



BEHIND THE LENS

SHARON MEYERS INTERVIEWED FOUR EQUINE
PHOTOGRAPHERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

A silhouette by Suzanne Sturgill.



Anwer Sher's image of Palestra and Estishama.

Please tell our readers your name and where you are based.

Anwer Sher: I am based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE). I am from Pakistan and settled in the UAE.

Suzanne Sturgill of Equine Photography by Suzanne, Inc. Based out of Bradenton, Florida, USA.

Gregor Aymar: I am based in the centre of Germany, about 150km northwest of Frankfurt. I have run the company Eyecatcher Advertising, one of Europe's most frequented sources for promotional needs for the Arabian horse industry, since 2001.

Gabriele Boiselle of Edition Boiselle based in Speyer, Germany. We print about 26 different horse calendars, distributing them around the world.

At what age did you become interested in photography and what sparked this passion?

Anwer: I used to take pictures as opposed to photographs but only in 2003 my interest in photography took off, so in a sense I really learned to take photos about six years back.

Suzanne: I was 11 when my father bought a 35mm camera with a zoom lens for himself. I borrowed it one day to photograph my Morgan colt and he never got it back. That was it, I was hooked. I photographed the neighbouring horses, people and everything else that struck my fancy. I started my photography business with that same camera 13 years later.

Gregor: I only started around four years ago with the photography of Arabian horses. Being involved in print advertising for farms and breeders in Europe and the Middle East I was many times in need of recent photos, so I decided to give it a try myself.

Gabriele: My father was a brilliant photographer and I inherited his talent. My first image was of my cat that I took

when six years old and then photography was a part of my life. It was never supposed to become a business but was always to be a pleasure and this is still the case today.

Are you self-taught or formally educated in photography?

Anwer: I am pretty much self-taught on the use of the camera, but Scott Trees and my wife Eileen Verdieck taught me a great deal about photographing horses.

Suzanne: I am self-taught basically in photography and graphic design. I had two photography classes in high school. I usually only need someone to show me a few basics to get started and then I figure the rest out on my own. My other interests in photography include portrait and macro photography.

Gregor: I am 100% self-taught and far away from being perfect.

Gabriele: I studied the science of communication to become a journalist, working in TV and broadcasting, with magazines and newspapers. Photography was always my second love. I was interested in portraits and people and I travelled the world to very remote areas to capture the soul of the tribes and natives. I had several exhibitions and publications.

What inspired you to photograph horses?

Anwer: I used to go to Arabian horse shows in the days my wife Eileen Verdieck was in the show business as a top trainer, and I took an interest in photographing these beautiful horses. My first lot of photos were a disaster and Eileen and another trainer, Frank Buetto from Italy, sat me down and talked to me about what constitutes a good horse photo. It sort of started me on the path of seeking to take photos that bring out the personality of the horse.



Horses frolicking in the sea by Gabriele Boiselle.

Suzanne: I have had a lifelong love affair with horses since my first pony at five years old. Horses have always been part of my life. I grew up showing and training my own horses, but my biggest love and inspiration was a Morgan colt I raised. He was a part of my life and family for 29 years. Arabian horse photography, more so than any other horse breed, fulfills the artist in me with their beautiful graceful lines, elegant carriage and their vanity. The Arabian horse owners appreciate beauty and art, therefore offering opportunity to express myself artistically through my photographs and make a living at the same time. I started shooting professionally all breeds of horses 20 years ago, travelling for farm shoots and horse shows. Eventually I was able to specialise in private shoots for Arabians and Andalusians and the marketing needs for these farms.

Gabriele: When I was in Egypt, just coming from the Sudan where I was taking pictures of starving children, a friend

took me to the National State Stud Al Zahraa in Cairo just to forget the terrible images I had in my mind. And it worked. I photographed Echnaton and Ibn Ahktal and was so inspired and healed from that moment, I returned several times and shot my first images of Arabian horses. There I met a breeder from Jordan, he invited me to photograph his horses and one of his neighbour's horses, who turned out to be Princess Alia of Jordan. The outcome of my first photographic trip was a calendar published in 1984, which was presented by *Arabian Horse World* (AHW) magazine and turned my world around. I received immediately calls to photograph horses and I did. AHW sent me to Russia and Poland on consignment and published many of my images and articles.

What other equine photographers do you admire?

Anwer: Scott Trees is one of the best photographers out there. He has a gift to see light and the subject of the horse



Gregor Aymar's beach photo of SA Misha Apal.

in the right balance. He is innovative in his shoots and takes time to plan them and do a first-rate job. I also like a budding photographer, Sonja Rasche, her work while different from the point of view of say, the conformation of a horse, is still very dramatic and captures the spirit of the horse. She has her unique style, which is interesting to see.

Suzanne: I grew up admiring and studying the photography of Johnny Johnston, Polly Knoll and Jerry Sparagowski. I also admire the works of Stuart Vesty, Scott Trees and Gigi Grasso. I think we all have a different unique style and all have contributed to Arabian horse photography, being the most beautiful and admired photography in the horse industry.

Gregor: Gigi Grasso and Stuart Vesty, nobody else understands how to put more atmosphere into a photo than them.

Gabriele: I guess I did know most of the best photographers in the world some 15 years ago. We met and had a good time at shows or privately. Times have changed and competition and pressure from clients has become so hard that photographers are not friendly any more with each other. But I always had a liking for Scott Trees' images, and I am glad to hear he had

a special exhibition at the Kentucky Horse Park recently. He has never lost his heart in the business and is still creative and having fun. That is very important. Most colleagues go professional and they have a certain style and hang on to it, they become perfect technically but boring. The images I remember from childhood were from Robert Vavra, his white Andalusian stallion in the poppy fields. He infected millions of hearts with those images.

Describe the type of Arabian horse photography you do.

Answer: I used to do shows but found it very boring after a while. I like to set up some shoots that are different and capture the essence of the horse.

Suzanne: My work mainly consists of private shoots for the marketing needs of Arabian breeding farms and show horses with a twist of artistic flair as I try to mix the two. My clients rely on me to achieve a beautiful artistic photo of their horse while maintaining correct conformation that best portrays their horse for successful marketing.

Gregor: I only do farm shoots. I can't get inspired at all to

photograph at horse shows. During shoots at studs I always try to use the surroundings as artistically as possible.

Gabriele: I do it all. I have had horses in the studio and in the desert, in water, at shows, ridden in sport and trekking in Kenya. What I am looking for is not only to portray a horse – my wish is to show the universe of the horse to people. I love Arabians, but all the horses of the world are loved and documented by me. I am fascinated by the way horses interact with people all around the world.

What area of horse photography are you most passionate about?

Answer: I think if you love horses you see them in every facet and place and do not really try and be too picky. I do not do the shows much because the setting is too contrived, so other than that seeing the horse at its best is all that matters.

Suzanne: I love shooting the stallions. They are what I get most excited about and are my favourite subjects. They can be famous already or I can start from scratch and make them famous. Come to think of it, that probably is my favorite thing to do, starting a fresh new face as a yearling or two-year-old and watching him grow through my photographs and marketing until he

does become one of the big boys. That is very rewarding.

Gregor: It's a challenge to shoot famous horses, most of them have something really special about them and there is nothing more exciting than to capture it with the lens.

Gabriele: I am passionate about the horse itself and a big challenge is the horse performing in the circus or with artificial light. My dream images, the most artistic and "touchy" were the ones of Cavallia, a horse theatre that performed in America and Europe with Frederic and Magali Pignon interacting with their horses – just pure magic.

Can you tell us about a memorable moment while photographing?

Answer: While shooting photos in the desert of two Arabian mares together at liberty, my wife released the mares and they did what was expected of them. Then on the second run both Palestra and Estishama decided they wanted a trot into the desert and they just kept going. About two kilometres later they looked back and realised we were not following them frantically. My wife had said wait, they will come back and they wheeled around and trotted back. It was lovely to see that, especially as Estishama loved to be in the desert and yet she loves people.

Suzanne: Memorable! Well, maybe it's memorable because I had no memory for three days after a horse ploughed into me, sending me 15 feet through the air, landing on my face and I was sent to the hospital with severe concussion, bruised ribs, a broken tooth and my camera broken in two. A freaky incident, most horses will not run into you if they have a way around you, which he did. I learned later the horse was avoiding a dog that thought he should be helping us catch the loose horse. The horse jumped over the dog and probably never saw me before he hit me.

Gregor: When I went to photograph WH Justice, a horse that had made his name around the world, I was nervous and excited at the same time. I was lucky enough to get some great results. Probably this photo shoot was one of the most important ones to get noticed by people in the Arabian horse industry.

Gabriele: I never will forget my first shooting in Al Zahraa when Echnaton was dancing in the dust, illuminated by sunshine, he was supernatural, a creature of light and energy and inspiration.

What do you regard as your greatest photographic achievement?

Answer: Still to be done. Wondering when.

Suzanne: I have to say QR Marc was



An Arabian horse in the desert by Anwer Sher.

Gregor Aymar's image of Eternity Ibn Navarrone-D.



my greatest achievement. Creating an international phenomenon around the world with my images and graphic design, with a little help from Marc I have to admit. He couldn't help that he was exceptionally beautiful and photogenic. I was his exclusive photographer and marketing designer from nine months old until he sold, a year and a half to two years later for an industry record-breaking price – when he wasn't even being offered for sale and they sold an unbelievable amount of breedings to a two-year-old colt. The whole Marc experience was incredible. Despite the camera loving Marc, he probably was my biggest challenge to photograph because we always had to top the photographs we got from the last shoot, and then top it again, and again. We had started a ball rolling at an amazing speed and it couldn't slow down for mediocrity.

Gregor: The stallions Eternity Ibn Navarrone-D, Ajman Moniscione and WH Justice.

Gabriele: Every shoot is a challenge and I am still nervous before shooting. The challenge is to show the beauty of the horse in the utmost best way, not his conformation and body, but his soul and divine spirit. I do not care if the horse in front of my camera is a multi-million dollar champion or a 20-year-old kid's pony. They are all beautiful and loved by their owners and considered the most beautiful horse in the world. This is my goal, to capture that in my images.

Describe what you consider are the most important factors for capturing a great horse photo.

Anwer: I think it's about getting the conformation as right as possible, like the ears up, nostrils flared, body

position balanced and all that, but more importantly it's to tell a pictorial narrative of the essence of that particular horse. If one can do that with say 10% of one's best selected photos, I think a horse photographer is doing well. I see tons of horse photography books out in the market and some of these guys are commercial advertising photographers who got a commission to do a book. And yes, their technique is good and they get perhaps 20 great photos of horses out of 200 and suddenly they are touted as the world's best "this" and "that". Why Scott Trees, Gigi Grasso and others stand out is they have over decades done just that, great horse photos consistently. There is no magic recipe for what makes a great photo – it's all in the eye.

Suzanne: I am a stickler for capturing correct conformation and type that best represents that horse along with beautiful light and composition. It has to portray the horse at his most attractive angle. If the light and composition and background of a photo are phenomenal but the horse isn't portrayed at his best, the photo is tossed. I am sure this is due to the fact that 95% of my business is for marketing purposes.

Gregor: Knowing how a good horse should look and knowing what people want to see, the combination of this and the feeling for prettiness is one important part. No less important are the people you work with during the shoot, the grooms and trainers. The results can only be great if the whole team works in the same direction.

Gabriele: You have to know your camera and the technical background to be able to act. Then you should throw your creativity in the shoot and

a lot of energy and last but not least, your heart.

Which Arabian horse has left an indelible impression on you?

Anwer: I have been lucky to photograph some amazing horses, and I would say Escape Ibn Navarrone-D and Bess Fa'izah would tie for that position. Escape is just such a stunning stallion as he has presence, attitude and that flair that makes him a world champion. Bess Fa'izah is such a darling, very pretty an incredibly sweet horse always in the limelight even when she is just standing there or grazing.

Suzanne: Of course QR Marc as described above, but I also loved Consensus – a sexy grey stallion with a real heart of gold. He just got off a van crossing the United States from the cool dry California coast to very hot, humid August weather in Florida and had to do a photo shoot the next morning with a strange handler, then again in the afternoon and again the next morning. Consensus gave us his all every time. He was a great stallion who could turn on for the camera and then turn off when we finished to the sweetest stallion, begging you to scratch his butt. Then there was a basically unknown grey stallion named Third World in a separate barn from the show horses where I was shooting. While waiting for my next horse to shoot, someone walked the grey stallion from his barn to his turnout. He was dirty with tangled mane and tail. He was so commanding of your attention as he walked out and then commanded the attention of the other horses with his presence. I have never seen such a horse command your attention as he did with his sexy, bold and arrogant confidence, and undisputed stallion instincts. He owned the place. I told the trainer we have to photograph him! The stallion didn't let me down and one of those photos graced the cover of the USA Arabian Horse Association magazine. Speaking of undisputed stallion instincts, Soho Carol taught me a lot about photographing stallions years ago. He was another whose life revolved around real horse instincts. Our horses these days tend to lose some of that in our domestication of them. Third World and Soho never lost a bit of it, which made photographing them way too much fun for me, not so much fun for the handlers.

Gregor: WH Justice gives me goosebumps every time I see him. There are not many of his kind that has as much expression and charisma.

Gabriele: Some horse personalities are unforgettable including El Shaklan from Om El Arab.

What advice would you give budding horse photographers?

Anwer: I am learning each day, so I would say look at horses as much as you can and see in your mind's eye what makes them stand out. See the works of Scott Trees, Gigi Grasso, Irina Filsinger and others and try and see the essence they brought out.

Suzanne: Study and know your subject. These days cameras are pretty darn smart, but they don't know the correct timing and angles to shoot horses. Nor do they have the instinct to anticipate a horse's reaction to capture the precise moment. Knowing your subject inside and out gives you the edge to help those new smart cameras out.

Gregor: Try and learn from your experiences. Good taste and talent is something you cannot learn.

Gabriele: None, everybody has their own way and if you love to do it, do it. If you suffer, forget about it!

Websites to visit:

Anwer Sher: www.aqsher.com and www.hoofbeatz.com

Suzanne Sturgill: www.SuzanneSphoto.com

Gregor Aymar: www.eyecatcher-advertising.com

Gabriele Boiselle: www.editionboiselle.com ☼



Suzanne Sturgill's sepia image of a mare and foal.

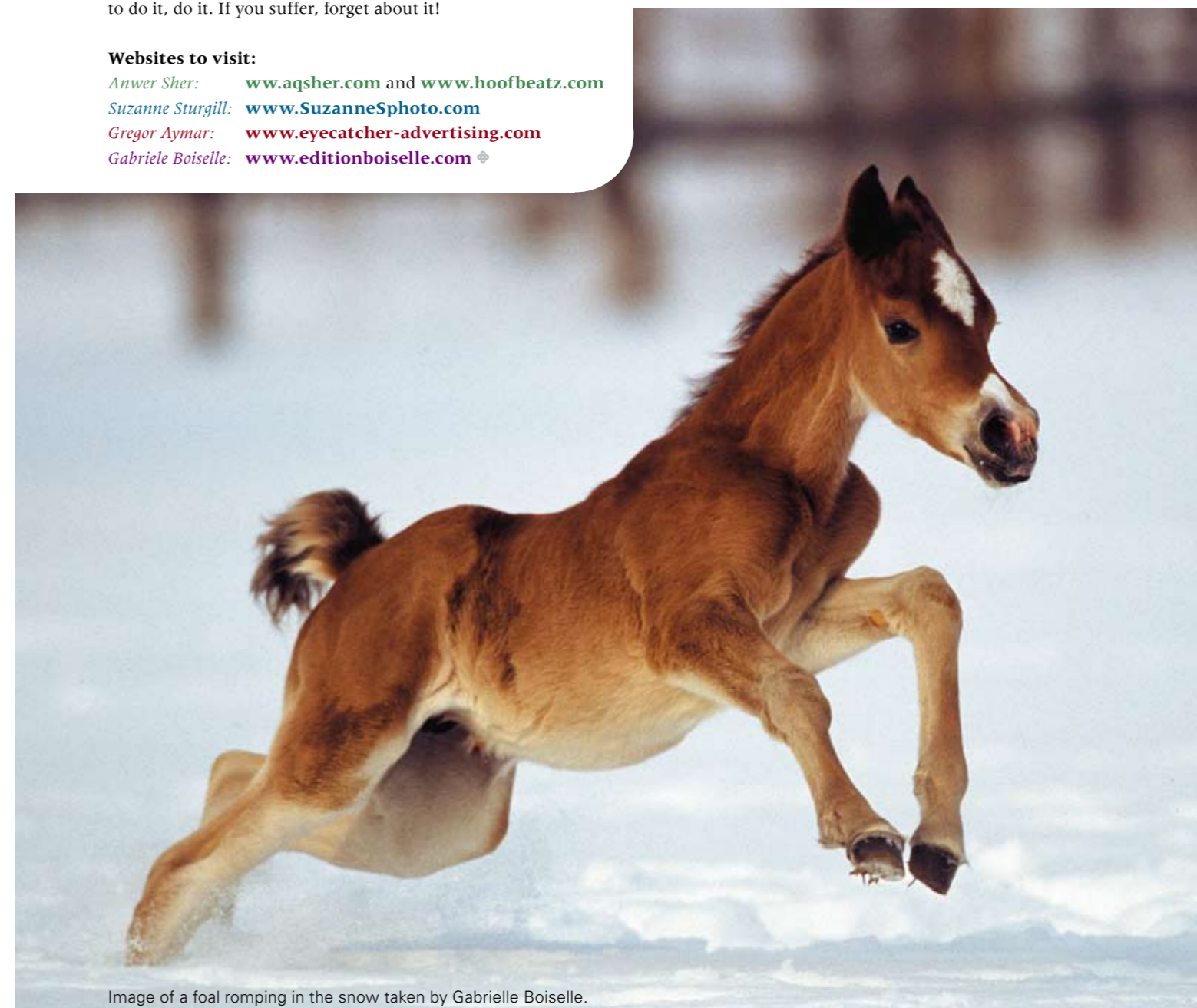


Image of a foal romping in the snow taken by Gabrielle Boiselle.