



Elvis and his daughter Inès at 2014 Menton Championship

Elvis

If you dream, dream big

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I meet up with Elvis Giughera to talk about Arabian horses and his life. It is a lovely autumn afternoon. Breeder, rider, artist, marketer, surveyor, designer, art collector, husband and father. He has been known for years in the Arabian horse world as «Elvis of Arabian Essence».

Yet many people don't know how he looks like, because they contact him via emails. He is a humble, talented person, which can sometimes be a problem when trying to perform an honest interview. It is hard to get such a person to open up. I have questions written in my notebook, I have tried to be well prepared and planned to start with the basic «when did you buy your first horse?», however when I turn on the recorder our conversation flows all by itself, differently than how I presumed.

MYSTERY OF LIFE

In his book about Lipizzaner horses Frank Westerman wrote: «when you touch a Lipizzaner, you touch history.» While

reading this book my mind often turned to Arabian horses, a breed much older than the Lipizzaners (which date to 1685, whereas the Arabians reach more than 2500 back). So I asked Elvis about his relationship with Arabian horses, how he understands them, whether this breed is somehow special to him and why did his interest turn to these equines.

Elvis always had a special relationship with «the mystery of life». He began breeding dogs at the age of 15. He discovered Arabian horses by sheer coincidence when he was 19 years old. The first thought that came to the young boy was not that he wanted to own a unique Arabian, but that he wanted to breed them. He didn't have to wait long before his thoughts became reality! He was aware that horse breeding was something totally different than breeding dogs.

In his opinion horse breeding is associated with much greater emotions, perhaps due to a long waiting, the uncertainty, maybe it's because the mare produces only one foal a year. «I can't say exactly why this is such a special activity. It's hard to describe the joy of the breeder when a foal is born. It's something incomparable to buying a highly decorated champion. The moment when you personally help the mare during labor, then help the foal to stand and nurse. You participate in the creation of a new life. The effort that goes into it, the getting up at night, because that's when the mares usually give birth (they feel safe when there the barn is all quiet). We have a camera installed in the foaling stall, which is connected to my computer in the bedroom. I sleep very little in the spring and summer. Especially when a mare is expecting her first foal, she doesn't know what to expect.» The breeder must feel that the moment is right, he has to observe and not stress the mare with his presence. «The mare has to understand that I'm there to help her, to alleviate her pain and fatigue. After labor you see a mare lying or standing next to her foal, licking his head, often the mare motivates the foal to stand by himself, you see the love between mother and baby, you feel closer to nature, with no exaggeration. When I come to the stable during the first days of the foal's life I see the mare shielding her young, aware of her treasure, jealous, as though one look could take the foal away from her. And that's the feeling that is incomparable to anything else. It's magic! Only later do you start to evaluate the newly born foal, his conformation, you think over your breeding decisions. You have control over that. But that's a totally different story.»

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

Elvis was born in the northeastern part of Italy, in Cercenasco a small village located in the foothills of the Western Alps, 30 km from Turin. His parents and grandparents were farmers, they bred dairy cattle. Elvis grew up among animals, on the farm.

When horses enter our lives, as a true passion, our everyday life and we ourselves are forever changed. We subordinate our lives to them. That's exactly what happened with Elvis and his closest family, his parents, wife, children and many friends. «It's beautiful that when Arabian horses become part of our lives we cannot imagine things happening any other way.»

Arabian horses bring people together, thanks to them great friendships are born. «One of my closest friends is Gigi Grasso. If not for Arabian horses I would have never met him, just like many other wonderful people: Marieta Salas, Miloslava Khamis, Shirley Watts, Irina Stigler, Ferdinand Huemer and many others, without whom I can't imagine my life today. But of course I can't say that everyone in this «Arabian world» is a good person. Just like in any other business - there are friendships that last a lifetime and sometimes we witness disputes which end in a court of law. And just like in any field of life, we should always follow our heart and have our eyes wide open.»

«The passion for the Arabian horse was in my case love at first sight. During a walk on a Sunday afternoon, one just like today, I noticed a trotting horse which appeared to be dancing. With a long, flagged tail, like a symbol of pride, with flaring nostrils. I have never before seen something so beautiful and elegant. Maybe because I have never seen an Arabian horse before. After this encounter I began searching for information on Arabians in books and the internet. The «arabitis», an illness associated with a passion for the Arabian horse, was inevitable.»

LE SOLEIL: THE SUN

The name «La Soleil Stud», the place where Elvis started his adventure with breeding, originates from the Italian «sole», meaning «sun». The story behind this choice is in fact longer.



first Le Soleil's foal



Leilany Le Soleil (Alfabia Sheib x Tabata Le Soleil)



Hilal Le Soleil (Laheeb Al Nasser x Alfabia Nile Queen) 2009 stallion owned by Bebo Stud - Egypt

Elvis lost his brother who was just 15 years old. His name Elio originated from Helios, which also means «sun» in Greek mythology. «I wanted to honor Elio, so I named my farm Le Soleil. This really shows just how important this place is to me.»

In 2000 Le Soleil consisted of one mare, Tabavka and in 2004 Alfabia Gaucita also became part of the breeding program. One had a Polish-Russian pedigree and the second was part Russian and part English - from Crabbet Park. Elvis began his breeding with them, using Egyptian stallions Phaaros, Laheeb Al Nasser and last but not least - WH Justice and his son Alfabia Sheib. «My favorite damlines are Polish and Russian, due to their temperament and movement. I love Straight Egyptians for their type. If a breeder manages to find the right combination between the two, the result can really be extraordinary. I used to have Egyptian mares in the past, but I sold them. Recently I bought a beautiful bay mare, VP Athalheid, which I bred to Phaaros and am awaiting a foal from her next year. I hope it is a filly, which will continue the Straight Egyptian program in my stud.»

But long before the foals are born, decisions regarding which sires should be used are made. Elvis focuses on analyzing the sires' previous get and their traits, which they pass onto the future foal. But most of all a sire has to capture his heart. «When I see a sire, he has to make a good impression on me, only then do I start analyzing his good traits and flaws from up close.» One such stallion that took his breath away was El Perfecto, whom he saw during his visit to Ses Planes in Mallorca. «Huge, dark eyes, not touching the ground while trotting, emanating charisma. Even now, when I visit Marieta Salas, the first thing I do is visit this stallion. When I see him trotting, against the setting August sun, I feel like I'm watching a scene straight out of a movie. That's when I now why I chose Arabian horses.» Apart from introducing Elvis to El Perfecto, Marieta Salas also shared plenty of knowledge with him. «I

always look at Marieta with admiration and with the eyes of a student. I could listen to her for hours when she tells stories about her experiences. The same is with Judith Forbis.»

In the case of Judith, Elvis had the opportunity to create illustrations for one of her books, which was a special experience and which opened his eyes to many aspects of the breeding world. Marieta Salas was also the first client for whom Elvis designed a web page. It can be safe to say she liked it very much, because she didn't want any changes made to it for 10 years. «We finally added some new features this year, previously we only made updates...»

Horses bred at La Soleil that were offered for sale found buyers in Egypt, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Iran and other countries. The last colt born this year, a son of Marwan Al Shaqab, was sold to the United Arab Emirates. The stallion Jahleel Le Soleil was sold as a six month old weanling to Elvis's good friend - Miloslava Khamis, who showed him in the Czech Nationals where he became National Champion. «I had tears in my eyes when I heard the show's announcer say Jahleel claimed the gold.»

Elvis consults his breeding decisions with his long time friend and business partner, Gigi Grasso. «Every time I'm not sure about something, not only horses, but also other things, I ask his opinion. I also ask the opinion of people who have already used that stallion and of course I also create my own opinion by looking at what the stallion has already produced and if he was bred to any mare of the same bloodline as mine. I do a lot of research to achieve the best result I can... It is a long process but I love it.» Gigi lives about 40 minutes down the road from La Soleil. He is an inspiration for the future. Of course such places as Ses Planes, Halsdon Arabians, La Movida, Bebo Stud are always interesting experiences and a lesson in breeding humility. «In 2009 I also visited the farm



Laheeba Le Soleil (Alfabia Sheib x Halima Shah Le Soleil)



Leilany Le Soleil (Alfabia Sheib x Tabata Le Soleil)

of Count Federico Zichy Thyssen in Argentina, that was a truly unforgettable experience. That's why I believe that every good breeder should travel. We shouldn't be scared of having others assessing our breeding work, nor should we be scared of seeing someone else's progress, their successes and failures. Breeding is something that we learn all our lives. You have to have to be courageous and humble at the same time.»

Among the many places that Elvis dreams of visiting in the future are, among others, Haras Meia Lua of Lenita Perroy in Brazil, Simeon Stud of Marion Richmond in Australia, the Polish studs of Janów Podlaski and Michałów, Katharinenhof of Dr Hans Nagel in Germany and many other places where history was and still is being created. Elvis believes that seeing horses at shows or in other studs is not enough. It is worth visiting places where many influential horses were born, to feel the magic of these places and meet the people that created them.

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL MOMENTS

The horse that made the greatest impression at the beginning of Elvis's breeding career was the afore mentioned El Perfecto. «He was my dream and I knew I had to use him in my program.» El Perfecto sired a colt, much to Elvis's dismay, as he dreamt of having a broodmare by his favorite stallion. Another stallion whose daughters make great dams is, according to Elvis, Phaaros. Used in Le Soleil on non-Egyptian mares he left daughters which are broodmares in the stud to this day. When asked about a horse that he most admires, Elvis doesn't hesitate: «who else than Marwan Al Shaqab?». From the moment that Marwan took up the post of chief sire at Ses Planes Elvis has been following his breeding successes. Admiring the young at the time stallion, who looked like a perfectly carved living statue, he dreamed of using him in his own stud. This was made possible several years later by courtesy of the sire's owner, Al Shaqab Stud. The first result, out of the mare Halimashah Le Soleil, was Marwel Le Soleil, a colt sold to Dubai.

Elvis says that the happiest moment for a breeder, right after the foaling season, is when he observes his own-bred horses trotting and galloping across the pastures, with their tails blowing in the wind and their nostrils flaring. That's when the answer to the question if an Arabian horse can be charismatic is more than obvious. When it seems that the horse is soaring through the air, man feels that he is flying together with him...

Elvis admits that when he participates in a show with his own horse, the emotions and stress go through the roof. «When you wait for the announcing of the final results during the championships, time seems to stand still, as though the speakers will never utter one more sound. Then suddenly you hear the name of your horse and the joy that sweeps through you cannot be put into words.»

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Marwel Le Soleil (Marwan Al Shaqab x Halima Shab Le Soleil) 2014 bay colt, owned by Al Sagran Stud



A morning view at Le Soleil Stud

The most anticipated time in Le Soleil is spring, when the foals are born. The weather is sunny and the farm is blooming with flowers planted by his wife Margaret and mother Mariangela. «Personally my favorite time is when all the mares have given birth and the foals are happily galloping across the fields, playing with each other. They spread their legs wide apart to be able to reach their first blade of grass and afterwards they lie down tired next to their grazing dams... You can feel the farm thriving with life, and at the same time there is peace and harmony.»

Hanging in Elvis's office is a portrait of the black Simeon Sadik, set in a several hundred year old frame. While being a guest at the Russian National Show in Moscow last year, Elvis purchased a portrait of Sadik by one of Russian's well-known painters. Unfortunately this stallion passed away much too early, therefore Elvis couldn't make his dreams come true and use him in breeding. «Simeon Sadik was to me the essence of a Straight Egyptian stallion. He had everything that such a stallion should have. This year I used EKS Alihandro while making a marketing campaign for Athbah Stud. I always wanted to see him live. When that happened, I immediately knew that I wanted to use him. After some time he became World Champion which confirmed my previous decision. I'm happy that one of my mares, a WH Justice daughter, is in foal to him.» Other stallions that Elvis considers using are Kahil Al Shaqab and Lebanon Al Shaqab. Currently Elvis is leasing

two Egyptian mares, which originate from his breeding and are bred to Sabeh Al Salhiyah, which has already departed from Italy to the US. He is awaiting the birth of those foals with great anticipation.

Elvis's parents are also involved in managing the farm. «We run an agrotourism farm, my mom takes care of the house and garden, while my dad Silvio and my brother Giuliano helps out with the horses. My wife in turn takes care of everything! Literally. The famous saying «beside a great man there is a great woman» is very true here. Although in my case this is only partially true - I don't feel like a «great man», but she definitely is a «great woman».»

YOU DON'T GIVE UP ON YOUR PASSION

Arabian horse breeding is hard, everyday work, but Elvis treats in more like a life passion. He knew that there would be no turning back after 2-3 years, that only consistency gives results. «I don't treat this like work, because a job is something you can resign from in hard moments. And you don't give up on your passion.» Elvis can easily imagine his life without horse shows, but not without breeding.

In one of the interviews in Tutto Arabi made by polskiearaby.com (Monika Luft) with Marek Grzybowski, the latter called the Arabian horse industry «a throat cutting business». Saying

this he meant that there is no place for sentiments in this business and you have to be ready to deal with hard competition - a world of commissions and people who will do everything for money. Elvis doesn't belong in that world, he prefers to stay somewhere on the side and do his «own thing». Because that's what gives him pleasure. He focuses on breeding and doesn't compete in who sells more horses or breedings. His breeding intuition and artistic talent, a hard work of a graphic designer allow him to lead a decent life. «I liked that interview. When I sell a horse I try to make it an honest transaction. When a friend, a different breeder, asks me to help in selling his horse, I try to do it without thinking about a commission. If I am able to help him then maybe he will help me in the future. Of course the world of dog breeding is different. Easier... Perhaps because such large sums of money are not involved.»

Elvis is also a rider, but he hasn't ridden for the last 10 years. He just didn't have time. «Three months ago I asked myself if I truly don't have time and I decided to find it. I took a saddle and went to the stable. Now I try to ride in the regularly. I am even closer to nature then.»

AN ARTIST WITH A SUBTLE TASTE

When asked which role in life he treats most serious: an artist with a subtle taste, husband, father, architect, breeder, marketer, graphic designer, PR manager, administrator and creator of web pages, he answers immediately: «Father! I love my children. But I also like what you said about being «an artist with a subtle taste». I think that being a breeder is a bit like being an artist. You create a work of art, something spectacular. An artist shows his style by painting or sculpting, whereas a breeder does the same by choosing a certain sire for a given mare and being proud of the resulting foal in his stable. Also my other duties, done every day at my computer, are very much artistic. When I close the doors to my office I focus on nothing else but my work. I don't feel the passing time, I don't know whether it's time for dinner or supper, whether it's still day or night [Margaret, forgive me!].» Like a child that's playing and doesn't want to stop despite its mother calling to come for dinner, Elvis is so busy with his designs and thoughts, among many books, color palettes, photographs that he just can't draw himself away. Because this isn't just his work, it's his life. Maybe that's why ArabianEssence is so good and one of its kind, because its owners treat it like a passion and not just a profession.

In May I met up with Elvis in Austria at the Open Days in La Movida Arabians. ArabianEssence was doing a live web broadcast from the stud. Most probably it was the first in history live stream from an Open House in Europe, if not in the world. Ferdinand Huemer, before he began the presentation of his horses, said that thousands of people on several continents are currently watching this show. He also thanked Elvis and Gigi for their many year friendship: «The whole Arabian horse world has been admiring your great work and tasteful talent

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for many years. Without you this industry would lose so many hues, colors and shades. Thank you for being with us, not only during this special evening but every single day.»

«Ferdì is one of our (mine and Gigi's) best friends and most important clients. The role that Gigi plays in ArabianEssence is crucial. I have learnt a lot from him over the years and am still learning. It is thanks to him that I have such artistic taste and position in the marketing part of the Arabian horse industry. It is him that cheers me on when I don't feel any motivation, he also brings me down to Earth when I start to have my head in the clouds. Gigi taught me one basic thing - that if you're doing something you have to do it the best you can or not do it at all.»

ArabianEssence also carries out live broadcasts from shows all over the world and is the leader in this business in Europe and the Middle East. «We decided to create the LiveStream not for the money, but because we wanted to allow every fan to be able to see the show from their own home. So that people that can't travel could participate in a given event and web moderators could immediately update their web pages while cheering on horses from their countries. However the costs of such a broadcast, organizing a team with cameras, the travel expenses are significant. We knew that the majority of show organizers would not want to pay such money. The first broadcast was sponsored by us, as a sort of promotion. Thanks to our friends and clients we are now often able to find sponsors, which agree to support even a different show without their own horses. As a kind of help and auto promotion. And it works. We have a new project associated with ArabianEssence WebTv, but I won't say anymore about it now.»

Another thing that Elvis «caught» from Gigi is the constant traveling. «During my recent stay in Moscow last year I purchased several important books. I will never forget the looks of Irina Stigler, Marek Trela, Peter and Jenny Pond when

we visited one of the larger bookstores in the city. I purchased three volumes, each weighing about 8 kg. They looked at me like I was from outer space and asked what did I need those books for? I had to carry them with me the entire day, because that was the day that we toured the Kremlin. Books are special to me, because they teach us, give inspiration and new ideas, which even the most talented people don't have an endless supply of.»

The advertisements and designs created by Elvis have many sources of inspiration: his own taste, observations from his travels, nature. «If we look at flowers, birds, trees, the sky - we will never say that the color combinations are bad or don't match, they can only surprise us. Sometimes the ideas come from the clients. They tell us what they would want to see and we develop that concept according to our own taste.»

Since its establishing in 2005 ArabianEssence has been cooperating with the majority of the most known and largest Arabian horse studs in the world. «To me it is a great honor to be able to work for each of these clients. Regardless whether it is a large Middle Eastern stud or a European breeder with several horses. I try to do my best for each of them, that's why I have been working with many of them for years and hope that they remain not only my clients, but also my friends. That's why it is hard for me to say «no» when they ask me to do something, even during my vacation or when I'm ill.»

LUCKY IN ITALY

Elvis is a land surveyor by education. In Italy a surveyor not only measures the land, but also designs buildings and their surroundings, makes them fit into the landscape. He met Margaret at the high school. After graduating and a two year internship they opened their own company. Elvis is more into Arabian horses, Margaret runs a company that designs houses. They sometimes meet in the office to talk over the most



With Marieta Salas in Oman



With Gigi Grasso, Marco Sordelli and the Guardia Family in Panama



With Sheikhha Sarah Fahad Al Sabah in Kuwait

important projects and choose the best solution. Traveling is also important in this profession. Thanks to many journeys Margaret and Elvis learn about architecture in different cities and get to see breeders' houses from the inside. Elvis sees a similarity between his work and Margaret's. «The horse is the base, of course, so are the photos. It's like with a house, a wonderful roof is not enough to have a nice home and also if in a nice home you don't have good foundations, the walls and the roof cannot stay up by themselves. I personally think this is a good comparison.

To have a final great advertisement you need all the elements matching together. If I have a wonderful photo with an ugly design surrounding it, it will ruin not only the photo, not only the full advertisement, but it will also do a lot of bad PR to the horse. To have the best advertisement you have to work with the best elements and if you have the chance to merge them in a good way you are on top!»

Seeing the house that Elvis and his wife created there is no doubt that they are artists.

«We love antiques and prefer to renovate them than to buy new furniture. Similarly with houses, it is a greater satisfaction to renovate an old building than to build a new one. An old house is filled with invisible, but perceptible vibrations.

We are lucky to be living in Italy where there is a lot of places like this. We can participate in the restoration of many historic buildings, while not forgetting about the legacy of our ancestors.» Elvis designed and built his house together with Margaret. They chose materials for the renovation, all very old, often reclaimed from historic sites.

They bought every element separately, gradually creating their own home. Elvis believes that the place where you live and create a family and spend the majority of your life is very important to everyone. The finishing touches depend on the nature of the people living there.

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*When I close the doors to my office I focus on nothing else but my work. I don't feel the passing time, I don't know whether it's time for dinner or supper, whether it's still day or night [Margaret, forgive me!].»
Like a child that's playing and doesn't want to stop despite its mother calling to come for dinner...*



With Gigi Grasso , Charlie and Shirley Watts in Paris



With Miloslava Khamis in Shanghai



A view of the Arabian Essence offices

We spend 80% of our lives in the office, that's why we designed ours like the rest of the house in order to feel good, listen to good music, be able to have candles around us. If you feel good in your office you have a good chance at succeeding in your work.»

It turns out that living in Italy is not only a guarantee of quality - in literature, fashion, architecture, but also has an impact on horse breeding.

LOOKING FORWARD FOR MORE

Arabian Essence has many plans for the coming years. Elvis would like to collaborate with meritorious breeders and experts on Arabian horse breeding not only regarding mailblasts, photo galleries, show coverages, web pages, but on a larger scale. Several times during our conversation he mentioned cooperating with Judith Forbis on her books. «To work with such an important breeder as Judith is truly honorable and might happen once in a lifetime or even never. So I am proud I had this chance. Looking forward for more.»

When asked about personal plans and dreams, Elvis again does not hesitate: «Arabian Essence plans to go on and help people fall in love with Arabian horses and to promote them, to help this special world grow even more than it is at the

moment. I can also say I am fully satisfied with what I achieved in my private and professional life. But as someone said: never stop asking yourself whether the thing you have done is good enough! My dream is to breed such horses at Le Soleil that will shine at shows and have a huge impact on breeding on a large scale. I would then feel I had a contribution in this world, that is something I really care about. Because if we are to dream, we should dream as big as possible.» □

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