

BY CHRIS MILANESI

Building Durable Equestrian Jumps



I've specialized in the design and construction of jumps used in competitive horse trials—or “eventing”—since 1974. An Olympic sport, an eventing competition is best described as an equestrian triathlon where paired horse and rider teams compete in three riding disciplines: dressage, stadium jumping, and cross-country jumping. (I've had the great fortune of being part of the equestrian building team for both the 1984 Los Angeles and 1996 Atlanta summer Olympics).

During the dressage phase, the rider and horse must illustrate a graceful partnership through a sequence of movements on level ground, while the show-jumping portion tests the pair's precision as they clear a course of fences. Cross-country jumping challenges the bravery and fitness of the horse and rider as they navigate a series of obstacles and varied terrain. The team must complete each riding discipline and competitors accumulate penalty points in each phase. The pair with the lowest score wins.

Portable jumps. The biggest part of my business as an equestrian contractor is building the cross-country jumps used in eventing competitions. There are two types of cross-country jumps, permanent and portable. Permanent jumps feature items such as lined ponds, ditches, and fixed structures (typically log posts set into the ground with a horizontal log strapped to them). Portable jumps vary from 24 to 42 inches high by 8 to 16 feet long and are moved around with tractors (**1**).

Built to withstand a blow from a jumping horse and to live outside year round, portable jumps are made out of durable materials such as pressure-treated wood, common residential siding products, and with increasing frequency, synthetic trim and roofing—cellular PVC and faux slate and shakes.

I construct the jumps out of heavy-duty ribs made from 2-by and 4-by pressure-treated stock attached to 4x6 skids (two long pieces of pressure-treated wood that are essentially the foundation of the jump). I use a mixture of screws, metal clips, plates, and ties from FastenMaster and Simpson Strong-Tie to tie everything together before I sheathe the structure (**2**).

Keeping up to date. I make it a point to attend JLC Live yearly to visit manufacturer's booths, on the lookout for new connection hardware and fasteners as well as new, durable building materials I can use to highlight my jumps. I recently completed a barn structure using Versatex PVC trim. I routed grooves in the pressure-treated 2x6 roofing to simulate three-tab shingles, prior to applying a stain finish (**3**).

Chris Milanesi is an equestrian contractor from Old Chatham, N.Y. He is a long-time JLC subscriber and JLC Live attendee.



Photos: (1) Joan Davis, Flatlandsfoto.com; (2,3) Chris Milanesi