

by Lindsay Brock

Martha Jolicoeur



Photo © Erin Gilmore



Martha Wachtel (Jolicoeur) and Sweet Lullaby; photo courtesy of the Washington Intl. Horse Show

Before devoting herself to real estate, Martha Jolicoeur first made a name for herself among the equestrian community as a top amateur show jumping athlete. Having trained with several North American legends of horse sport, she is now Wellington's go-to broker for residential and equestrian properties. Jolicoeur may have hung up her show coat, but she is still a familiar face, industry supporter, and event sponsor in the equestrian world from Wellington, FL, to Canada. For Martha, real estate is now her sport, and she's winning!

Horse & Style: How did your riding career take shape?

Martha Jolicoeur: I grew up in Westport, CT, which is located in the heart of northeastern horse country, so riding felt like a natural step for me. As a junior I trained with George Morris and rode a horse he and Katie Monahan [Prudent] found for me named Movie Star. She was an amazing small junior hunter, and on her I was grand junior hunter champion at Devon in 1977 and '78 and was named Best Child Rider at the Pennsylvania National Horse Show in 1978. I also earned ribbons at Medal and Maclay Finals.

H&S: Who were some of the biggest influences on your riding?

MJ: George gave me a foundation that was invaluable for the rest of my career in the saddle. But, when I attended college at St. Lawrence University in Canton, NY, I got serious about the jumper discipline and

started training with 10-time Canadian Olympian Ian Millar. He really encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone. He told me that I knew exactly what I needed to do to ride jumpers successfully, but I was afraid. I had been doing the amateur jumpers with George, but Ian made me competitive on a variety of horses and he found a horse for me named Sweet Lullaby that I ended up buying from Belgium's François Mathy. Ian first saw her in Switzerland in a little town between Geneva and Zurich, and she was definitely the best horse I ever had.

The other person who influenced my riding was Norman Dello Joio. After I graduated from college, I moved to New York City and began riding with him. He taught me that I was capable of jumping even bigger and going even faster. He put the finishing touches on my riding to complete the package. Under his direction, I was named American Grand Prix Association (AGA) Rookie of the Year in 1985.

H&S: Do you remember the first time you stepped into the grand prix ranks?

MJ: Someone else had to enter me in my first grand prix because I was too nervous to commit! I was always placing first and second in the Friday open jumper classes in Palm Beach, but I was too scared to ever enter the grand prix. I didn't know it, but one week, Mario Deslauriers nominated me and that's how I did my first grand prix with Sweet Lullaby.

A few weeks later, I won the \$25,000 Mercedes Masters World Cup Grand Prix, of course with Sweet Lullaby.

H&S: Explain the transition from riding to real estate?

MJ: From 1986 to 1990, I continued competing in the grand prix ranks and rode in Europe as well. In 1991 though, I started thinking beyond my career in the saddle. My former husband Pierre and I had moved to a farm in Culpeper while I was

working in Middleburg, VA, and I decided to balance my riding with a career in real estate. I got my license and began selling in both the Northeast and in Wellington, FL, during the winter season.

In 2005, I decided to make a big change. I was riding my horse along a hill and thought to myself, 'I'm not getting better at riding, and I really want to secure my future for my family.' My daughter, Isabel, was in eighth grade then and has now graduated with a law degree from the University of Miami. I got off the horse that day and asked Pierre if it was time to sell the farm and focus on real estate full-time. He agreed, and we moved to Florida for me to focus on real estate. I wanted to be really good at something. To this day people ask me if I miss riding. It was a conscious decision to stop riding and focus on real estate, but I feel lucky that I still get to spend so much time at the shows and around horses.

Today, I am a member of the Douglas Elliman Real Estate Sports and Entertainment Division and I have found my calling. I feel the same passion and joy for helping my clients buy and sell properties as I did when I was competing in the show ring.

H&S: Why did you choose to base your business in Wellington, FL?

MJ: I have been working within the Wellington real estate community since I

got my start, but I have been in love with the location since showing here myself as a junior rider. I have watched Wellington and the Winter Equestrian Festival (WEF) grow from the ground up, which has equipped me with unique opportunities to help buyers and sellers find their own piece of horse heaven. It is an honor to be involved with WEF and to interact with some of the world's top show jumping athletes, trainers, and owners looking to sell a property or find a place to call their own in Wellington.

I am a horsewoman and I understand what equestrian clients need and want for their horses and their families. That understanding puts me in front of a very specific audience, but it is an audience that speaks the same language; and that is the language of horse. For me, Wellington is a unique and fabulously special place because it is not dedicated to one discipline. It is the winter horse capital of the world because one can find show jumping, dressage, polo, racing, and everything in between here.

H&S: How have you seen the equestrian real estate market change throughout your tenure?

MJ: Real estate obviously has peaks and valleys that coincide with the health of the economy. When I started in Wellington, there was a boom in the market. You listed things and they sold right away. I still feel that we have a very healthy market, and more people

are coming to Wellington today than in 2005 because of the growth of the horse sport industry itself. Growth has been the biggest facilitator for a healthy market in Wellington. Before, people were renting more than buying, but today more people are buying because they realize the horse show is here to stay and they spend more nights of the year in Florida than any other location in the world. I would say that the great majority of equestrians have someplace to call home in Wellington.

H&S: What inspired you to create the Martha Jolicoeur Leading Lady Rider Award?

MJ: When I was competing, my favorite award to win was most definitely the Leading Lady Rider Award in a sport that makes no distinction between male and female athletes. It was a sign that I was consistently successful. That inspired me to dedicate a portion of my support of events like WEF and the Upperville Colt & Horse Show in Upperville, VA, to showcasing women who strive for and achieve success. I have now been presenting the award at WEF for nine consecutive seasons.

H&S: Will we see you back in the competition ring anytime soon?

MJ: I never stopped riding from the juniors all the way to the grand prix level. Horses are still my passion, but for now real estate is my competitive sport. Although, I have been working on my golf and tennis games lately! **H&S**



Martha and Isabel Jolicoeur



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