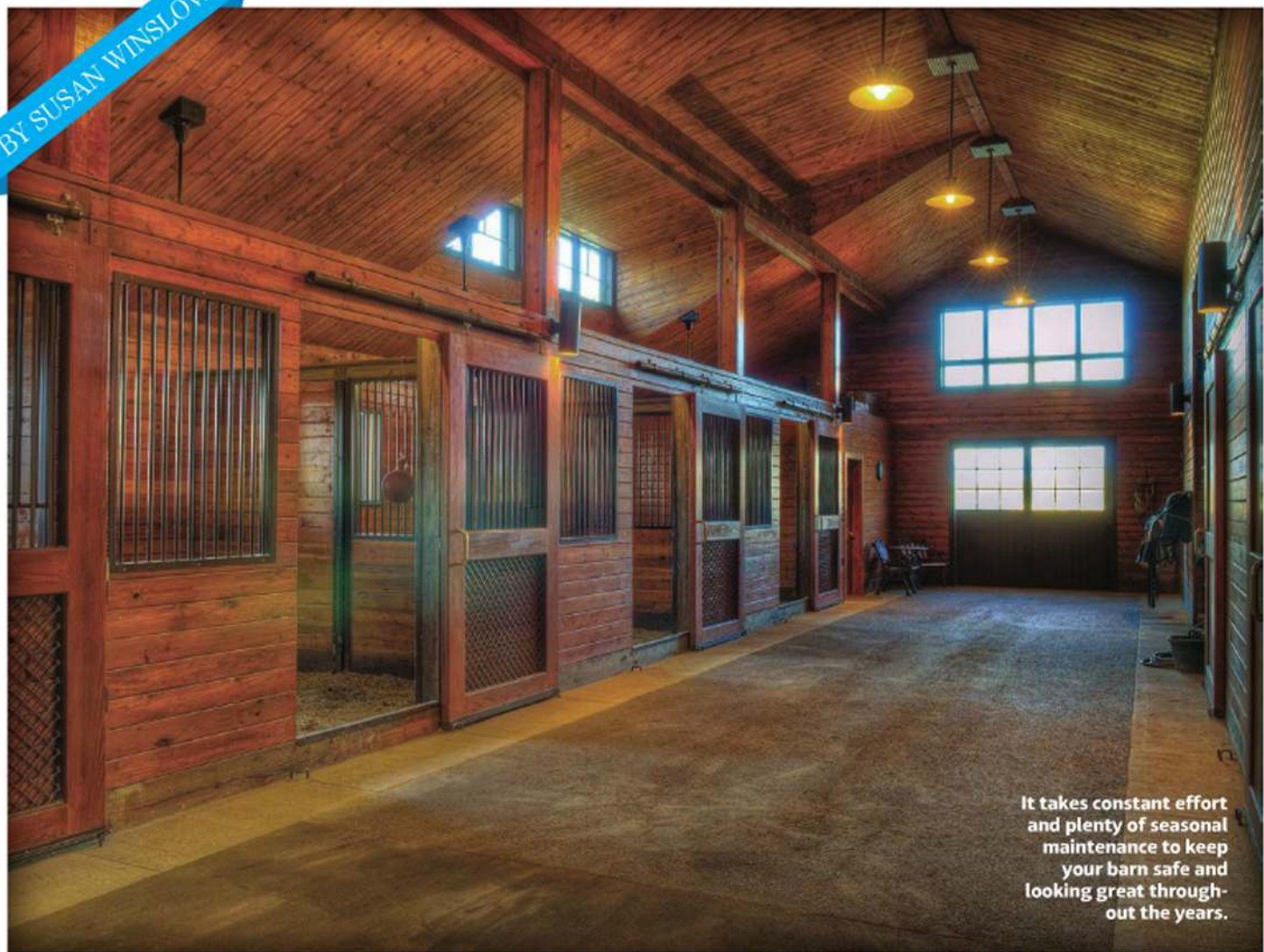


BY SUSAN WINSLOW



It takes constant effort and plenty of seasonal maintenance to keep your barn safe and looking great throughout the years.

# A LASTING Impression

## Tips for Maintaining Your Barn In Any Weather

Anyone who has spent time around farms knows the constant effort it takes to maintain a barn or arena. From the minute the last nail is driven in a new barn, the elements conspire to undo all your hard work on the outside, while horses work their destructive magic on the inside. However, with seasonal maintenance, it's possible to stay ahead of these factors to keep your barn and arena attractive and safe.

Paul and Karen Cuneo and their daughter, Kristen, are the owners of the

169-acre Kingswood Farm and the Wings and Hooves Therapeutic Horseback Riding Program in East Kingston, NH. Karen describes the level of commitment necessary to maintain their high standard of safety and cleanliness, "We love living on the farm, but most people who don't have a barn of their own don't understand that you are on 24/7, 365 days a year, and everything that comes up broken comes out of your own pocket. In winter there are the elements: snow/ice, subzero temperatures, rain,

and high winds. In spring and summer, the maintenance issues are daily checking of paddock/fencing, keeping down the dust in the arena, and maintaining the fly control spray system."

With 36 horses on the property, the Cuneos routinely check fence lines, stall interiors, and aisle ways for damage. She says, "Wear and tear from the equines is constant: chewing, kicking at stall doors, weaving or pacing in paddocks, all those things take a toll, so the maintenance is constant."

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Horses can make safety hazards out of the most benign conditions. That is why grill spacing, wall strength, and the quality of stall materials are important.

## Extreme Weather Preparation

It's important to be proactive in your seasonal barn care. Dylan Zublin, operations manager at Old Town Barns in Pawling, NY, encourages barn owners to take extra steps to prepare for the extreme weather challenges in northern regions before they happen. He says, "While there are several chores to be done prior to the start of each new season, preparations for the winter months can be much more critical. Water, feed, and medication for animals are essential in keeping them healthy, so be sure to test water heaters and climate controls before the harsh winter weather begins. Double check that the ventilation system is working properly to ensure there is enough airflow inside the barn while the doors are closed. Also make sure that the barn roof is in good condition to handle the additional weight of the snow and check that the gutters are clear of any leaves to allow for the melting snow to drain properly. Above all else, stay safe and keep warm."

The experts at Lucas Equine Equipment specialize in helping farm owners cut down on seasonal and routine maintenance by listening to concerns of farm owners like the Cuneos and developing products geared toward low and maintenance-free care. Nick Thornton is a stall design expert at Lucas. He says, "Weather and climate are definitely important considerations when building or rehabbing horse stalls or barns. For instance, in coastal areas where salt air is prevalent, choosing hot-dipped galvanized stalls will create a rugged and practically maintenance-free coating. Severe weather in any area makes stainless steel hinges and latches vital elements for stall and barn doors. After all, these are the parts of your barn that you'll open and close thousands of times over the course of a few years. Use the very best materials and companies you can afford. Don't cut corners to save money. If you do, you'll likely spend more money re-doing those 'cut corners' down the road."

*Thornton offers the following suggestions for fall and spring maintenance:*

- **Clean, Clean, Clean.** Clear out those cobwebs and layers of dust that have

accumulated over the winter. Not only is this dirt just plain unattractive, it can also create a fire hazard and contributes to respiratory problems in both humans and animals. Remember, clean steel stall components with water and a mild dish-washing liquid, never abrasive cleaners. Never pressure-wash wooden stalls. The intense pressure can degrade the wood.

- **Be on the Lookout.** Bored horses cooped up in some of the worst winter weather can inflict wear and tear on even the most durable stalls. Take this opportunity to inspect and repair the interior of the stall. You'll be looking for any cracked or broken boards or exposed steel (if a horse has chewed off any paint). Any exposed steel should immediately be touched up with paint. Contact your stall manufacturer for a color that will match. Hot dip galvanized stalls will likely need little maintenance on the coating. Powder coated or wet painted stalls may need to be touched up or painted every few years, depending on your environment. You should also use this time to consider future prevention of this type of wear and tear. Stall design experts can offer many great solutions, such as chew guards or stronger types of hardwood.