



THE MAGIC OF
HORSE
WHISPERING

Text and photos by
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Above: Lisa Bedient, instructor and head of the Harmony with Horses Program



From top: Tanque Verde casitas sit among Sonoran Desert cactuses; flapjacks during an early morning ride; a Saguaro bloom



Asaguaro cactus — all spines and creamy blooms — swerves into view, alarmingly close. Chester the quarter horse seems about to take a knee. And I'm facing some unique, but very unwelcome, piercings.

Fear scuttles through my limbs, but I grab the saddle horn. Yeah, I know: total dude move. But, then, I'd visited the Tanque Verde Ranch — 16 miles east of Tucson, Arizona — specifically to overcome my jitters. A year back, I'd bailed off a spooked and bucking mare. I escaped with bruises worthy of a rodeo clown. Lucky, lucky, lucky. But, for the first time, my enthusiasm had dimmed for playing cowgirl.

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I did that with the ranch's Harmony with Horses program, which teaches inter-species communication (\$250 for three hours). “You develop a relationship, like with a dance partner, not a machine,” explains instructor and head of the program Lisa Bedient, one of the most graceful athletes I've ever seen. The barest nick of her heel produces a gallop. An unperceivable flex of her thigh sets her mount circling. Gorgeous.

Like any art, this mastery has been hard-won. Lisa brings her headstrong gelding into the ring for a tune-up, cueing him with a long whip. “It's all about

chances, choices and consequences, just like with children.” she says, “If he misbehaves, he has to work. When he listens, I reward him with rest and relaxation: I let him marinate in the moment. Sometimes he'll even give me the horsey high-five: a big sigh. Because he wants a good leader.”

Being boss is a very hands-on endeavor, I discover, as Lisa hands me a bucket of gear. I give Chester a spa session: grooming his coat and picking his hooves into *My Little Pony* perfection. He starts rubbing his face ecstatically on my belly after just seven minutes. It tickles away my concentration. But Lisa just cheers us on, her voice shiny as her rhinestone belt buckle: bonding! Yes!

Our dynamic changes completely when I swing back into the saddle. Chester and I are a team. We cruise the trail. We weave through barrels, then pivot around them. Cantering? Got it!

But as the quarter horse ratchets from 15mph to 30ish, I squeak and stick to the saddle horn like a burr.

Lisa roars, “Get those hands on the reins. Ride!” And, without thinking, I take control. My heels dig in. Chester breaks into a lope, just long enough for me to yell the unthinkable admission: “I. Am. So. Freakin'. Scared.”

“Sure,” my instructor says, as I draw near. “But you still did it.”

Chances, choices and consequences. Indeed.

