

WHITETHORNE RANCH

Georgy Maskrey-Segesman's hunter/jumper program builds confidence and skills in a lovely setting.

by Kim F. Miller

Whitethorne Ranch in Somis has every imaginable equestrian amenity. A three-acre grass jumping field, two huge jumping arenas with permanent water obstacles, an FEI dressage court, tree-lined quarter-mile track, trail access, spacious stabling options, a quiet setting and lots of green grass top the 22-acre facility's long list of physical attractions.

It's an intangible trait, however, that best defines Whitethorne and the hunter/jumper training program run by ranch manager and resident trainer Georgy Maskrey-Segesman. "It's one of those places where, the minute you drive into the driveway, it doesn't matter what else is going on in your life, you get that sense of 'Ahh, I can relax now,'" says client Nicky Joyce.

Joyce brought her daughter Abbie to Whitethorne in 2003 when Maskrey had just opened for business. The Joyces initially went to Whitethorne as a stopover between trainers. It became their permanent home very quickly, with Abbie, now 21, having progressed from beginner rider to a solid amateur jumper contender.

With word of mouth and great show results as her only marketing strategy, Maskrey has built up the training business to 45 horses and a thriving clientele that ranges from pony riders to Grand Prix competitors. Maskrey is a Grand Prix regular herself and young amateur Yasmine Abdallat made her debut in the big ring at the recent Memorial Day Grand Prix in Los Angeles.

Maskrey prides herself on giving equal attention to those without show ring aspirations. "We have a group of people who are not interested in showing and for them

we offer quality training in an environment that is safe and geared toward real learning," she explains. "Nobody is discriminated against because they don't want to show."

A familiar name on the West Coast hunter/jumper A circuit, Maskrey rode with Tom Blakiston as a junior, then progressed to being his main rider for many years. In that post, she campaigned hunters and jumpers in all levels and learned a great deal about the business from Blakiston. She juggled her riding career while earning a degree in business administration and was poised to attend law school when the opportunity to take the reins at Whitethorne arose.

Maskrey and her parents, Joe and Joan Maskrey, were looking for a small property to keep her horses on during law school when they came across a special 22 acres in Ventura County's Somis, between Camarillo and Moorpark. "My parents said I could either go to law school or run a horse business," Maskrey relays of the catalyst question in her career. "I never thought that would be in the cards for me, even though it was something I dreamed of since I was a kid."

Maskrey gave notice at Blakiston Ranch and headed to the family's new property, formerly a reining training business, with her own horses and a tack box. The property had 76 box stalls, but otherwise, "We started from scratch," she recalls. The arenas and riding fields came first, along with first-rate footing and lovely landscaping to augment the property's already beautiful and serene setting. From the get-go, boarding and training profits have been invested into the property. A Eurocizer and a jumping shoot are

among the extras that reflect the Maskreys' commitment to providing their clients everything necessary to fulfill their goals. Easily reachable from northern Los Angeles County and Ventura County, Whitethorne's Somis location is another appealing factor.

The Gift of Confidence

The sense of calm that Nicky Joyce considers Whitethorne's greatest asset comes from several sources. The most powerful of those is Maskrey's abilities and attitude as a trainer, especially her gift for building confidence in her riders. "Georgy is very patient," Joyce explains. "She doesn't give up on anything. If there is a problem, she'll approach it several different ways until it's solved. She makes sure that absolutely everybody is achieving their goals."

"I'm an eternal optimist," Maskrey says. "I really, truly believe, down to my core, in the ability of all my clients to achieve their goals. I refuse to give up on anybody."

That approach to training grew from her own needs as a rider. When Maskrey was just starting out on her own, she received some life-changing coaching and support from close friend and fellow Grand Prix rider Holly Scapa. The epiphany came while campaigning her jumper, El Campeon's Cayenne, on the Desert Circuit at Indio. "I had little confidence at the time," Maskrey recalls. "But Holly was there for me. Standing by me at the back gate and telling me that I could do it." She has never forgotten the impact of her friend's faith and support.

Building the horse/rider partnership on a strong foundation is the first step. "You

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Whitethorne

Photos, counter-clockwise from top left:

- Yasmine Abdallat and Team Harmony's Rimana at Tucson
Photo © Marilyn Marsh
- Stallion Campino 009 in pasture.
Photo © Working Lens Photography
- View of main house.
Photo © Working Lens Photography
- Riding court main arena and dressage court.
Photo © Working Lens Photography
- Georgy Maskrey-Segesman on Eurocommerce San Francisco
at Spruce Meadows. Photo © Marilyn Marsh
- Malcolm van Halen and Double Trouble
Photo © Captured Moment Photography



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have to teach them everything they need to know and pick shows where they can be successful and challenged." With that in place, confidence becomes the make-it or break-it component in creating a successful and enjoyable equestrian experience.

"Most people have this fear of disappointing the person who is training them," Maskrey observes. "I see my role as very delicate. I want to empower my students to do well and I want them to know that, when the chips are down, I am there for them and I believe in them when they walk in that in-gate."

"Good luck and have fun" are the words of wisdom Maskrey imparts to any client as they head through the in-gate. "When you are having fun, that's when the luck comes." And even when things don't go as hoped, the trainer always has something positive to point out when her riders exit the arena. "We always talk about what was good first. There is always a take-away."

Grand Prix newcomer Yasmine Abdallat is thriving under Maskrey's positive approach. "Georgy has experienced some of the stuff that Yazy went through in terms of not getting much positive reinforcement," says the rider's father AJ Abdallat, a close observer of the sport during his daughter's 15 years in it. "It's been a refreshing change and Yazy is really getting her confidence back. It's amazing what can be accomplished when you work with an individual who fosters positive reinforcement. It's been a great year-and-a-half and the results speak for themselves."

Yasmine Abdallat's current Grand Prix mount, Rimana, came to Whitethorne with what were thought to be career-ending soundness issues. Observing her in pasture after a few months, however, Maskrey thought the mare looked remarkably sound. A careful return to work proved successful and Rimana and Abdallat completed their first Grand Prix on Memorial Day, having warmed up with a fourth place finish at Showpark

the week prior. They proudly represent their sponsor as members of Princess Haya of Jordan's Team Harmony.

AJ Abdallat praises Maskrey's client-intensive focus and her open-mindedness. Yasmine aspires to compete internationally in both show jumping and dressage. "It's an ambitious goal and it's a compliment to Georgy that she encourages that," he observes.

Fantastic arena footing is what drew Stine van Halen to Whitethorne Ranch four years ago. She was a dressage rider at the time, with a horse returning from an injury. During that mount's recovery, Maskrey lent van Halen horses to ride and in time van Halen and her now 10-year-old son Malcolm both became hunter/jumper enthusiasts under Maskrey's direction. Van Halen considers Maskrey "wise beyond her years" and a great horse person whose personality is one of Whitethorne's biggest assets.

"Georgy takes great care of the horses and she does a great job of targeting a training program for each individual," says van Halen. Her transition from dressage has gone very well and she's competing successfully in the low Amateur Jumper divisions while Malcolm is getting ready for the Pony Jumper ranks. "Georgy has that ability to see where her students are at and to challenge them without overfacing them." Van Halen also appreciates Maskrey's gift for keeping young riders like Malcolm engaged in the process of learning both riding and horsemanship.

Doing It All

In addition to training and ranch management, Maskrey manages the breeding of Holsteiner stallion Campino 009. The former mount of Austrian champion Hugo Simon, Campino was a third place finisher in the Hickstead Derby and a winner of the Bologna Puissance at 7'4". He was a superstar in the High Amateur Jumper divisions for Maskrey before retiring to his full-time stallion life at Whitethorne. She typically breeds him three times a year and hopes one or more of those

youngsters will become her Grand Prix partner in the future.

With the stable as full as she wants it to be and a show schedule that averages two competitions a month, Maskrey relies on excellent, mature assistants to keep every aspect of Whitethorne Ranch running smoothly.

Assistant trainer Laura Mourmouris handles many barn management tasks and stays home to maintain training continuity when Maskrey has horses and riders on the road. Mourmouris came to Whitethorne after several years as an assistant trainer at the Foxfield Riding School and for Jenny Martin and Steve McAllister. Julia Spreen-Balcom had been operating her own training barn when Maskrey took over Whitethorne. A close and cooperative professional friendship evolved and when Spreen-Balcom wanted to scale down after the birth of her first child, selling her business to Maskrey and becoming a Whitethorne assistant was a natural segue.

"We provide an environment in which every one of our clients can expect and receive every consideration," says Whitethorne's mission statement. "We are dedicated to providing our clients' horses with the highest possible standard of care and attention, and to provide facilities, arenas, footing, bedding, feed, cleaning and grooming of the highest possible standard. We and our employees love horses and will provide them with every possible attention to their needs and their well being."

Whitethorne Ranch takes its name from the English home in which Maskrey was born. "I have very fond memories of that home," she explains. No doubt the horses and riders in Maskrey's program will have equally fond memories of their equestrian home at Whitethorne.



For more information on Whitethorne Ranch, visit www.whitethorneranch.com or call Georgy Maskrey-Segesman at 818-618-9949.

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