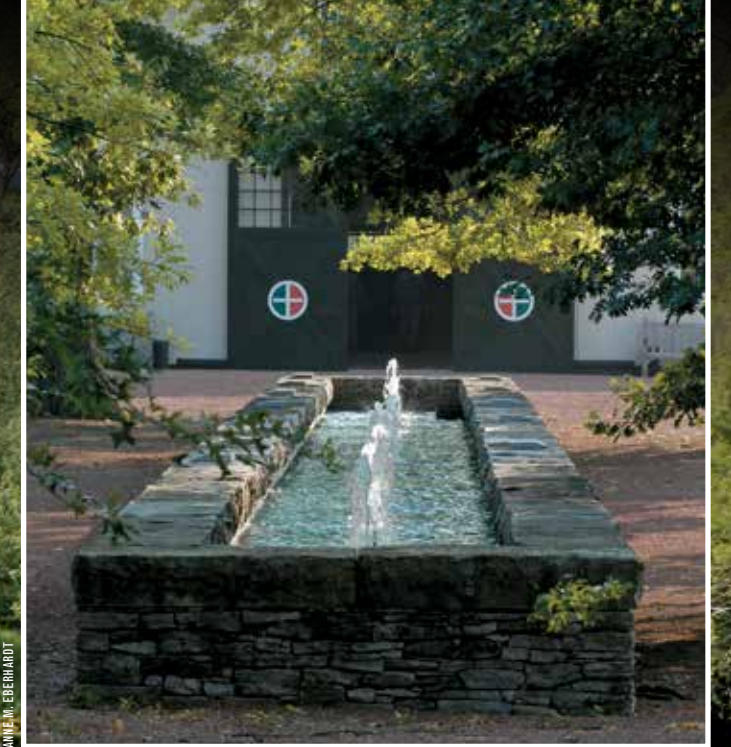


*Antony Beck and his family have nurtured, enhanced, and put their own stamp on Gainesway Farm during nearly 25 years of ownership*



# SILVER JUBILEE

An array of show-stopping formal gardens surrounds Antony and Angela Beck's home on Gainesway.

PHOTOS BY NURS NETHER

Caption



The Becks have consolidated Gainesway, Greentree, and the C.V. Whitney farms under one banner.

By John Eisenberg

Eyebrows went up throughout Central Kentucky and the Thoroughbred industry when Graham Beck purchased Gainesway Farm in 1989. John Gaines' 500-acre spread in northern Fayette County was a Thoroughbred breeding colossus, a massive stallion station luring clients from around the world while generating almost a million dollars a day in stud fees. Beck, a garrulous South African coal magnate, was his country's leading owner and breeder and seemingly had the resources to keep the business going strong, but little was known about his plans. Would Gainesway flourish or falter under his stewardship?

Nearly a quarter-century later that question has been answered resoundingly. Beck, who died in 2010, and his son, Antony, who has effectively run the farm since the mid-1990s, have done more than simply maintain Gainesway's prominence. They have expanded, transformed, and beautified the historic property, creating a 1,500-acre haven that is "unique in the world," according to James "Ted" Bassett, former president and chairman of the board of Keeneland.

Joan Gaines, John's widow, agrees. "They've done amazing things, taken it, and made it their own in just a fabulous way."

The farm's Paris Pike address now comprises three times the land it did under Gaines. Just months after buying Gainesway, Graham Beck also purchased his adjoining northern neighbor,

Greentree Stud, long owned by Jock Whitney and his sister, Joan Payson. Beck then also added his southern neighbor, long known as the C.V. Whitney farm, in a 1998 transaction with Whitney's widow, Marylou.

"Here in Kentucky we're used to seeing things get torn apart, but Graham has put them together," said Henry Alexander, Beck's real estate adviser, at the time of the 1989 merger.

Merging Gainesway, Greentree, and the Whitney properties, the Becks consolidated vast assets that include a design-award-winning stud complex built by Gaines in 1981, a pair of equine graveyards containing Whitney-bred or -owned champions going back almost a century, several dozen barns and residences, and acres of rolling pastureland bisected by the meandering

Elkhorn Creek — in sum, a parcel of Bluegrass with towering history; a place where presidents have slept, royalty has visited, and legendary Thoroughbreds such as Regret, Mahmoud, and Tom Fool have grazed.

But rather than scrub the formerly separate farms into a seamless, streamlined unit, the Becks subtly brought them together under the Gainesway name while making sure each retained its distinct character. The barns on what once was Greentree are still known by nicknames they acquired almost a century ago. The barns on what once was C.V. Whitney's land are still painted in a different color scheme from Greentree's, as was the case for decades. Gaines' unique hand remains palpable; when Graham Beck's widow, Rhona, visits, she stays in the



JONATHAN PALMER

From left, Emma, William, Antony, Lily, Angela, Henry, and Andrew Beck have made Gainesway Farm their home. Below, the late Graham Beck purchased Gainesway in 1989. Son Antony runs the farm today.

former barn John and Joan Gaines transformed into a modern residence.

“We call it a blended farm,” said Annette Covault, a long-time administrative assistant in Gainesway’s office. “We still call each farm by its old name. When you say, ‘I’m going over to Greentree’ or ‘that’s on Whitney,’ everyone knows what you mean. We all speak that language here on the farm. The places were so distinctive that it just comes naturally.”

On top of the substantial bones they purchased with the three farms, the Becks have built new residences and renovated others, fixed up barns, put in spectacular gardens, and planted so many new oak trees that the American Public Garden Association has granted Gainesway official status as an arboretum, a lofty accreditation no other horse farm in the world shares.

Meanwhile, the farm’s tradition as a spawning ground of equine champions continues, thanks to a stallion roster led by Tapit, an Antony Beck selection currently about as popular as any other sire on the planet. Antony Beck has also backed a major upgrade of Gainesway’s sales unit, an aspect of the breeding industry that neither

Gaines nor the Whitneys had much interest in. Led by general manager Neil Howard, director of sales Michael Heron, and yearling manager Brian Graves, Gainesway is a top-five yearling consignor at many major auctions and has sold numerous horses for seven figures.

“It’s an incredible place with incredible people. We’ve put together an amazing team from top to bottom,” Antony Beck said.

Antony admits he had doubts about his father’s purchase of Gainesway almost a quarter-century ago. When his father and Gaines struck a deal for the iconic farm, the younger Beck was running his father’s horse empire in South Africa, which included three farms.

“I thought [Gainesway] was a heck of a thing to swallow. Where I was living in Robertson, South Africa, is not to be compared with Central Kentucky by any stretch of the imagination,” Beck said. “At the time Kentucky was the undisputed center of global horse breeding. I thought it required a tremendous amount of guts to acquire a farm like that ... actually two farms, as it turned out [when he bought Greentree].”

But Rhona Beck, Antony’s mother, said she and her husband especially found Greentree



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

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irresistible with its undulating pastures, groves of tall walnut trees, and dramatic sycamore lane running down the middle. “Bang, crash, just like that, we fell passionately in love,” Rhona Beck recalled.

The Becks immediately began to leave their mark on the farm. An expert gardener and ardent environmentalist, Rhona designed a colorful new floral vista to greet visitors turning in from Paris Pike. Then she started planting trees ... and never stopped.

Gainesway already featured towering oaks and sycamores mixed with elms and maples on the creek line and other species such as walnuts, hackberries, pin oaks, and mulberries. But under Rhona’s direction, “we have planted 430 trees and 50 different species of oaks in six fields, all in the last 15 years,” said Ryan Martin, the farm’s full-time horticulturist since 1996.

At first, Graham ran Gainesway from afar as he traveled the world attending to his other businesses, while Antony contin-



The late John Gaines commissioned Gainesway’s award-winning stallion barns.

SHANNON GUNDIFF

ued to live in South Africa. But after Antony married an American, the former Angela Levy, in 1992, he moved to Gainesway to run the place and built a splendid two-story residence, modeled



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PHOTOS BY Z

Antony Beck has reinvigorated Gainesway's stallion roster with, clockwise from top, Tapit, Afleet Alex, and Birdstone.

after the homestead of a Lexington tobacco farm. He and Angela are raising their five children on the farm.

Working with a full-time gardener, Dave Hruska, Antony has surrounded their home with an array of show-stopping formal gardens including an apple orchard, vegetable and flower gardens, a shade garden, a maze, a woodlands garden, and one garden divided into quadrants with miniature boxwoods planted in the shape of fleur-de-lis.

"I'm sure books are going to be written about Antony's gardens because they're totally wonderful," Rhona Beck said.

New trees and gardens are not the only additions and changes the Becks have made. Most of the Whitney-built barns they inherited have been updated on the inside. Antony has built residences for employees and turned other structures into homes. Ryan Martin lives in what was once a milk pasteurization lab, dating to the long-ago days when James Ben Ali Haggin ran Elmen-dorf dairy on what later became Greentree.

While investing millions, the Becks, incredibly, have erected only one new barn. "We've just renovated and fixed up and



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fixed up, put on new roofs, new siding. But the integrity of the [barn] interiors was good," Antony said. "They were really well-built. If you look at them from the outside, they look new now, but if you go inside, wow, it is ancient history. I'm a historian. Anything that could be saved was saved. And we saved a lot. Why change when it was already as good as it was?"

For decades the Whitneys had used the land as a bucolic backdrop for developing champions to run or breed in their names. Gaines changed the atmosphere, taking advantage of a surge in the breeding industry in the 1970s and '80s to stand as many as 50 stallions at once before selling to Beck. Today, Gainesway is a vibrant, all-purpose commercial farm with a horse population that fluctuates between 300 and 400, depending on the season. Aside from Tapit, who stood for \$125,000 in 2013, the sire roster includes Birdstone, winner of the 2004 Belmont, and Afleet Alex, winner of the 2005 Preakness and Belmont.

But Gainesway is more than just a horse farm. Stretching from Paris Pike east to Bryan Station Road and from Johnston Road south to Muir Station Road, it contains 30 residences and supports close to 80 employees, more than half of whom live on the property. It is a neighborhood unto itself, a community that holds an annual Fourth of July party on the Greentree side and a rollicking Christmas party every December.

"It is a great life for everyone here on the farm," said Brian Graves, who is married with a young family and resides just down the road from Antony Beck in a house Antony built for him. "Antony treats us like family. We're invited to dinner. I feel more like an adopted son than an employee. It's peaceful; it's nice; it's a haven for the horses. Once you get used to this ... this isn't normal. This is special."

Yet while Gainesway pulsates with the day-to-day business that a horse farm generates, a powerful sense of history endures. Horses found in the former Greentree and Whitney graveyards include La Troienne, Winning Colors, Twenty Grand, Shut Out, Top Flight, Capot, and St. Germans — a roll call of classic champions and legendary names. More than 12,000 stakes winners alone trace back to La Troienne, a broodmare nonpareil. Now, Tapit, sire of four Breeders' Cup winners in his first four crops, is helping write a new chapter of history.

"Every day I drive through here thinking that there just can't be many better places on earth," said Neil Howard, Gainesway's general manager since 1998. "It's a beautiful place. The history is amazing. And I would like to think we're not done writing that history." 🐾



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