

The Arabian Ho

Nasr Marei

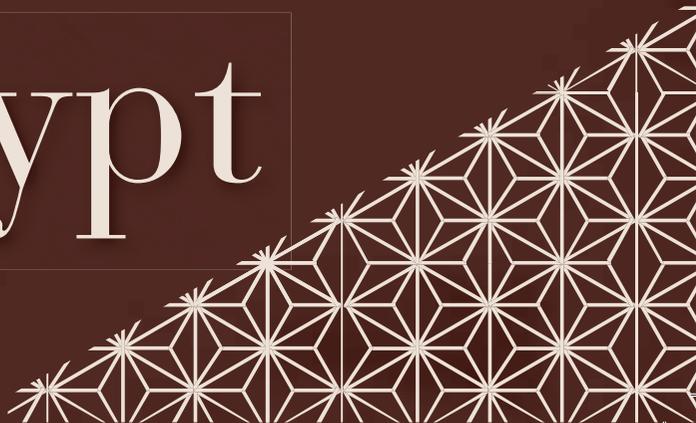
■ by **Pat Canfield**

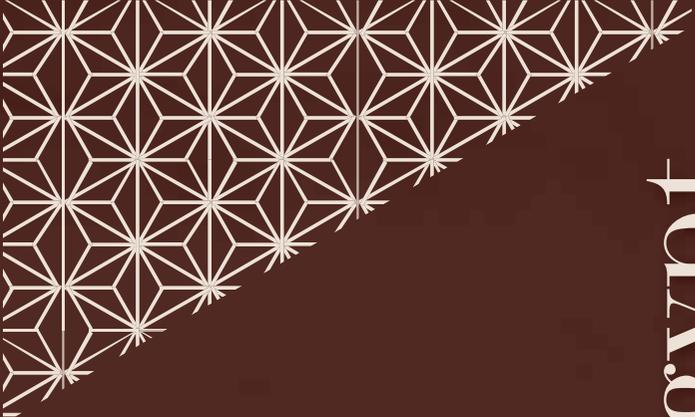
Photographs by Nasr Marei from The Arabian Horse of Egypt, published by the American University in Cairo Press (www.aucpress.com).

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Dr. Nasr Marei as the owner of Albadeia Stud in Cairo has been an internationally recognized breeder of Straight Egyptian Arabian horses for over four decades. In that time he has also become recognized

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The Arabian Horse of Egypt

as an exceptional photographer. He has combined both passions in a book, *The Arabian Horse of Egypt*, which features over 130 of his photographs of the Egyptian horse, a historical Introduction written by Cynthia Culbertson and forwarded by HRH Princess Alia Bent Al Hussein of Jordan. The book is published by The American University in Cairo Press.

Dr. Marei recently discussed his thoughts on the book.

PC: It is evident that you have a long time fascination with both horses and photography. When did you have your first camera?

NM: When I was seven or eight years old, I was quite keen to have a camera and my father, Sayed Marei gave me a Kodak Brownie, one of the original black box cameras. I carried it with me all the time mostly photographing my family and friends. Then when I was eleven or twelve, I was given a Nikon as an incentive to work harder and began to capture landscapes and animals. I won a National contest for Prep school students with a photo of a swan in a lake showing reflections in the water. I still have the trophy because it was the first prize that I won.

PC: And when did you begin to photograph horses?

NM: As a teenager, I was very active in show jumping and dressage so I was able to shoot my colleagues at training and in competition. I even accompanied our 60's Olympic team to Rome where they took a fourth place in the Nation's Cup and photographed some of the world's leading riders. In the mid 70's, I returned from my Academic stint in the States and began to discover the incredible beauty of the Arabian horse as a living work of art. I then began to attempt to document the spirit and artistry of the horse.

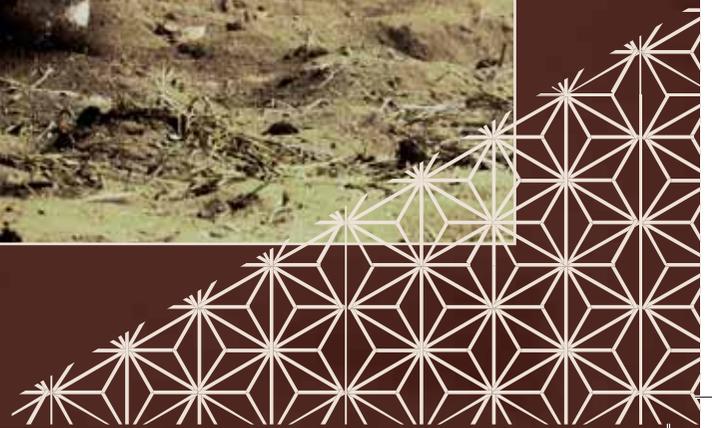
PC: Who were some of your favorites among the early horses that you photographed?

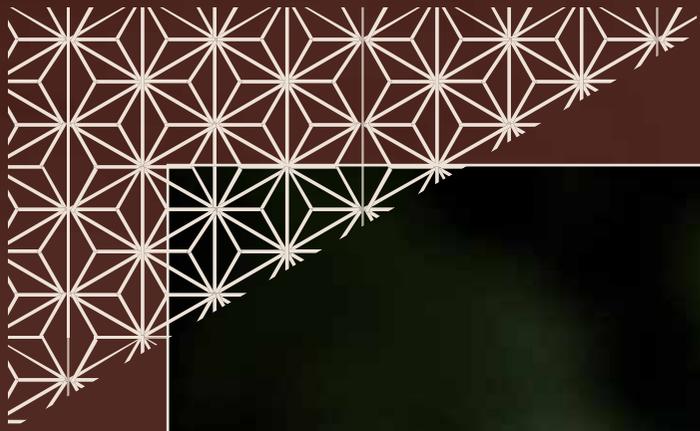
NM: The first one who leaps to mind is Ameer Albadeia (Kayed x Malekat El Gamal) and his father, Kayed, the Morafic son out of Kaydahom who was our foundation sire. Among the mares I really enjoyed were Anzar (El Sareei x Hanaa), her daughter Asrar by Kayed, and Nagdia, the Nazeer daughter out of Zahia. Other unforgettable mares were: Mesada (Maher x Nagwa) and Halawa, our Kayed daughter out of Malekat El Wadi.

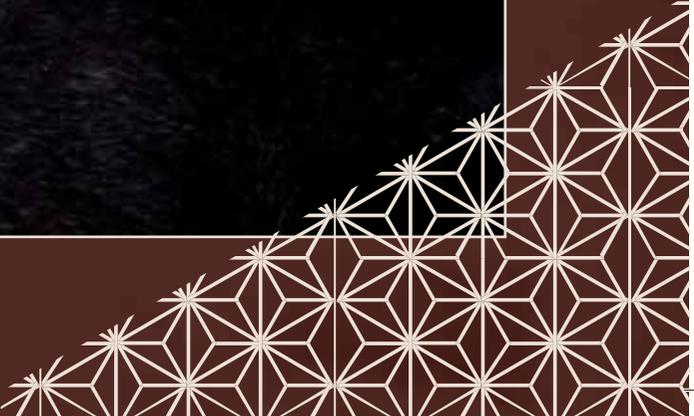
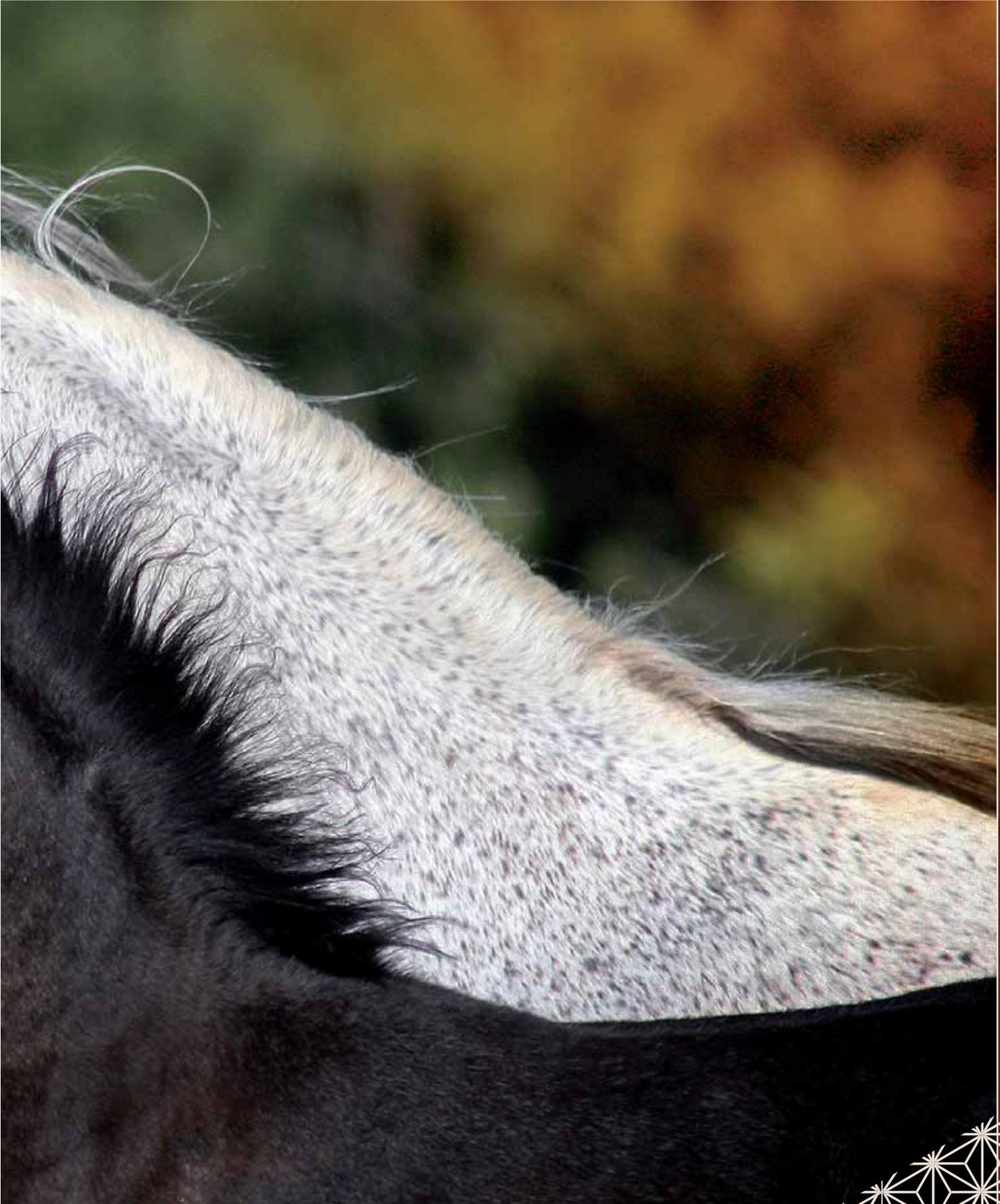
PC: What are you trying to capture when you photograph each horse?

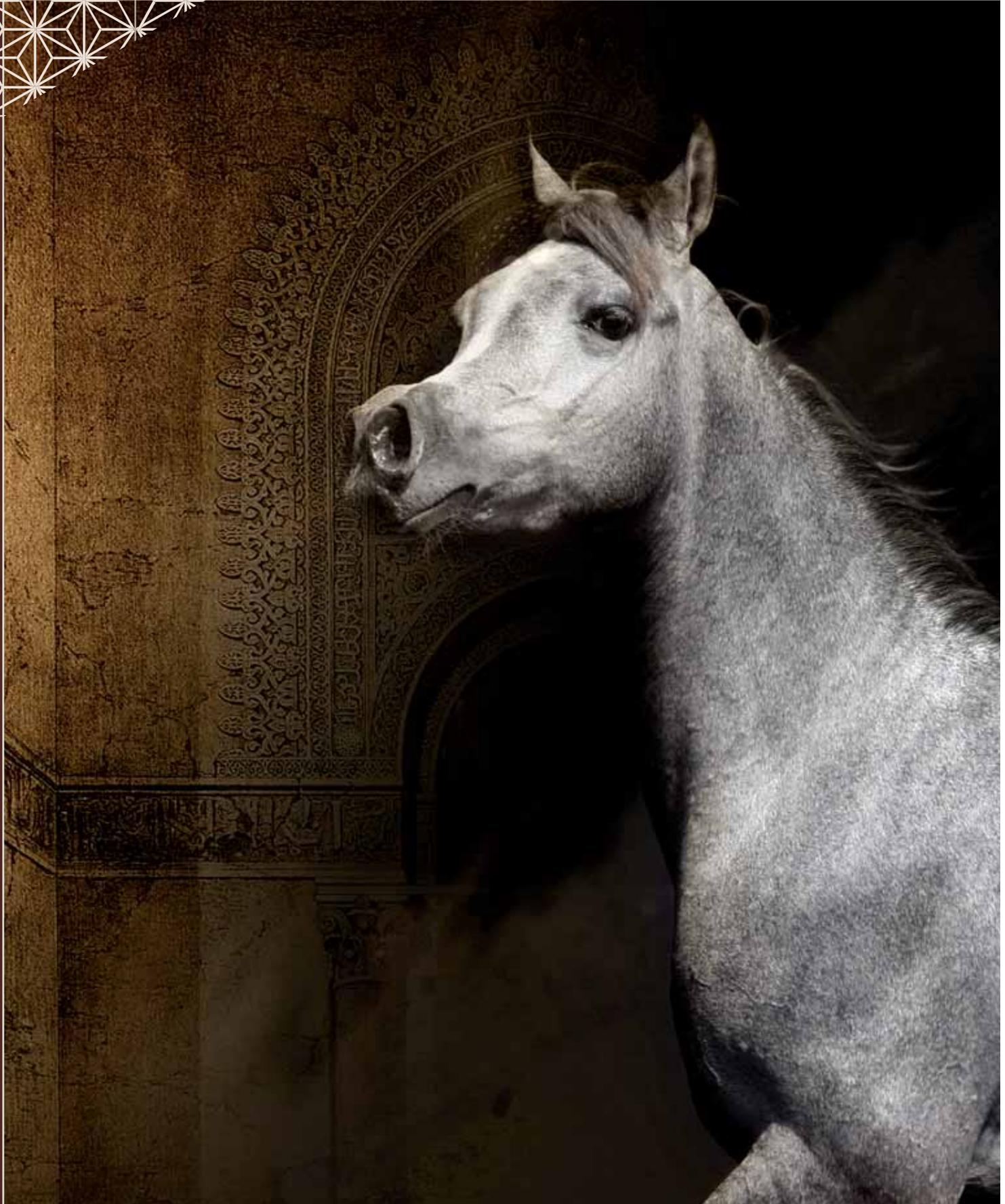
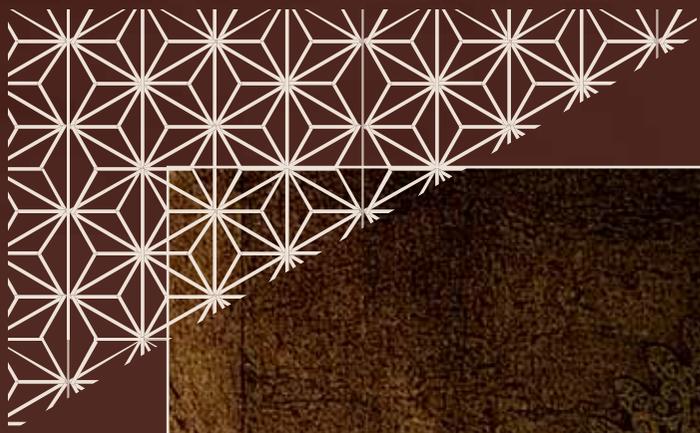
NM: Basically, I am attempting to show the soul, personality and spirit of the horse. It is not a static object or a statue and so I try to show them naturally. They are not posed or interfered with by a person, unless of course, I want to show something specific in the conformation.

PC: When you select a subject, what are you looking for in











The Arabian Horse of Egypt

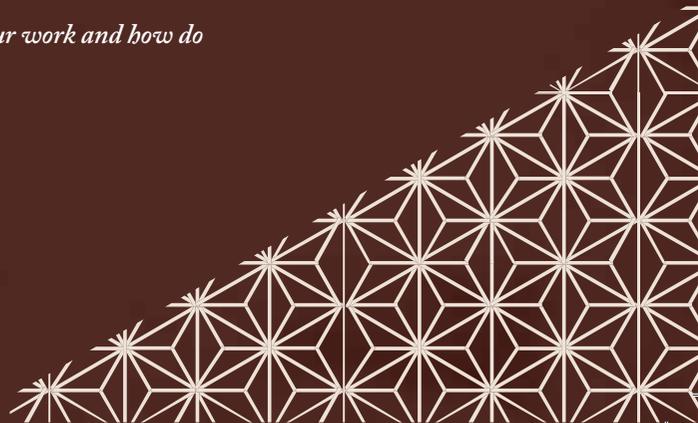
the individual?

NM: I am looking for a mixture of looks and appearance along with behavior and personality. I observe the horse carefully so that I know how to capture this relationship at its best. It is important to be able to anticipate the shot so that I can trigger the shutter at the exact moment. Of course, this is much easier with the new cameras. However, technical knowledge is not enough to get the shot. One must have a good working knowledge of horses to know how they will present themselves.

PC: How do you choose the locations for the photos?

NM: In fact, I have two preferences for the setting depending on what I want to achieve. If I want to integrate the horse into the locale, then the background is quite important. When I want to concentrate more on the horse then I will choose a neutral background so that there is no distraction and the horse will stand out. The photographs in this book are primarily of the second type.

PC: What is the role of lighting in your work and how do you use it?



The Arabian Horse of Egypt

NM: *It absolutely plays an essential role. I choose an angle for the existing light that I can work with and not against it. For example, I never shoot a gray horse in full or direct light. I use back or side lighting because that can turn a flat image into a dimensional representation by showing shadows and a depth of field. With a chestnut or bay, I usually will want full light with side or back lighting only in special circumstances. I find that the best times to work are early morning or late afternoon; mid-day light is much too harsh.*

PC: *What makes a horse a good subject?*

NM: *An Arabian horse is one of the most beautiful and intelligent creatures on earth. When you add in its charisma you have a subject with whom you can interact and communicate. I find that a horse with an imposing personality will give what I am looking for in the photograph. First I look for an intelligent eye with an expression full of expectation and curiosity and without hesitation. Then I look at the body language and his behavior towards people or other horses. Depending on a combination of factors, I can get the shot in three minutes although with a more timid horse it can take much longer. Some days, the horse just may not be in the mood to give a full-out performance, but when he is in the right frame of mind, you get what you want and even more.*

PC: *Is there a difference in photographing mare and stallions?*

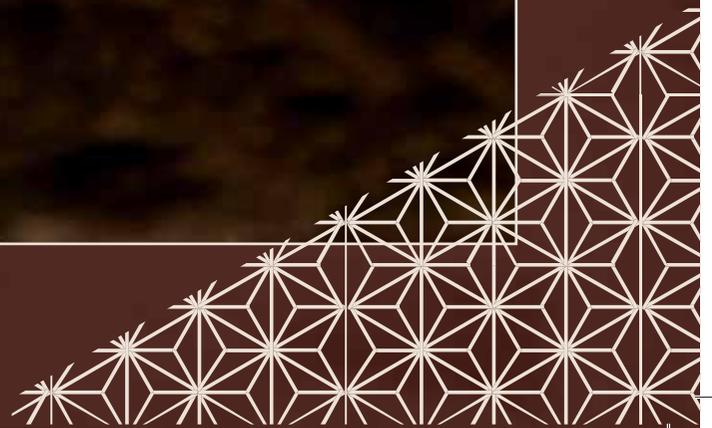
NM: *Yes, there is. With a stallion you are looking for strength, masculinity and a bit of fire. You want a look in the eye, a strong move and a more explosive behavior. With the young female, I look for elegance and femininity. In the more mature mare, I want to see that wonderful trait of gentleness and maternal demeanor. The mare must be extremely feminine without diminishing her power but it must be more nuanced than the stallion.*

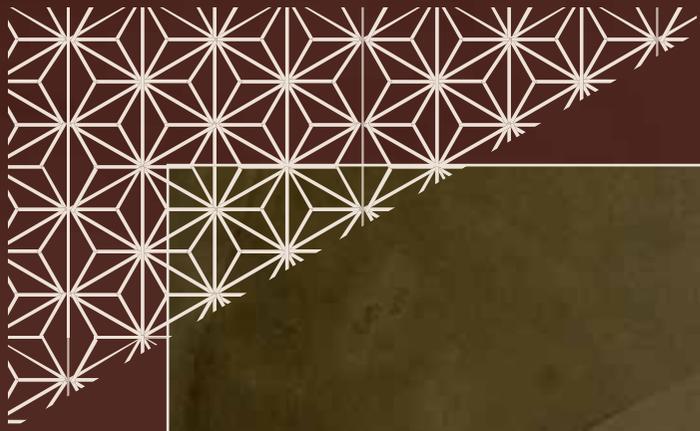
PC: *How has your style evolved through the years?*

NM: *As in any profession, if one is keen on pursuing it, there must be continuous learning through experience. You study the style of others who appeal to you. Early on, Polly Knoll was the photographer who I studied and admired greatly. Later on, I appreciated the styles of Gabrielle Boiselle and Gigi Grasso. The key, however, is to develop your own approach. You shoot a lot and experiment to see how to achieve what you are trying to show.*

In looking at my portfolios through the years, I feel that my earliest work was a bit elementary as I was not in full control of the equipment. I was a new student. In my









The Arabian Horse of Egypt

second stage, I became more dynamic in approach. I studied movement and behavior of the horses. The work shows technical improvement but lacks a bit of artistry. The photographs in the book are illustrative of my current work. I feel they are more artistic and refined. They bear a signature which I believe is establishing my position with an individual style. I am able to put my own stamp on the work.

PC: Who are some of your favorite Albadeia horses to photograph?

NM: Without question, Farid Albadeia (Ameer Albadeia x Farida). This stallion has the most exquisite eyes that I have ever seen on a horse. Magd Albadeia (Rashdan x Bint Makhsous) and Daboom Albadeia, a Farid son out of Simeon Safir are two stallions who have given me extraordinary photos. Among the mares, Semha Albadeia a Magd daughter out of Zaghroudat Albadeia, Zomoradat Albadeia (Mansour Albadeia x Kamar Albadeia) and Issad Albadeia by Gafaar Albadeia out of Zaghroudat are some who never disappoint.

PC: Who are some of the international horses who you would like to photograph?

NM: Of course, the great stallions: Marwan Al Shaqab, Al Adeed Al Shaqab, Ashaal Al Rayan, Escape and Eternity Ibn Navaronne. When it comes to the mares, I would love to photograph AR Farida, Ansata Nefer Isis and Nagda Al Zobair among others. They all have so much to capture in a photo.

PC: What do you want people to see and experience when they read *The Arabian Horse of Egypt*?

NM: I want people to see a magnificent creature that has been honed by thousands of years of selection and dedicated breeding. I have tried to show the emotions that I feel towards this noble creature, not merely the looks but also the soul. In taking these photographs, I have seen with my eye as well as my heart. That is what I want readers to take away from this book. □

