

Building Dreams from the Ground Up



John and Sara McDonald with Georgia and Lionel following the win by Attache's American Patriot.



Dr Merrell Magelli and Lismore's A Nutter One showing in the Junior Three-Gaited division.

By Jackie Hale

Lionel and Georgia Bulmer Ferreira first shipped just two horses from England to the Kentucky State Fair in 2005. It was a humble entrance into the United States horse show world.

"Our two stalls at Louisville were in completely different barns," Georgia laughs. Nevertheless, both horses won world titles that year.

Gothic Revival won the Three-Year-Old Fine Harness class and Carlswald Princes Domino won the Five-Gaited Gelding Stake and went on to win Reserve World's Championship in the Five-Gaited division following a three-way tie with Five O'Clock, who captured the World's Grand Championship title that year.

It was exactly 10 years later, in 2015, that Lionel achieved his long held dream to win the Five-Gaited World's Grand Championship.

Lionel is originally from Welkom, South Africa. He grew up like most horse trainers do — riding anything his parents could afford. At age 8 his parents bought a new horse for him and it happened to be a Saddlebred.



WC Lismore's Magnut, winning the Two-Year-Old Five-Gaited Stake for owner Deborah Butler.



Judy Oetinger pictured with RWC Bree's Fleur de Lis after capturing Reserve at Louisville in the 15.2 and Under Three-Gaited class.



WC Cloverleaf Freedom Writer was the Amateur Park World Champion in 2014 & 2015 with Alexandra Percoco.



Terri Kearney with her Country Pleasure Driving horse, WC Riverdreams Remarkable, and Assistant Trainer, Sarah Mackenna.

"We went to a few local shows and decided this is what we would do," recalled Ferreira. "My family was instrumental in guiding my obvious enthusiasm for the breed."

Young Ferreira became engulfed in the Saddlebred world and slowly upgraded his stock. He also took note of the training methods of the top trainers of his day in South Africa, including Harold Poil and Bill Rowan, knowing he wanted to follow in their footsteps. As soon as he turned 18, Ferreira was off to America to further his education. While in the States, he worked for Omega Farms and Joe Becker in South Carolina, as well as

spending two years with George Knight.

"George taught me a lot about routine, hard work, and turning one out correctly," Lionel said.

Lionel worked for Knight as long as his back would hold up, but was forced back to South Africa for his third spinal fusion, having been born with a spinal condition that required metal rods to keep his back straight. After his surgery, he realized that he wouldn't be able to physically keep up in the United States with the lifting required in many jobs, so he accepted a position as head trainer for the Bulmer family's Morgan Farm in Hereford, England.

While becoming an integral part of the British Morgan community, Lionel maintained his passion for Saddlebreds. Sharing his enthusiasm, John Bulmer joined Lionel on a buying trip where they purchased Monnington's first Saddlebred, Gothic Revival, as a weanling. In the ensuing years, they continued the practice of buying horses from South Africa and America, finishing them in England, then bringing them to the U.S. to show and sell.

In 2008, one of the young stars that Lionel took home with him to England to finish out was the two-year-old Marc Of Charm.



Enchanted Kiss was exhibited by Dr. Merrell Magelli in the Amateur Three-Gaited division.

"He had the same enthusiasm and goals for Marc as I did," said Carolyn Koch, owner of that two-year-old by the name of Marc of Charm. "I had gotten to know Lionel during his time in the U.S. that year, and had met Georgia's parents, so I had no hesitation in letting them take Marc back to England. I knew he would be well cared for."

During his time in England, Lionel's back grew stronger, and all the while the fire to get back to Kentucky continued to burn. But it seems that wasn't the only fire Lionel had burning. He and the boss' daughter, Georgia, became romantically involved and, as the burden of shipping show horses across the big pond for Louisville each year grew increasingly challenging, the young couple decided to take the plunge.

In 2010, they got married, and moved full-time to the U.S. Georgia sold her interior design business in London and they decided to bring Monnington Farm to Kentucky,



The Ferreira's purchased the historic Crabtree Farm in 2010 and Monnington set up shop in the United States.

where Lionel could reach his full potential and start his own business.

They purchased the historic Crabtree Farm in Simpsonville, Kentucky and expanded the original 30-stall barn to include an indoor arena, a 12-stall colt barn, and a breeding lab.

Currently their operation has 40 show horses in training and 25 broodmares. Lionel and assistant trainer Sarah Mackenna handle the training, Katey Smith handles the breeding program, and

Georgia oversees all things administrative.

The year 2015 was a milestone year for the Ferreira's and Monnington Farm. Twins Cora and Lucian were born and Lionel won the Five-Gaited World's Grand Championship on Marc Of Charm.

"People say that Lionel calmed down after we had the twins, but actually he calmed down after he won the Gaited Stake," Georgia said. "When you grow up in a small mining town in South Africa, and no one expects you to make anything of yourself, and your back keeps giving way, it creates a very deep sense of purpose in you."

The climb to win the Gaited stake with Marc Of Charm is well known, but the many obstacles for Lionel and Georgia to get to that point are even more impressive.

"Lionel is a very upbeat, outgoing person and I think that when we moved here to Kentucky in 2010, some people kind of took him up as an overconfident guy pushing too hard," Georgia explained. "But the truth is we had four horses in our barn and we had to push hard to build our business or we would have had to go back to England with our tail between our legs.

"Marc was a huge blessing, but also made some people feel this young guy was pushing to win the Gaited Stake and he needed to pay his dues."

Lionel explained, "In hindsight, I get that I might have come across quite forceful. But I had to prove to John (Bulmer) that he didn't back a donkey, and I wanted to prove to my wife that I could achieve these goals. People believed in me and trusted me — when they didn't have to — and I will spend the rest of my life repaying them."

The Ferreriras are very grateful for the support this industry, and their customers, have given them.

"There was a moment when I knew Lionel's entire life goals hung in one basket with Marc, and I really wasn't sure if it was going to work out for them," Georgia said. "To see your husband drive so hard for something his entire life, move two continents away from his family to achieve it, and to not succeed would have been very hard."

Since the historic win, Lionel has continued to push hard in both his work time and down time.

"I just don't want to take my foot off the gas," he said. His focus now is on developing young show ring stars and putting amateur combinations together. In 2015, they expanded the original farm, purchasing the larger house next door for the expanding family and an additional 50 acres for the breeding program.

While Lionel is known as a high powered open performance horse trainer, his philosophy is to make horses. He often looks



Dr. Merrell Magelli and her daughter, Emily, who exhibits Supremacy's High And Mighty in the Juvenile Five-Gaited division.

for unfinished horses and young stock that he can develop and bring out to be excellent amateur horses.

"I love the process of developing a horse and giving it timing and developing its muscles and creating a neck, so that it all comes together in the show ring," he said. Lionel often seeks out horses that have not been doing well and tries to change things so that the horse can find its division.

Dr. Merrell Magelli Of Omaha, Nebraska is one of Ferreriras customers who has been particularly successful in buying and selling young prospects.

In order to accommodate their growing breeding program and family, Lionel and Georgia purchased the adjacent 50 acres and larger home in 2015.



(Below) Georgia and Lionel with two-year-old twins, Cora and Lucian.



(L-R) Chris Hill, Jenn Holdren, Hannah Stillwell, Sarah Mackenna, Lionel Ferreira, Katey Smith, Daniela Karsten

"I was first introduced to Lionel and Georgia by Mark Webster," she said. Merrell had grown up in the Quarter Horse world — riding reining and barrel horses. She and her daughter Emily entered the Saddlebred world when the Websters were training horses at the former Cheradon Acres in Springfield, Nebraska. Years later, Mark was the one who introduced her to Lionel.

"Mark told me that I could trust Lionel, and I trusted Mark," she said.

That was the start of a fruitful relationship that has produced several top show horses, including Watermark's Kiss For Luck, WC Heir To A Kiss, and Enchanted Kiss.

"Lionel puts the horse first," Magelli said. "He feels it's his job to be their voice, and I appreciate that."

Merrell is one of those owners who enjoys buying young horses and being a part of their learning journey.

Where she gets it right is by being willing to sell them when they are at the pinnacle of popularity — which is hard for many people.

"I really don't care about the ribbon," she said. "I just enjoy learning something every time I ride, and learning something different from each horse I own."

Lionel is great at putting people and horses together, which is how she came about purchasing her current mount, RWC Bree's Fleu de Lis from co-customer Judy Oetinger.

"Lionel had this beautiful mare in the barn and he thought she would be a good fit for me. She is very game — and Lionel knows I like to say "whoa" more than "go" — so he recommended that I buy her.

Judy Oetinger from Prospect, Kentucky adds, "Lionel, as a trainer, is really a good fit for me. I am a perfectionist when it comes to how horses should be trained and presented

in public. I am laid back when the situation warrants it, but with show horses that have rather large investments in their upkeep and training, one wants their horses to be at the top of their game when they go in the ring. I believe Lionel thinks the same in this regard.”

In addition to Bree’s Fleur de Lis, Judy has owned WCC HS Decorum and RWC Lullaby Kiss.

“Lionel’s horses come first and he will do whatever it takes to make the customer and the horse come together. He wouldn’t send someone in the ring that isn’t ready, nor their horse. He radiates confidence and it is infectious.”

Lionel shares his love of raising young horses with another client, Terri Kearney. Terri and her husband Joe of Lismore Farm enjoy raising a few foals each year from their small band of broodmares. They were looking to establish a long-term relationship with a trainer who shared their vision, possessed a good work ethic, and had the ability to get their young stock in the ring.

After vetting and lots of interaction, they began sending their young prospects to Monnington in 2011.

“Lionel and I foaled Lismore’s Magnut at 2 a.m. at Monnington Farm,” Terri said. “When Lionel saw him he said, ‘He’s going to be something!’ Well he was right because he won the Two-Year-Old Five-Gaited Stake at Louisville and Kansas City in 2016, and was later sold to Deborah Butler.”

Butler enjoyed a blockbuster first season with Monnington Farm, winning three World titles in 2016 with Lismore’s Magnut, Monnington Glam Girl, and He’s A Cool Cat.

Sara McDonald of Birmingham, Alabama has been a client of Monnington’s for just over a year. She moved a horse back to Lionel that she had purchased from him, and ended up buying Attache’s American Patriot a short time later.

“Lionel is passionate about his horses and is relentless in trying to get a horse to work out,” she said.

Patriot is the perfect example of a horse that might have fallen through the cracks had it not been for Ferreira’s tenacity, which culminated in the big gelding winning the Three-Gaited Over 15.2 Stake at Louisville last year.

Monnington’s clientele range from long-time Saddlebred enthusiasts to juvenile exhibitors and include people who have one horse and enjoy attending the local County Fair shows, to others who have over a dozen horses and want to win at Louisville.

“And he treats them all the same,” added McDonald. “It’s a wonderful family atmosphere — a very collaborative team — and everyone ultimately just wants to have a good time.”



My Royale Prince made his show ring debut with Lionel Ferreira in 2015 under saddle.

This brings us back to Monnington’s first client, Carolyn Koch, who saw something special in the young horse and the young man and gave them the opportunity to climb this mountain of success together.

“Nothing against any of the other trainers I’ve ever had,” Carolyn said, “but Lionel and I just connected in a way that I can’t describe. He shared my dreams for Marc and no matter what — during all the ups and downs — I believed in the two of them.”

Georgia added, “I am just forever grateful that Carolyn and Gary stood by Lionel and Marc through it all. It did make the victory all the sweeter. If we never win a blue ribbon again, I would be happy that Marc and Lionel got to see the view from the top of their mountain.”

Koch is a long-time breeder of record-setting champion Pugs and her kennel River Song currently has the number one toy breed dog in the country. She knows a thing or two about the dog show world.

“When you know you aren’t going to be able to do well under a certain judge, you show to the crowd.”

Marc and Lionel did that time and again and once they won the crowd over, the judges had to take notice of the big red gelding and



WC Marc Of Charm is enjoying his retirement by eating bananas, drinking Gatorade, and making special appearances to promote the American Saddlebred. Pictured here at the 2017 ASHA Youth Convention luncheon held at Monnington Farm.



WGC Marc Of Charm was retired in 2016, just one year after winning the Five-Gaited Stake, "because he had accomplished everything Lionel and I dreamed he would and we wanted him to go out on top," said owner, Carolyn Koch.

the young showman guiding him effortlessly around the arena. Since his retirement at Louisville in 2016, Marc is enjoying his bananas, Gatorade and duties in the breeding shed.

"My next dream is to win the Stake again with one of his offspring," Carolyn smiled.

Behind every great man is a great woman, and the partnership between Lionel and Georgia is no exception.

"Georgia is the glue that holds it all together," said Judy Oetinger. "She has a sharp eye for a good horse and savvy understanding of how a customer and horse will get along."

Merrell Magelli added, "They are a great team. He and Georgia are equal partners — both of them are great teachers and good communicators." Georgia's father John Bulmer is equally proud of what the couple has accomplished.

"When Lionel and Georgia decided to set up a farm in America, I was confident they would make it work," he said. "Lionel is a very talented horseman, and Georgia is one of those people who can make a success of anything she turns her mind to. They were always going to be a good partnership."

Georgia has lived this journey with Lionel every step of the way and is incredibly proud of what her husband has achieved.

"Lionel has a level of determination and grit that I have rarely seen, his ability to work around obstacles and keep his focus only on his horses is exceptional.

"Our home life since the twins were born has been extremely hectic," she said.

"When most people come back from a busy day at the barn and relax before dinner, Lionel and I are running after two extremely active 2 year olds. It's sometimes like running a marathon, but the extreme happiness they bring us both has only fuelled Lionel's determination in the barn to bring out more great horses."

"I wanted to win the Gaited Stake because I wanted to accomplish that milestone, but I really believed I needed to do it for my business," Lionel said. Now that he's done that, what's next? "Our breeding program," said Lionel.

"I spent a lot of money we could have saved reinvesting in horses and the business in order to get where we are today," he said. "Now I want to produce my own stock and sell them," allowing other people to be in the limelight with the finished product. "I hope that the prefixes 'Monnington' and 'Riverdreams' will one day stand out like 'Callaway Hills,'" he said.

He continued, "People asked us when we first opened the stable, how are you going to fill your barn?" The Ferreiras sought out people who shared their same dreams in order to grow their business from the ground up. "I told Georgia," Lionel remembers, "we have to get every customer to also buy a broodmare and get them involved in the process of raising horses."

It's a long-term investment, but one that's good for the trainer, because each broodmare means a foal that eventually has to be trained. Six years later, Monnington is home to 25 broodmares and only 5 belong to the farm, while the other 20 are customer-owned.

"People want to be part of the process," Lionel said. "Everyone needs to have something to hope for, and it actually takes some of the pressure off the trainer because this prospect wasn't bought, it was born."

The Ferreira's have created an atmosphere of camaraderie, where no one has an exclusive or private lesson.

"We insist that they all participate together and support one another," Lionel said.

"We have a jolly time and this model has served us well."

Last, but certainly not least, one can't overlook the people behind the scenes that make it all happen.

"Sarah McKenna, assistant trainer and Katey Smith, broodmare, weanling, and yearling manager are the backbone of a rather amazing farm," said Judy. "I love the crew at Monnington, which includes the loyal work force."

Sara McDonald added, "I have many of the employees' numbers in my phone and they communicate with me regularly, sending me text messages and snapshots of my horses, and I love that!"

Kearney continued, "There are many good horse trainers, but few are gifted horsemen. Lionel is a gifted horseman. He and Georgia and the entire Monnington Team strive to put forth the best product they can, each and every day. They turn out impeccably groomed and fit horses no matter how large or small the venue."

"It's wonderful to have reached a point where we have a great team working with us and it is such a team effort," Georgia said. "Everyone at Monnington — from the staff to the customers — is doing their part to make it an enjoyable and successful place."



The ride of a lifetime! Ella Herrin, granddaughter of Don Harris, wrote an essay that won her a spin on Marc Of Charm during his retirement ceremony.