

# JUPITER

MAGAZINE

## KARIN TAYLOR

THE FORMER RUNWAY  
MODEL & ACTRESS  
BEHIND JUPITER'S  
MANDALAY FARMS

## ROAD WARRIORS

JACK LIGHTON &  
GIO DI STADIO  
ARE EMBRACING  
THE RV LIFE

# KEEP IT SIMPLE

## EASY LIVING

20+ WAYS  
TO SIMPLIFY  
YOUR LIFE



Karin Taylor takes a stroll with Juliette, one of five emus at Mandalay Farms.



Nigerian dwarf goats

# Connected to NATURE

*Former model Karin Taylor welcomes at-risk and special needs children to her Jupiter farm to enjoy the benefits of animal interaction*

*by JUDY MARTEL | photography by STEVEN MARTINE*

**A**s a former model and actress, Karin Taylor's early career was all about being in the spotlight. But the trappings of glamour weren't enough to captivate her in the long run. She returned to her home state of Florida and gave it all up to be a mother and indulge in her real passion: developing a charity dedicated to helping both animals and at-risk and special needs children.

On a sprawling, 20-acre farm in Jupiter she calls Mandalay, the 50-year-old mother of five invites visitors to unwind and learn about nature and animals. Working with various organizations including the Salvation Army, as well as







From top: Coatimundis Bandit and Scout have some fun on climbing structures in their outdoor enclosure; Juliette the emu; Cash the zebu cow.



area foster parents and corporations, she invites groups of children and corporate teams to interact with her animals in a pressure-free environment. “Science has proven that there are therapeutic benefits to being around animals,” says Taylor, who is certified in equine-assisted learning. “It’s very calming, like going to the beach.” Her trademarked program, Unbridled Power, helps attendees gain self-esteem and critical life skills by engaging with horses in different situations. One of the methods Taylor has perfected involves training horses “at liberty,” meaning without bridles, reins, or halters. “We’re working off body language,” she explains. “All of our programs are about connection.”

From the moment you enter the front gate, Mandalay Farms exudes a sense of tranquility. The name of the farm comes from one of Taylor’s favorite black-and-white movies, *Rebecca*. The 1940 film based on the book by Daphne du Maurier is set on a fictional English estate called Manderley. “In the great opening

scene, the gates open and Rebecca sees it for the first time, describing the home and grounds as the most beautiful place she ever saw,” Taylor says.

In place of lush English gardens, Mandalay Farms presents a low-key, peaceful landscape of ponds, palm trees, trails, and

well-tended pastures dotted with spacious animal enclosures that house her “animal ambassadors,” many of which are exotic species. The centerpiece is the two-story pristine horse barn at the end of the lane.

Mustangs and miniature horses, goats, kangaroos, pot-bellied pigs, tortoises, turkeys, chickens, emus, and even a skunk named Tux are all part of the farm’s menagerie that includes around 140 animals (including the 70 poultry). Snow-white fantail pigeons, cockatiels, and a hyacinth macaw chatter in their cages while in others, nocturnal species slumber. Bennett and Boomer, a pair of wallabies, are a bit aloof at first, calmly remaining at a distance to regard their visitors before deciding to approach. “Wallabies are like the cats of the marsupial world, and kangaroos are like dogs,” Taylor says, explaining their behavior around humans.

As she visits each enclosure, her affection for the animals is apparent. She gets up really close, smiling as she pets and talks to each one. She even incubated three of the farm’s five emus inside her home. “I hatched them on Facebook Live and raised them in my bathroom,” she says. She can differentiate siblings who look alike and calls each by name.

“For me, it’s all about creating a mutually beneficial experience for people and animals, so it’s important that the animals are cared for properly,” she says. “I think the reason our animals come to people is because they’ve had positive experiences. We tell visitors that the animals will come to them if they choose. I never bring animals to people, except for some of the smaller ones like the rabbits.”

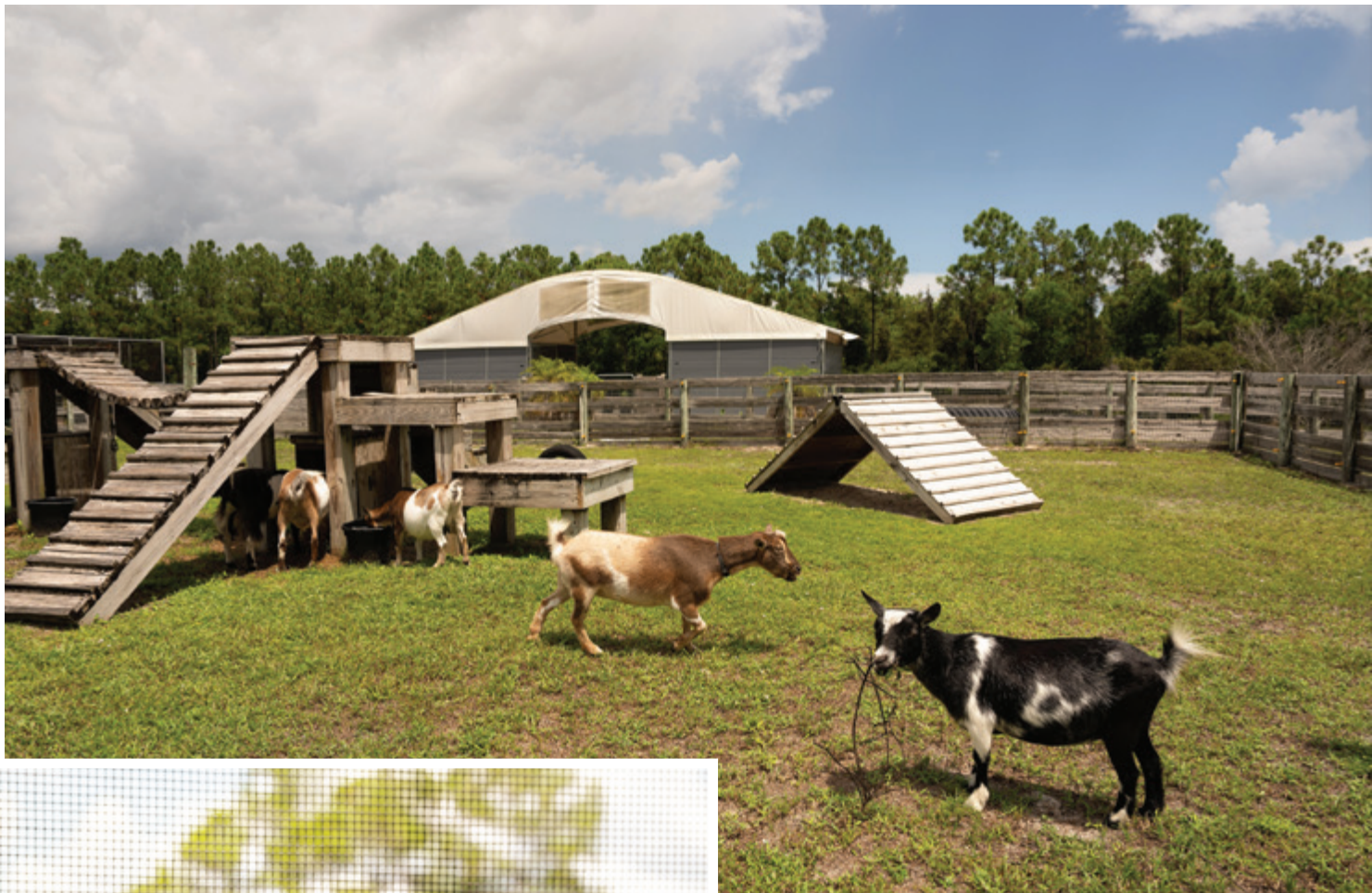
Still, there is no guarantee the animals will want to be with humans on any given day—and often, Taylor is surprised by their behavior. On one occasion, a girl in a motorized wheelchair who couldn’t speak wanted to see a particular horse. “I wasn’t sure how the horse would react because it had ever been around motorized wheelchairs and I didn’t want him to reject her,” Taylor recalls. “But when we brought one of our



mustangs, Ford, out of the stall, he walked right up to the little girl and put his head in her lap! She kind of collapsed forward and put her head on his, and the horse didn’t move. It was an incredible moment that makes me cry to this day.”

Taylor can recall dozens of such incidents and says that’s what keeps her going. “Some kids arrive and are disconnected at first, maybe a little bored,” she says. “I want to see the light in their eyes. I never know what animal will do that, and sometimes





From top: Nigerian dwarf goats Domino, Daisy, Flash, Clover, and Blossom enjoy their custom-built playground, which kids are welcome to experience along with the goats; coatimundis Bandit and Scout play outside (they also have an air-conditioned indoor house).



I'm surprised that it's the chickens. When it happens, when I see that moment, it makes everything I do here worth it."

Every day at work is different for Taylor and her staff. One day, she might be training horses; another might find her bottle-feeding baby animals. Recently, she spent a day trying to introduce the male otters to the females, "but the females weren't going for it," she says. She doesn't miss her former career but does find herself calling upon some things it taught her over the years. "I feel like my eclectic career serves me well," she says. "Marketing yourself is not that different from marketing a business."

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Taylor moved to Orlando with

her parents and seven siblings as a child. Her father was an executive at Disney World, and Taylor became a dancer in the Magic Kingdom's Electric Light Parade when she was 17. She never aspired to be a model, but after being recruited by Ford Models as a teen, she began working in Miami, eventually making her way to New York and Europe and walking the runway for the likes of Betsey Johnson, among others.

Posing for *Playboy* as Miss June 1996 opened the door to acting. A guest appearance on the wildly popular TV show *Baywatch* was her first big job—and perhaps a peek into the future. "My character, Taylor Johnson, worked with at-risk youth," says Taylor. "I always had a heart for children, but as a model, I traveled so much." While working in Los Angeles, she met her former husband and moved with him to Philadelphia before they eventually settled in her home state of Florida. Along the way, they started the family she had always wanted.

Now divorced, Taylor lives near the water in Tequesta but devotes seven days a week to the farm. During her rare time off, she enjoys paddleboarding, playing pickleball, going to







The farm's two tricolored ruffed lemurs (above) are still awaiting the perfect names; Flowers the miniature horse (left); Calypso (below) is one of two hyacinth macaws at Mandalay Farms. Hyacinth macaws are the largest flying parrot species in the world.



dinner with friends, and hanging out at The Breakers Beach Club, where she is a member. “I’m living the best of both worlds because I have the ocean and the farm,” she says. Her kids—who range in age from 12 to 17—have all worked at Mandalay in some capacity, conducting tours, caring for animals, helping set up events, and learning the basics of running a farm. “There were certain ages when they became less enthusiastic, but I think it builds a strong work ethic,” she says.

Since founding Mandalay Farms in 2015 with personal funding, Taylor’s goal has been to expand the operation to become financially self-sufficient. To that end, Mandalay opened to the public as a members-only facility last month. A limited number of members will pay an annual fee (\$12,000; seasonal members can pay \$5,000 for a three-visit pass) for exclusive use of the farm, where they can take advantage of private tours and animal interactions. Members can also host private

daytime events and corporate team-building programs and enjoy the members’ lounge. Philanthropy remains at the heart of the farm, and kids are still welcome at no cost on certain days, funded by part of the member fees. “The revenue from memberships will fully support the farm and the philanthropic work I do with at-risk youth and children with special needs, without having to ask for donations,” Taylor explains. Outside of that, she adds, “it is only accessible by annual membership, in order to maintain privacy and tranquility on the farm.”

For Taylor, life these days is happiness at its simplest. She has taken three things that mean a lot to her—philanthropy, children, and animals—and immerses herself in her passions and mission every day. “I know it sounds cliché, but if you do what you love, it will never feel like work,” she says.

*To learn more about scheduling a visit to Mandalay Farms and/or becoming a member, visit [mandalayfarms.com](http://mandalayfarms.com).* ❖