

MEET OLD SALEM FARM *Super Groom* JUAN MARTINEZ

Juan Martinez celebrated his one-year anniversary at Old Salem Farm in June and never imagined he would be working for one of the top show jumping barns in North America. Juan was born in Sacramento, CA, but his family hails from Guadalajara, Mexico, where he worked in construction before finding horses.



JUAN MARTINEZ WITH OLD SALEM FARM HOMEBRED ROXSTAR.

"I worked with rubber and cement construction, but because I was a U.S. citizen, many of my friends told me that I should consider grooming in the States," said Juan.

While working at his construction job Monday through Saturday each week, Juan heeded their advice and spent his Sundays exploring farms in Mexico in order to learn to care for horses. After choosing to groom full-time, Juan returned to the U.S. in 2010 in search of a work as a groom. Soon after, he found himself on the East Coast, and has since worked for the likes of Olympic bronze medalist Norman Dello Joio, Missy Clark and John Brennan's North Run, as well as Fairfield County Hunt Club.

Now an integral part of the Old Salem Farm team under the direction of trainers Frank Madden and Stella Manship, Juan lives in Danbury, CT, with his wife Bertha Sanchez and their three daughters Maria, Diana, and Alejandra.

"It was the best thing that ever happened to me," said Juan of his decision to groom at Old Salem Farm, based in North Salem, NY. "Everyone is friendly around the barn, and that is my favorite part about being here. We all know our jobs and do them well. We are a good team."

Juan's favorite part about grooming is preparing horses for competition, saying, "Presentation is so important, and getting the horses clean and shiny is what I enjoy. But also, I love seeing my horses win ribbons and their owners happy."

Around the barn, Juan is best known for his knack for perfect jumper braids and spotless stalls, but perhaps more importantly for an obvious dedication to all the horses under his care.

"Whether he is preparing a horse to show or simply keeping them turned out well at home, Juan's work is second-to-none," said Manship. "He is a pleasure to work with, but the most obvious testament of his hard work comes from the horses. They respond well to him, and he is dedicated to ensuring they receive the best care possible. Grooms are the backbone of Old Salem Farm, and we are lucky to have Juan as part of our team."

We caught up with Juan at Old Salem Farm and asked him to share some of his tips and tricks to rave-worthy horse care. Here's what he told us:

HORSES CAN'T TELL TIME

Juan's number-one rule is to be on time and to never rush the horses through their care, grooming, and horse show preparation.

"It is important to take your time and be calm and quiet, so the horses are calm and quiet as well," he said. "The horses need to trust you and when they know you are doing your best, they want to do their best."

"And, always having treats with you really helps!" continued Juan.

Juan learned the importance of a calm and composed routine during his first few days at Old Salem Farm when a homebred named Roxstar was placed under his care. Juan helped with Roxstar's familiarization with the barn's routine, introduction to tack, and start to his training.

“He was so little and green,” said Juan. “He was my first horse at Old Salem Farm, and we became friends. He knows me and I know him, and he trusts me. I feel like he is still a baby, but his body has changed so much – he is a big, muscular horse now.”

COAT CARE, COAT CARE, COAT CARE

For Juan, shine is a sign of a horse that is properly groomed and cared for, and he maintains that the only true shine comes through elbow grease. Juan has a well-loved red body brush that is responsible for the head-turning shine on his horses.

“Sometimes I brush them for over a half an hour,” he said. “That brush is my only secret!”

To supplement his brushing practices, Juan bathes his horses after they are ridden, uses the Electro-Groom vacuum on them after they spend time in their paddocks, and maintains perfect tails thanks to a little Show Sheen from Beval Saddlery, the official tack store of Old Salem Farm. In addition, Juan dabs some baby oil on their noses, shines their hooves with Effol Hoof Ointment, and finishes with a buff from a cotton towel.

KEEPING THE GRAY HORSE GRAY

An ever-present grooming dilemma is the talent most gray horses possess of adding a little color to their pristine coats. Juan always has Quic Silver shampoo and Cowboy Magic Greenspot Remover on hand, but prevention is his best tool.

“A good layer of clean bedding is the only way to really keep gray horses clean,” he said. “I make sure the manure and urine is always removed quickly, and when the horses are showing, I come to the barn during the night to clean the stall and add more bedding.”

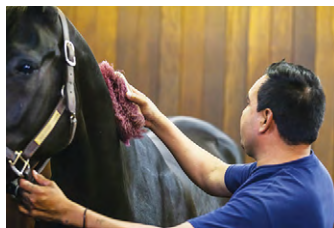
While Juan has specialty shampoos in his grooming stall, for daily bathing he turns to generic Ivory dish soap.

WHEN IN DOUBT, PLEDGE IT OUT

No, Juan doesn't use Pledge on his horses. But, he does approach every day with the motto: “If you have a clean barn, you have a safe barn”. Cleanliness and organization are priorities at Old Salem Farm, and their go-to product to keep the barn spotless is Pledge. It is their secret to keeping stall bars sparkling, wood paneling gleaming, and the whole facility smelling fresh and clean.

“We use it on everything except the horses,” concluded Juan with a laugh.

■ STORY AND PHOTOS BY LINDSAY BROCK/JUMP MEDIA



ABOVE COUNTERCLOCKWISE: MARTINEZ BRUSHING ROXSTAR WITH HIS FAVORITE BODY BRUSH; USING THE ELECTRO-GROOM; POLISHING ROXSTAR'S HOOVES; WRAPPING HIS LEGS; MARTINEZ SHOWING OFF HIS JUMPER BRAIDS; AND TENDING TO ROXSTAR'S TAIL;

TOP RIGHT: OLD SALEM FARM IN NORTH SALEM, NEW YORK; AND LEFT: TWO OLD SALEM FARM STAPLES – PLEDGE, WHICH HELPS KEEPS THE BARN CLEAN AND IVORY DISH SOAP FOR DAILY BATHING.