

# How 'Bout Them Cowgirls?



**W**hat do Wonder Woman, sharpshooter Annie Oakley, famed Arabian horse breeder Sheila Varian, and Jessie the Yodeling Cowgirl from “Toy Story 2,” “Toy Story 3” and the recently released “Toy Story 4” have in common? You’ll find them all honored at the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame in Fort Worth, Texas. This is the only museum in the world dedicated to honoring women of the American West. Its 200+ Cowgirl Hall of Fame Honorees include pioneers, artists, writers, entertainers, humanitarians, businesswomen, educators, ranchers and rodeo cowgirls.

On March 9 of this year, following an intensive 13-month, \$5.5 million remodel, the museum tipped its hat to reveal exciting secrets when it reopened its second floor. The renovated upstairs



housing the new “It’s Never Just a Horse™” exhibition is now the Kit Moncrief Galleries renamed after the organization’s board president and patron.

Entering the two-story, light-filled rotunda, you are welcomed at the film lounge with two video options. The first, a four-minute “How ‘bout Them Cowgirls?” video serenade by three-time Country Music Award Entertainer of the Year George Strait is certainly the best tribute song to one of America’s greatest national treasures, its cowgirls. Made specifically for the museum as an experience introduction, it features the myriad of cowgirls represented in the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame.

“Toy Story’s” Jessie the Yodeling Cowgirl is the second welcome offering. Jessie is the 2000 recipient of the museum’s Patsy Montana Award, which recognizes those whose work in the entertainment field continues and advances the tradition of the cowgirl in the areas of film, television, music, writing and theater. Seeing Jessie’s character development into the “Toy Story” narrative will particularly interest the younger set. In the future, the museum will continue to add vignettes to welcome guests.

“With our ‘It’s Never Just a Horse™’ exhibition and the new galleries, the museum is situated well to be a touchstone for those interested in horses, the West, and those women who rarely get included in history texts. Part of our continuing mission is to bring to the mainstream discussions those women who shape the West — and in turn change the world,” says Diana Vela, Ph.D., associate executive director.

To date, there are two Cowgirl Hall of Fame Honorees with connections to the Arabian horse family; the much beloved Sheila Varian, a 2003 inductee, and 1981 Cowgirl Hall of Fame Honoree Mamie Francis Hafley, whose jumping horses were all Arabians.

## The Cowgirl Museum Experience

Walking through the museum you will find three motifs are continually used throughout: the rope, the horse, and the desert rose. These were part of its initial build in 2002. The desert rose, known for its strength, beauty, and ability

By Janet de Acevedo Macdonald



to survive and even thrive in very difficult terrain and weather situations, often represents the cowgirl. It was also the inspiration for the museum's logo.

The first floor's Hitting the Mark: Cowgirls and Wild West Shows Gallery has life-sized, motion-sensored holograms of the iconic five-foot-nothing sharpshooter Annie Oakley. Matter-of-factly, Oakley tells her engager that being the fifth of seven children in the 1860s, she taught herself to shoot so she could help feed her family. Oakley also tells of winning a shooting match at the age of 15 against traveling-show marksman Frank E. Butler — whom she would later marry — which set her on the road to become an international legend.

The Anne W. Marion Gallery hosts temporary exhibits. Currently, "The Trail of the Cowgirl" by 2007 Cowgirl Hall of Fame Honoree Donna Howell-Sickles is on exhibit through September 2019.

As you move to the renovated galleries, two separate staircases are beautifully adorned with 27 framed Hermès scarves that are worth spending time admiring for both their artisanship and thematic intricacies. Horses and the iconic Hermès horse carriage motif are at the heart of the French brand's logo and even today remain one of the key themes in its scarf portfolio.

The second floor is filled with hands-on activities for both young and the young-at-heart. The renovation brought impressive, interactive technology to the Western Design



Room where visitor-now-designer can create her own custom boots, shirt, or horse literally with the touch of a finger! The fan-favorite Bucking Bronc Ride superimposes the rider into a 1900's era bronc ride perfect for sharing on today's social media. Photo op for younger kids on a small, stationary paint horse with cowgirl backdrop is in the same area.

What beckons both your eye and body into the spacious second-floor gallery is the floor-to-ceiling 180-degree backdrop where horses are projected moving gently at times through bucolic fields. Then with ears and noses twitching at a coming storm, they are transported to a black background where herd interactions are displayed in 11-foot

**MISSION STATEMENT:**  
The National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame honors and celebrates women, past and present, whose lives exemplify the courage, resilience and independence that helped shape the American West, and fosters an appreciation of the ideals and spirit of self-reliance they inspire.  
"Horses are mirrors to our emotions, and they have an uncanny ability to teach us about ourselves."



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**TOP**  
2003 Hall of Fame Honoree Sheila Varian, an icon of the Arabian Horse scene, riding Desperado V. Courtesy of the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame, Fort Worth, Texas.

**MIDDLE**  
Patricia E. Kelly, 2015 Cowgirl Honoree. A former U.S. marine, award-winning community leader, and equestrian trailblazer, Kelly has been at the helm of Ebony Horsewomen, Inc. for the over 30 years.

Courtesy Ebony Horsewomen, Inc.



**BOTTOM**  
2018 Hall of Fame Honoree Camilla Naprous, horse master and stunt woman for the film industry, has ties to "Game of Thrones" and "Wonder Woman." Photo courtesy of Camilla Naprous.

**RIGHT**  
2018 Hall of Fame Honoree Mamie Francis Hafley diving with her Half-Arabian mare, Babe. Courtesy of the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame, Fort Worth, Texas.

**OPPOSITE TOP**  
Jessie the Yodeling Cowgirl from the "Toy Story" franchise of films. Courtesy of the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame, Fort Worth, Texas.

**OPPOSITE BOTTOM**  
Annie Oakley hologram shown in the Hitting the Mark: Cowgirls and Wild West Shows Gallery. Courtesy of the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame, Fort Worth, Texas.

Anastasia Taylor-Lind



close-ups. Caught between magical and educational, the youngest visitors are often seen trying to touch and talk to the horses.

The "It's Never Just a Horse™" exhibition has five topical "islands" — Ranching, Competing, Healing, Business, and Inspiring — exploring how the horse connects with women through artifacts, some not seen before, displayed on the perimeter of each island. For instance, the Inspiration Island looks at how horses have inspired artists, writers and other creative types. Singer-songwriter Miranda Lambert's autographed pink hummingbird guitar is displayed here.

## Hollywood Features

The "Wonder Woman" movie costume created by Lindy Hemming and worn by Israeli actress, singer, martial artist, and model Gal Gadot when she starred as Diana in the 2017 blockbuster, is now on display at the museum. The National Cowgirl Museum's 2018 Honoree, Camilla Naprous, who worked as a horse master and stunt woman on Wonder Woman, generously loaned the costume to the museum.



Hafley-Shelton Wild West Rodeo Collection



She is currently working on “Wonder Woman 1984,” the Wonder Woman sequel due out in June 2020.

Naprous also took care of the horses on the award-winning HBO series “Game of Thrones.” She joined the series during its first season and notes with pride that a horse has never been injured during the show’s eight-season run. She choreographed all the horse scenes, stunts and fight sequences.

Her company, The Devil’s Horsemen, based in Buckinghamshire, England, supplies horses to the film industry. It’s safe to say that any period movie or TV drama that has a horse in it, Naprous is usually involved. She teaches actors to ride, too. Olivia Colman, who just won the Oscar for Actress in a Leading Role as Queen Anne in “The Favourite,” was taught by Naprous.

In this area you will also find the actual saddle from “Game of Thrones” used by Kit Harington, who played Jon Snow in the series.

## Serious Business Worth Supporting

It’s not all fun, film and fantasy. The museum is considered an invaluable national educational resource for its exhibits, research library, rare photograph collection and award-winning distance-learning programs for grades K-12 and adults. Bethany Dodson, the museum’s research and education manager, has students contacting her to research specific women in the Hall of Fame for National History Day, people researching family members, or historians working on books or Ph.D. dissertations.

The Shop at The Cowgirl is well curated and has something of interest for cowgirls and cowboys alike at a variety of price points. Be sure to meander through the shop for unique t-shirts, original jewelry and accessories, children’s products, artwork, and books about or by honorees and other women of the American West.

The National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame is a one-of-a-kind experience that is well worth your time. How ‘bout them cowgirls? Go — answer the question for yourself. 🐾

*Janet de Acevedo Macdonald is a freelance travel writer, horse owner, breeder, and adult amateur competitor who blogs about all things Arabian horse at [www.arabianhorsetravel.com](http://www.arabianhorsetravel.com).*

## WHEN YOU GO

The 33,000 square-foot National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame is found on the Will Rogers Memorial Complex located in the heart of Fort Worth’s Cultural District, which is also home to the Kimbell Art Museum, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth Museum of Science and History and the Amon Carter Museum.

### ADDRESS:

1720 Gendy Street, Fort Worth, TX 76107. \$10.00 parking fee in the Cultural District.

### ADMISSION RATES:

Adults: \$12.00  
Seniors (age 65+): \$9.00  
Military & First Responders: \$9.00  
Children (age 4-12): \$6.00  
Children age 3 and under – free with paid admission

### OPEN HOURS:

Summer Mondays Memorial Day through Labor Day: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
Other Mondays: Closed  
Tuesday – Saturday: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
Sunday: Noon – 5 p.m.

As part of the post-renovation celebration, the museum will stay open late, 5-7 p.m., the third Friday of each month through Dec. 20 for cowgirl cocktails.

### CLOSED FOR HOLIDAYS:

Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and New Year’s Day.

### WEBSITE:

[www.cowgirl.net](http://www.cowgirl.net)

### SOCIAL MEDIA:

[www.facebook.com/NCMHOF](https://www.facebook.com/NCMHOF)

[twitter.com/cowgirlmuseum](https://twitter.com/cowgirlmuseum)

[www.instagram.com/cowgirlmuseum](https://www.instagram.com/cowgirlmuseum)



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### ABOVE

The Desert Rose motif shown on a staircase of the museum, and used throughout the building.

### BELOW

A saddle used in the wildly popular series “Game of Thrones.” Courtesy of the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame, Fort Worth, Texas.



Craig Kuhner