

EQUESTRIAN PROPERTY

INSPECTION GUIDE

9 Things to Look for Before
Making an Offer

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WHAT YOU'LL LEARN in this guide



Buying a horse property isn't like buying a traditional home—it's a complex investment that requires careful evaluation of the land, facilities, and long-term usability. The wrong property can lead to costly repairs, safety hazards, or even zoning restrictions that prevent you from keeping horses at all. That's why knowing what to inspect before making an offer is critical.

This guide walks you through the nine most important factors every equestrian buyer should evaluate before committing to a property. From ensuring a reliable water source to assessing pasture health, drainage, fencing, and barns, you'll learn how to spot red flags, avoid costly mistakes, and choose a property that truly supports your horses and lifestyle.

Whether you're looking for a private equestrian retreat, a breeding operation, or a competitive training facility, this guide will help you make a confident, informed decision.

Let's get started!

ARENA FOOTING QUALITY & DRAINAGE

TIP #9

If the property has an arena, don't assume it's competition-ready just because it looks good. Poor footing and drainage can lead to lameness, injuries, and expensive repairs. Even the most beautifully built barns won't matter if your horses can't train safely.

What to Look For:

- **Footing Depth & Consistency** – The ideal depth varies by discipline, but footing should be evenly distributed with no deep spots or hard, compacted areas. Uneven footing can cause tendon strain or tripping hazards.
- **Drainage & Water Control** – A well-designed arena should drain efficiently and not turn into a swamp after rain. Standing water or deep mud is a sign of poor grading or improper base installation.
- **Base Stability** – The base under the footing is just as important as the top layer. If it shifts or develops holes, it can be costly to fix. Ask if the base was professionally installed and how it has held up over time.
- **Dust Control** – Excess dust can cause respiratory issues for both horses and riders. If the footing dries out quickly, ask about existing moisture control systems or irrigation options.

Red Flags:

Large puddles or areas where water doesn't drain properly

Footing that feels uneven, too deep, or too compacted in certain spots

Visible base material showing through the top layer

Excessive dust, especially in dry climates without a watering system

Pro Tip:

If the arena isn't in great shape but everything else about the property is ideal, get a professional quote for fixing it before making an offer. A poorly maintained arena can cost tens of thousands of dollars to repair, so factor that into your budget.

ZONING LAWS & LAND USE RESTRICTIONS

TIP #8

Not all land is created equal when it comes to horses. I've seen too many buyers fall in love with a property, only to realize too late that they can't legally keep horses there or are restricted from expanding their facilities. When you work with an experienced equestrian real estate agent, you'll get the inside scoop on which areas are truly horse-friendly and which come with frustrating restrictions.



Red Flags:

- The seller says “horses are allowed” but doesn't provide zoning confirmation
- The property is part of an HOA with unclear rules about livestock
- No existing horse facilities, even though the land is advertised as equestrian-friendly
- Lack of clarity about access to roads, trails, or water sources

Pro Tip:

Zoning laws can be complicated, but they're not negotiable. Before making an offer, I always help my clients research the exact zoning designation and confirm land use rights directly with the county or city. If you're not sure, don't assume—ask an expert who's been through this process countless times. It could save you huge headaches down the road.

BARN STRUCTURE & VENTILATION

A beautiful barn might look impressive in photos, but what really matters is how safe, functional, and well-ventilated it is for your horses.

What to Look For:

- Solid Construction & Roof Integrity – Walk the perimeter and check for signs of rot, sagging beams, rusted metal, or loose panels.
- Ventilation & Airflow – Poor ventilation can lead to respiratory issues in horses. Check for ridge vents, open eaves, or windows that allow for cross-breeze circulation.
- Safe Stall Design – Stalls should be at least 12x12 feet (or larger for warmbloods and drafts) with kick-proof walls and smooth, chew-resistant edges. Old, flimsy partitions can be dangerous.
- Drainage & Moisture Control – Water damage is a silent killer of barns.
- Lighting & Electrical Safety – Look for well-placed, shatterproof lighting and safely installed electrical wiring. Old or exposed wiring is a serious fire hazard, and unfortunately, I've seen it more times than I'd like.



Red Flags:

Strong ammonia smell or excessive dust buildup

Rotting wood, rusted metal, or visible structural damage

No windows, vents, or airflow, leading to stuffy, stagnant air

Unsafe stall construction (warped boards, jagged edges, or weak partitions)

Pro Tip:

A barn can be updated or remodeled, but structural issues are expensive to fix. If you find a property with a barn that needs work, get a professional estimate before making an offer. I've helped many buyers negotiate repair credits or factor in upgrade costs so they don't get stuck with unexpected expenses. A well-built barn is worth every penny—it protects your horses, your investment, and your peace of mind.



WELL CAPACITY & WATER RIGHTS

You can fix a barn, upgrade an arena, or improve pastures—but if a property doesn't have enough water, it's a dealbreaker.

Horses drink 10-15 gallons per day, per horse (more in hot weather), and that doesn't even include water for irrigation, cleaning stalls, or maintaining an arena. A well that can't support your needs is a disaster waiting to happen.

I've seen buyers assume that if a property has a well, they're good to go—only to find out later that the water pressure is weak, the well runs dry in the summer, or worse, they don't actually own the water rights. That's why I always tell my clients: never skip the water inspection.

What to Look For:

- **Well Flow Rate & Capacity** – Ask for a recent well report to confirm the flow rate (gallons per minute) and depth. A well should be able to handle both household and horse-related needs without running low.
- **Legal Water Rights** – In some areas, just because there's water on the land doesn't mean you have full rights to use it. Confirm who owns the water rights and whether there are any restrictions on usage.
- **Backup Water Options** – If the property relies solely on a well, check whether a secondary water source is available (such as a cistern, creek, or irrigation district access).
- **Irrigation System & Pasture Watering** – If you plan to maintain green pastures, make sure there's an efficient irrigation system that can handle the demand without overtaxing the well.

Red Flags:

Low water pressure or inconsistent flow from faucets

A well depth that's too shallow for the area's typical groundwater levels

No documentation of water rights or restrictions on usage

No secondary water source in case of drought or well failure

Pro Tip:

Water issues can be expensive—or impossible—to fix. Before making an offer, I always recommend a professional well inspection, including a flow test and water quality check.

FUTURE EXPANSION POSSIBILITIES

Right now, the property might have everything you need—but what about five or ten years from now? Many of my clients start out thinking they only need a few stalls and a small turnout, only to realize later that they want an arena, extra paddocks, or even space for breeding or boarding. The last thing you want is to fall in love with a property, move in, and then find out you can't expand the way you need to.

I always tell my buyers: Think long-term. Even if you don't have expansion plans today, it's wise to choose a property that gives you options for the future.

What to Look For:

- **Available Acreage** – Is there enough space to add more stalls, turnout areas, or an arena if needed? Some properties look spacious but have unusable land due to terrain, wetlands, or easements.
- **Zoning & Building Restrictions** – Just because you have the land doesn't mean you can build on it. Some areas limit the number of structures, barns, or fenced areas allowed per parcel. Always verify before you buy.
- **Access & Layout** – Even if the property has space, is it laid out in a way that makes expansion possible? If new structures would block driveways, restrict trailer access, or interfere with drainage, you may be limited.
- **Soil & Drainage Considerations** – Not all land is buildable. If the best area for an arena or additional barn is low-lying and floods easily, expansion could be costly or impractical.

Red Flags:

The property has extra land, but zoning laws prohibit additional barns or outbuildings

There's no space to expand without major grading, tree removal, or infrastructure costs

Local HOAs or county restrictions limit fencing, turnout, or arena construction

The current barn layout leaves no room for safe expansion without disrupting traffic flow

Pro Tip:

I always encourage my clients to think ahead—even if they don't plan to expand today. Whether you want more stalls, a covered arena, or just room to grow, choosing a property with expansion potential is one of the smartest investments you can make.

FENCING & SAFETY

TIP #4

Fencing is one of the most critical safety features of any horse property. A stunning barn and lush pastures mean nothing if the fencing is unsafe, poorly maintained, or inadequate for containing horses. I've walked properties where the fencing looked great from a distance, only to find loose boards, rusty nails, and even barbed wire hidden in the back fields. These kinds of issues can lead to injuries, vet bills, and constant repair headaches. When buying a horse property, don't just glance at the fencing—inspect it carefully. Replacing fencing can be extremely expensive, so knowing what you're getting into before making an offer is essential.

What to Look For:

- **Type of Fencing** – Horse-safe fencing options include wood, vinyl, V-mesh, and coated electric fencing. Avoid barbed wire, chain link, or anything with sharp edges.
- **Condition & Stability** – Walk the perimeter and physically push on sections of the fence. Are the posts solid? Are boards or wires loose? A fence should be sturdy enough to withstand a horse leaning or rubbing against it.
- **Height & Suitability** – Fences should be at least 4.5 to 5 feet high for most horses, with smaller openings to prevent legs from getting caught. If you have foals or sport horses, you may need even higher fencing.
- **Pasture Layout & Safety** – Well-planned pastures have safe corners, wide gates, and smooth terrain. Narrow or awkward layouts can lead to horses getting trapped or injured.

Red Flags:

Barbed wire, chain link, or broken-down wooden fences
Weak, wobbly, or rotting fence posts
Gaps between boards or mesh large enough for a hoof to get stuck
Electric fencing with exposed or frayed wiring

Pro Tip:

Fencing is one of the biggest hidden costs of buying a horse property. If the fencing is in bad shape, I always recommend getting a repair or replacement estimate before making an offer. Depending on acreage, replacing fencing can cost tens of thousands of dollars—an expense that could be negotiated into the sale or factored into your budget.

DRAINAGE & FLOODING RISKS

TIP #3

Water is essential for a horse property, but too much of it in the wrong places can be a nightmare. Poor drainage can make pastures unusable, stall floors wet and unsafe, and arenas a muddy mess for months. It's one of the most overlooked factors when buying an equestrian property—but trust me, it's one of the most important.

What to Look For:

- Pasture Drainage – Walk the pastures and look for low-lying, muddy areas. Even in dry weather, you can spot signs of poor drainage—thin grass, compacted soil, or uneven patches where water has pooled before.
- Barn & Stall Drainage – The barn should be built on slightly higher ground so water naturally drains away from stalls and walkways. Wet stalls lead to mud, ammonia buildup, and hoof problems.
- Arena Drainage – If there's an arena, make sure it doesn't have standing water or deep, uneven footing. A well-designed arena should drain quickly after rain.
- Road & Driveway Conditions – Muddy, rutted driveways or waterlogged access roads are a major red flag. Getting a trailer stuck after a storm is no fun.

Red Flags:

Pooled water or deep mud in pastures, near barns, or in riding areas

A barn that sits at the lowest point on the property (water will drain into it)

Mold or dampness inside stalls and tack rooms

Driveways or access roads that become impassable after rain

Pro Tip:

If you're looking at a property during dry weather, ask about past flooding issues and request photos or videos from wetter months. I always help my buyers assess the natural grading and drainage of a property so they don't end up with a mud pit in the winter and a dust bowl in the summer.

Drainage problems can be fixed—but knowing the scope and cost before you buy can save you thousands in unexpected expenses.

PASTURE HEALTH & FORAGE AVAILABILITY

A stunning barn is nice, but if the pastures can't support your horses, you're looking at a serious long-term cost issue.

The truth is, not all land is good horse land. Just because a property has acreage doesn't mean it can sustain horses year-round. Before making an offer, it's essential to assess pasture quality, soil condition, and whether you'll need supplemental feeding.

What to Look For:

- **Grass Coverage & Forage Quality** – Healthy pastures should have thick, diverse grass that provides proper nutrition. Large patches of bare dirt, weeds, or thin grass indicate overgrazing or poor soil health.
- **Rotational Grazing Potential** – To prevent overgrazing, pastures should allow for rotational grazing—meaning multiple fenced sections so horses can be moved periodically. A single, overused pasture will quickly become muddy, barren, and unusable.
- **Soil Quality** – Sandy or rocky soil struggles to hold nutrients, while clay-heavy soil can become a muddy mess in wet weather. If the pastures aren't thriving, you may need soil testing and amendments.
- **Shade & Natural Shelter** – Look for trees, windbreaks, or run-in sheds to protect horses from extreme heat, wind, and rain. Open pastures with no cover can be uncomfortable and even dangerous in certain climates.
- **Fencing & Water Access** – Even with great grass, pastures need reliable water sources and safe fencing to be functional. Check for automatic waterers, trough placement, and whether fencing allows for easy pasture rotation.

Red Flags:

- Large areas of bare dirt, weeds, or overgrazed land with little grass left
- No separate paddocks or sections for rotational grazing
- Water troughs placed in muddy, eroded areas with poor drainage
- Pastures that are too small to comfortably sustain the number of horses expected

Pro Tip:

Healthy pastures save you thousands in hay costs every year. Before my clients make an offer, I help them evaluate whether the land can actually support their horses—or if they'll be relying on hay year-round. If pasture quality is poor but the land is otherwise ideal, get a soil test and estimate the cost of pasture restoration before committing. The difference between good and bad grazing land directly affects your long-term costs and your horses' well-being.

WATER SOURCES & QUALITY

If there's one thing that can make or break a horse property, it's the water supply.

You can fix fencing, upgrade barns, and reseed pastures—but if the water is unreliable, contaminated, or insufficient, none of that matters.

I've worked with buyers who assumed that because a property had a well or a pond, they were set—only to find out later that the well runs dry in the summer, the water pressure is too weak, or they don't even own the water rights. This is not a risk you want to take.

What to Look For:

- **Well Capacity & Flow Rate** – Request a recent well report to confirm how many gallons per minute the well produces. Some older wells can barely support a household, let alone a barn full of thirsty horses.
- **Legal Water Rights & Usage Restrictions** – Just because there's water on the property doesn't mean you can use it freely. Confirm who owns the water rights and whether there are any restrictions, especially in drought-prone areas.
- **Backup Water Options** – If the property relies solely on a well, check for a secondary source, like a spring, creek, pond, or irrigation district access. Running out of water isn't just inconvenient—it's a crisis.
- **Irrigation & Automatic Waterers** – Pastures and barns need a dependable watering system to avoid dust, heat stress, and dehydration risks. Inspect hydrants, auto-waterers, and irrigation setups to ensure they function properly.

Red Flags:

- Low well flow rate or inconsistent water pressure
- No documentation of legal water rights or restrictions on usage
- Dry wells or seasonal water shortages reported by past owners or neighbors
- No secondary water source in case of drought or well failure

Pro Tip:

I never let my buyers skip a **professional well inspection**. If there's one thing you want to be 100% sure about, it's the water supply. A dry well can cost tens of thousands to fix—if it's even fixable, and you can imagine the danger for the horses.

If you're looking at a high-acreage horse property, you need to be certain the water supply can support your needs year-round.



PHENOMENIAL EXPERIENCE!

We have had the experience of doing business with Heidi since 2000 and cannot imagine a better experience in completing over 20 transactions with her. Her seemingly endless level of expertise in all areas, from the listing and staging, to understanding the markets and her ability to work with buying agents, title companies, inspection and repair contractors and so much more made our lives so much easier during a very complication period of our lives. Heidi is a true professional and the very best! Our sales have had some incredibly complicated aspects to it and Heidi and her office never blinked when dealing with issues that arose. She was always available for phone calls and long meetings any time of day or night. We not only walked away with a sale that both parties were with, we came away with a new family friend. There are not words to describe what a god send Heidi has been for us during the entire process. Thank you Heidi for all your hard work for us over the years!

Ginn Family



Heidi made the home selling process easy and worry-free. I would recommend her professional yet very personable service without any reservations. She remained in contact and kept me updated on any progress in selling my home.

Yolanda P.



I purchased 2 investment properties from Heidi. I could not have completed my complex exchange without Heidi's professional expertise and unmatched negotiating skills. Hands down to Heidi for a superb experience.

Russ C.

READY TO FIND THE PERFECT EQUESTRIAN PROPERTY FOR YOU? [SCHEDULE A CALL](#)

Let's make sure you find a property that truly fits your horses, your lifestyle, and your future goals.

Schedule a free discovery call with me today, and let's determine if we're the right fit to work together. I'll walk you through the process, help you avoid costly mistakes, and show you exactly how I can help you find the perfect equestrian property.



ABOUT ME

Raised in Northern California, I developed a strong foundation rooted in hard work, ethics, and community—principles that continue to shape my approach to real estate today. Dual-licensed in California and Illinois, I bring a wealth of local knowledge and global connections to every transaction.

Coming from a highly competitive family of professional athletes, I am a former state-ranked tennis player, a lifelong equestrian, a runner, and a swimmer. This natural energy and enthusiasm drive my commitment to excellence, whether you are selling your first home, searching for a dream residence, or exploring investment opportunities.

I am also deeply committed to giving back to the communities where I work and reside. I donate to the Sunshine Kids—an organization dedicated to children with cancer—from every transaction I close. My past volunteer work includes serving on the Board of Directors for STAND (Battered Women's Alternative) and supporting local food banks, women's shelters, and children's hospitals.

Anyone who has done business with Heidii over the past 41 years knows its been a pleasurable ride!



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PROFESSION. I'M DEDICATED TO
PROVIDING EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE,
EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS, AND
HELPING CLIENTS ACHIEVE THEIR
HOMEOWNERSHIP DREAMS.



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