

AN EGYPTIAN STORY
NOTABLE
LINEAGE

Photographs: George Fakhry & others Courtesy of Shaarawi Arabians



Yasmine and Ali Shaarawi chose to live outside the city and far away from the usual agricultural areas favored by horse breeders. One hour's drive from the smog and chaos of the city, they established an Egyptian Arabian horse stud that combines traditional values and vision with a contemporary life-style. Their priorities were for an environment that was uncluttered with farms and second homes, clean air, wide open spaces (25 acres) and the latitude of choice that such a space would allow them in order to build a home and adjoining stables.

This nature loving couple built their house and stables as one unit. For them horse rearing is not a business, it is a vocation. This is clear when you see how they talk to their horses, address them by name, reel off their pedigrees and describe the personal idiosyncrasies of each. It is also apparent when you see the quality of the stabling where the horses are fed and groomed.

Keeping horses is a demanding occupation. In this case the daily routine of the Shaarawis is determined by the needs of their charges. Exercise, rest and feeding times are strictly adhered to in a way that is reminiscent of a well run house-hold in Switzerland which is where Yasmine was brought up by her mother, Princess Ferial, daughter of King Farouk and Queen Farida. Yasmine says that she was riding before she could walk.

This couple is dedicated to preserving the Egyptian Arabian horse and the heritage it represents. For them this breed has unique qualities of endurance, personality and appearance. Besides, Egypt is the repository of an invaluable Egyptian Arabian genetic pool. Their wish is to revive the best in Egypt's horse-breeding past when horses were prized for their individuality and not for their potential as marketable commodities. Yasmine and Ali Shaarawi explain why they do not go to shows. Such 'beauty competitions' are stressful for the horse and preparing and training for them requires a great deal of time. Above all they regard them as a distraction from their chosen vocation of breeding. Private clients wishing to purchase horses approach them directly and then visit by appointment.



The house and stables were built as one continuous unit. The land that started as desert, now has lush green paddocks, orchards and lawns around the house, thanks to Ali's diligence and artistry. It is only three years since the project began and the grounds are already looking well established.



Yasmine's rapport with horses explains why she emphasizes that gentleness is an essential quality in her relationship with these lovely animals. 'Discipline should be gentle but firm'. It is not pretentious to say that she and her husband have developed their own philosophy of breeding horses: one that is worthy of imitation. All the horses are exercised daily, including the stallion which Yasmine rides regularly.

The grooms are copying the way that the Shaarawis coax the horses and the care they give them. This couple has established a culture of nurture and respect for horses that everyone living and working in the stables observes.

The mares and stallion stay with them for a life-time. Only the superfluous foals are sold.



This Arabian horse stud feels like a very gracious hacienda. The house and stables were built to Yasmine and Ali's design and set in unspoiled surroundings which they landscaped to meet their domestic and professional requirements. The comfort and security of the horses was an important factor in their plan.

The house is a solid structure. Certain features remind us of Egyptian vernacular architecture and traditions of building that are to be found in the oldest parts of Islamic Cairo.

The couple researched the different styles before they got their engineer, El Shafei Mohamed Hegazi, to finalize the plans and organize the work-force. The builders and the uncut stone were sourced from Fayoum; the workmanship, as evidenced by the hand-cut blocks, is superb.

The carpentry work in the floors, ceilings, cupboards and doors of the house is flawless and illustrates a tradition of excellent Egyptian craftsmanship that the couple managed to source and encourage.

Ali Shaarawi has a passionate interest in history which is not surprising given that he is the grandson of an illustrious feminist Hoda Shaarawi.

The house and stables represent the couple's love of traditional architectural forms. They selected and imitated certain features found in old houses and palaces that blended with their overall plan. Their vision of a home and stables has been entirely realized. They have achieved an enviable work-life balance which could be a suitable model for others opting for the rural good life.

The playful foals seen here are trained from an early age to be ridden. They are the offspring of the mares and the one stallion kept by the Shaarawis.







The house has two traditional architectural features worthy of note. The first is the *shukshaykha* in the roof of the living room upstairs. This is a structure that stands above the roof level like a short tower. It channels light and air into the house. The windows on all four sides of this mini-tower act as a sky-light. Stained glass is often inserted in the small panes which reflect different colors onto the interior walls below. When the *shukshaykha* windows are open or closed the flow of air is modulated.

The second is the window seat known as a *kharga* or *roushan* which is an enclosed balcony common in the old Islamic houses. Here it adds an authentic Arab touch to what is a modern home. From this charming diwan-like seat one has a superb view over the paddocks and plantations below.



The stables are a picture of order and beauty. The wooden ceiling is a model of ingenuity and elegance. It resembles an upturned boat and the cross beams are identical to those you would find in a stout sailing yacht.

This excellent piece of work was done by - a boat-builder! He never imagined that his knowledge would be put to such use. What a transfer of skills and what a feat of imagination and design!



These two very handsome mares are the mothers of the foals featured in this story. The Shaarawis have every reason to be proud of their performance and appearance.

The individual 'boxes' on one side of the stable are covered with domes which are finished in exposed red brick. The building style – high ceilings and numerous windows – is meant to maximize the flow of air thus keeping the entire stable cool in summer.

Left: The stables are kept in immaculate condition as evidenced by this view of the interior.

Right: A charming picture of the one donkey in the stable. 'Falfoul' is his name!





Like descendants from other distinguished families Yasmine and Ali combine a modern low profile life-style with discreet clues to their ancestry. So whilst the sitting room is relaxed and comfortable with dogs sharing the sofas with their human friends the family photo above the fireplace is in fact a portrait of King Farouk. The modern shelves have a familiar cluster of books until on closer inspection one notices royal crests and famous signatures on otherwise everyday domestic items. A small black and white photograph of Hoda Shaarawi is a gentle reminder of Ali's famous grandmother and her contribution to modern Egyptian history.

Yasmine's grandmother, Queen Farida, was an accomplished artist. There are several of her pictures in the house. Yasmine is following in her footsteps and has produced a portfolio of delightful works. The family website has a full inventory of her work.

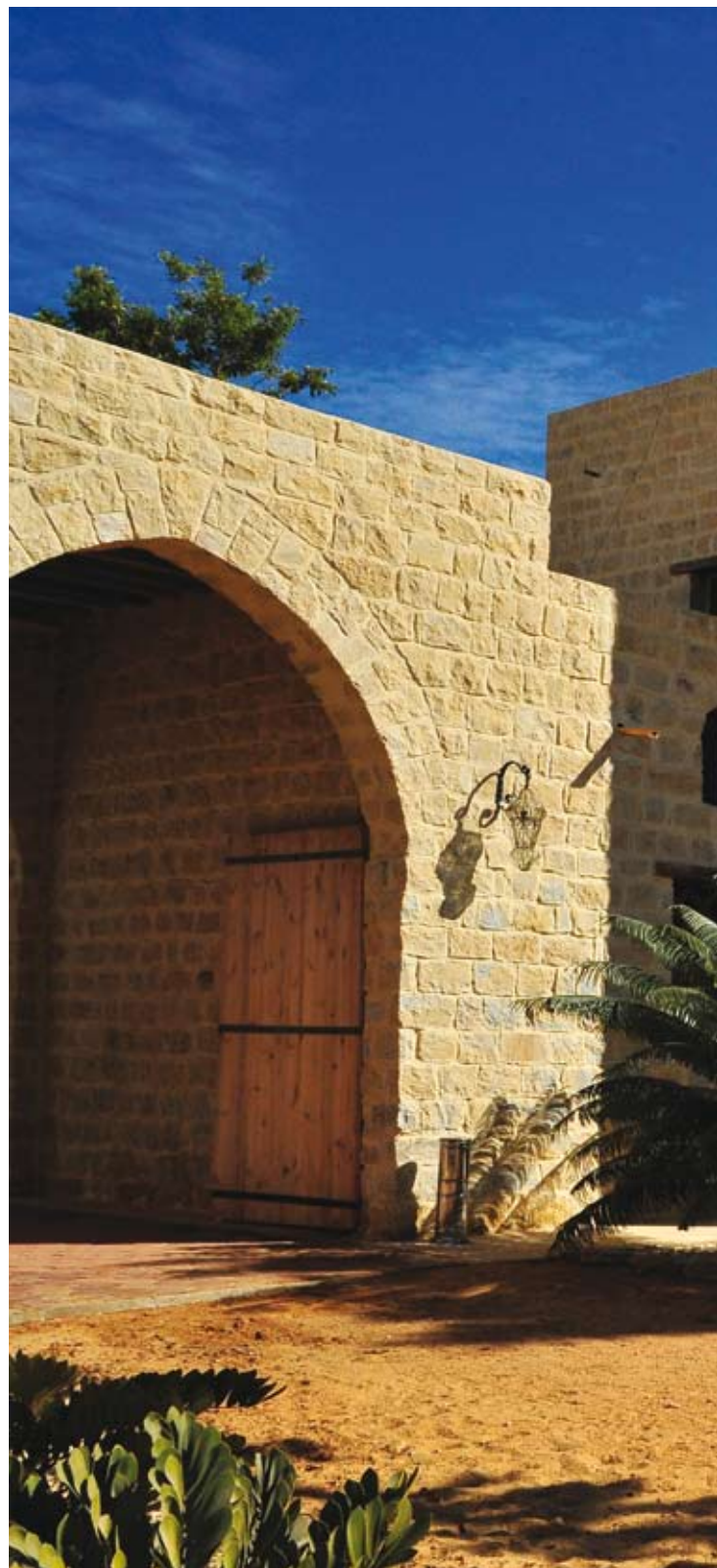
Left: This photo is a touching reminder of Yasmine and Ali Shaarawi's love of animals. These two aristocratic Sloughi dogs are an integral part of their household.

Above: These Sloughi dogs, renowned for their stamina and speed, have a Moroccan mother and came to the house when they were puppies. They are now thoroughly at home in their new semi-desert surroundings. "Sensitive and intelligent, these dogs should never be trained using force or hard-handed methods". The affection and loyalty these two dogs show for their master and mistress are proof that they were reared with a kindly hand and occupy a special place in their owners' life.





'Turath' is the proud stallion of the stud and was purchased from Egypt's national stud – the E.A.O. His delightful offspring populate this wonderful collection of Egyptian Arabians. Yasmine Shaarawi rides him daily.



Yasmine and Ali Shaarawi have named their business – Shaarawi Arabians. These pictures are a wonderful advertisement of the wholesome environment in which they rear their horses. Visiting this property and its owners fills one with a tangible sense of peace and joy. It is easy to imagine its long and happy future as the avenues of trees mature and this couple's long-term vision continues to bear fruit. The extensive orchards and a modern equestrian utopia that have been created from flat sandy land serve as an inspiration to us all. Ω

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The house and stables are one unit. The arched gateway leads into the long spacious yard in front of the stables. From their living quarters upstairs the Shaarawis are able to look down on their charges. With its immaculate stonework and the fine doors and windows, the house appears to be older than its three years. The L-shaped enclosed veranda is a large comfortable country-house sitting area built by Engineer El Shafei and roofed by the 'boat builder' who also executed the one in the stable.