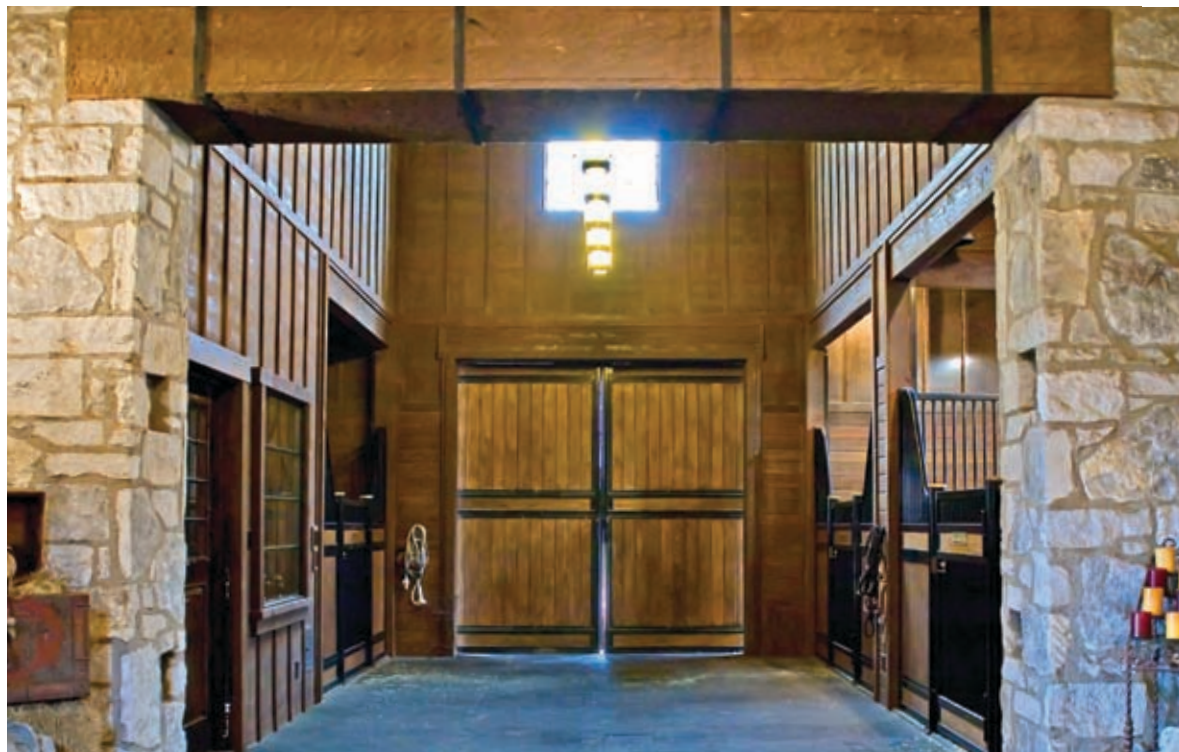
*Cordillera Resident and Clubhouse Mastermind*

by Ben Schooley

As everyone knows, Cordillera Ranch sports some of the finest facilities in the country. From the equestrian center to the new clubhouse (opening this fall), the ranch has amenities that are without rival. As with everything that Cordillera Ranch undertakes, the clubhouse facilities were carefully considered. Interviewing architects from across the country, the decision was eventually made to have Mike Marsh of MAI Architects design the clubhouse. However, as you'll see, Marsh's association with the Ranch did not end with the construction of the clubhouse.

Marsh, a Pennsylvania native, has now lived in something like 20 states throughout the course of his life and career. However, it wasn't always by choice while growing up. "My dad is a metallurgic engineer. He designed the processes for creating some very high end metals...the stuff used to make fortunes on golf clubs. He was working with some guy in 1972 to

make a titanium golf club, but they gave up on it. But for his career, he would build these specialty plants to build these metals, and once it was up and running, we'd move on for the next one. Once we got to Washington state, he stayed put long enough for me to almost get through high school. Almost." While in high school, Marsh dated Paula, his "first serious girlfriend." As he recalls, "My parents moved me away our senior year in high school. The world almost ended. We were apart for almost 10 years. 9 years out of school, I was living in Colorado, and Paula called me. I dropped the phone. We corresponded for 4 or 5 months, and one day she called and said I'm coming through Denver, and she told me where she was going to be. She told me to come see her, or not, but if not, to not ever write or call her again because she couldn't deal with this anymore. She was on her way to Los Angeles for her job. I saw her, flew off for work that weekend, got a job in LA, sold my house, car, and moved to LA to be with her. I dumped everything and



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moved out there and never looked back. We're celebrating 21 years together."

With Paula firmly at his side, Marsh got to the business of focusing on his career. Upon graduating from college with his degree in Architecture, a field he had a lifelong dream to work in, Marsh set about finally making some decisions about his location on his own. "I got my degree from Iowa State. I graduated, and on the last day of my last class, I packed my car and have never been back to Iowa. That's when I moved to Colorado. I just wanted to live somewhere that I chose, so I chose Colorado. Got a job in about a week, lived there for 4 years until Paula called. Then, when she showed up, I moved to LA for a really big, huge firm. We lived there for 5 years, and bought 3 spec lots in Bel Air. I designed a home on those 3 lots, and I think we

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made \$400,000. I figured we were rich and we retired back to Washington State. We fished, and enjoyed it from our place in Sequim, Washington."

However, being 35 years old at the time, Marsh had a lot of work left to be done, and Paula was there to encourage him. "We had a home and some horses, and it was just beautiful. But Paula walked in and said, 'You need to go get a real job'. So I looked all over the country, really looked for a great place to live, and my folks had settled in Denver, so I interviewed with a firm that did clubhouses there in Colorado. I figured, 'Hey, this is a great niche'. So we moved back to Denver in 1992."

However, it wasn't all that easy to make the move. Paula remembers, "The real estate market was tough. When Mike went back to Denver, I stayed behind to sell the house. It took almost 2 years to sell the place." Mike jumps in, "I remember having to think through a cup of coffee – do I buy this cup of coffee? It was so hard. A big night for me was Totinos pizza and 6 pack. Living in LA you saw all this money, and very few happy people. We learned very early on that our happiness is not dependent on money. It just brings new pressures." Eventually settling into their Colorado home, Marsh again began to build his career and face some important decisions. "When we were in Denver with that firm, that's what they did – clubhouses. They weren't the greatest company to work for, but I was able to work on some amazing projects, and I had considered over and over again starting my own company. Finally one day I just quit. I was working with a client that had encouraged me to branch out on my own, so I went to Scottsdale, told the client I had quit and started my own company, and the guy dialed a number, put me on the phone with a developer in Florida, and I was working for him the next week. That's how MAI was born. I'm a very careful person with decisions, but the big decisions just seem to be very spur of the moment with me!" Marsh laughs.

From this, Marsh has focused almost exclusively on high-end clubhouses ever since. Winning awards year after year, Marsh built a reputation and a client list that is unparalleled. As often happens in the architecture industry, word of mouth eventually brought the name of MAI to the ears of David Hill of DH Investments, the developer of Cordillera Ranch. For David, it was an easy decision. "As we started researching clubhouse architects around the country we kept coming across clubhouses that we really liked and Mike's name seemed to always be associated with our favorites. We researched he and his company and quickly became convinced that he was the right guy to design the centerpiece of the community. His creativity and understanding of how a clubhouse functions are unmatched and as we now see, this clubhouse will be something very special. Unlike so many architects, Mike valued our input and opinions and didn't think his way was the only way to design something. We are lucky to have MAI's professional team on our side and to have Mike and Paula as residents of the community."

The feeling was mutual for Mike, as he quickly brought Paula down to survey the development. "I've taken Paula to developments all over the world that I'm working with, but none of them really clicked with her. When I returned from my trip to Cordillera, I told her 'I think I've just seen the most beautiful place on earth.' So I took her down here, spent the weekend, met Chris, and we were able to really pick and choose our lot and size, and we have never looked back. That was in July when we looked, and we moved here in October." Paula agrees, "The park on the river was the initial thing that really caught my eye. Chris drove me

down to the park, and I was just in awe. I knew that we really needed to look at this. I told him one time 'You know, this is the first time I've ever felt at home.' I feel more at home here than anywhere we've ever lived. The people are so genuine and welcoming. Where else can you be saddling up, riding your horse through the community, go down to that beautiful park... it's just heaven."

Being a Cordillera Ranch resident, and being responsible for the clubhouse has brought its challenges, however. "I lived here for 2 years and we didn't play golf or socialize, because I knew I would be asked everyday about designing the club. We designed the entire complex. They're (DH Investments) very smart. We phased the construction to really fit in with the need. I have a lot of clients that don't listen to me...they don't listen to me, and then build a 50,000 square foot clubhouse, and then run a 3 million

deficit. But David and Chris (Hill) have been very smart...they've followed what I've said, and the whole project has come together great. It is tough, too, because we actually live here. We're designing things that we'll be utilizing as well. On Friday afternoons I like to just leave early and go walk the clubhouse. I've got several clubs I've designed that I've never even seen complete. But here, I have a very intimate relationship with it." As for the process of the construction and planning, it also had some unique aspects that have made the relationship a strong one. "One thing about Cordillera, it's been the first club I've ever done that was planned without it having a full membership. The problem with a lot of clubs is that they build the course, get 20 or 30 members, and then they build huge clubhouses. Cordillera did it in phases, which is what has made it so successful. I've been to hundreds of clubs, but the people here are genuinely happy. You go to a lot of clubs, and people just don't seem happy, but here, it makes my job easier because I could put up a less than perfect club, and people would still enjoy it. Obviously, we will build an amazing facility, and it will be a jewel. The location is ideal, and that's pretty rare too."

Utilizing a unique relationship with Cordillera Ranch, the Marshs feel they have really found "home". After an adolescence and a career that has taken them from Iowa to Washington to Colorado, and all points in between, the Marshs name Cordillera Ranch as their favorite. Mike says, "We'll never leave. We'll retire here, without a doubt. We're working to get the house built. We initially bought these 50 acres, and then bought a lot over looking



Swede Creek...but we decided to just build closer to the horses. Paula agrees, too, that the people are just so warm, welcoming, and genuine...it's just everything we could have ever looked for in a place to call home."

Paula's equine company has also found a great location at Cordillera Ranch. Wyning Edge Friesians breeds some of the world's finest Friesian horses for sale all over the world, all from their beautiful custom barn on Sendero Ridge. A lifelong passion of hers, the Friesians are just as happy as she is at Cordillera Ranch.

As for MAI Architects, they're as busy as ever. Mike proudly says, "MAI is one of the top 3 clubhouses designers in the world. It's the quality we produce, the dedication that we all are focused on, and the details that we understand. It's the intricacies that we can see, and help the client find that make them perfect. We have been awarded the Best Clubhouse Designer 3 years in a row in 3 different publications, and in 2007, we won all three."

With Paula's horses galloping in the arena, and with Mike planning yet another project, the Marsh's elusive search for their ideal location appears to have come to an end. With no signs of slowing down, there are many directions their lives will surely take them, but Cordillera Ranch will surely be part of those plans. Mike laughs, "I gave a little speech at the big kickoff party here at Cordillera for the clubhouse, and I casually said that I was thinking about buying a lot here. People laughed, but I was sort of serious. I guess I lied, though – I didn't buy a lot, I bought 6." ❀