When I arrive at David Rand’s farm in Falmouth Maine, Angela Conner Bulmer is already mounted, receiving a lesson on VL Zaia.

VL Zaia (Cherished Assets x Queen’s Gracious Me) is Angela’s mare who, at the age of four, won the English Pleasure World Championship in 2015. She is extremely upheaded and she is most articulate in her high stepping, saddle seat style motion.

David and his assistant, Leigh Drummey, are in the middle of the ring. RAND friend and client Sandy Hendrick arrives, as I do, mid-lesson. The energy in the barn is practically ecstatic. Angela, who is 80 years old, is not merely having a lesson. She is nailing it, making big pass after big pass at the trot, enjoying accurate canter departures, everything is in good order, both exciting and organized at once. Everyone is thrilled for this special friend and faithful Morgan owner and breeder from England.

Once dismounted, Angela is all about her good fortune in
owning such an animal and extolling David Rand’s “artistry” in training this mare and making her so completely accessible to an amateur owner like herself.

Her mind clearly on the interview ahead, Angela leads me down to a stall in the barn. The stall is home to a two-year-old colt she has fallen in love with. The colt is Queen’s Yankee Spirit (Queen’s Glory Days x Queen’s Sweet Talk). Angela grabs a peppermint and opens the stall door. Sandy and I are standing right behind Angela as the little lady from England starts to expound on the importance of an upright neck as a distinguishing factor of the Morgan breed, the thing that sets its silhouette apart from other breeds and something we must never take for granted.

The colt, happy to have visitors, knows not what all the fuss is about.

Stop and think about the “fuss.” A comrade from England is unreservedly addressing what she sees as the virtues of America’s breed to two of its fans from the homeland. And it’s refreshing to hear the word from someone who hails from another continent, who didn’t grow up with the breed, but consciously sought it out. Someone who, from a distance, is explaining a fast held vision to two people in New England about the local pride and product.

All that and she brings an artist’s eye to the topic, as well.

Presently we find seats in the office at RAND and Angela is asked about her inclinations toward “The Breed That Chooses You.”

European public statuary, she notes, shows long ago royalty and military figures mounted on animals with high set, cresty necks, short pricked ears, fine heads and flat, long croups. “In those days before mass media, television or the internet, kings and leaders, the way they gathered popularity was by parade in the street,” she observes. “You didn’t want to be top guy riding a low going horse. On the other hand you could ill afford to be tossed off into the gutter. So a type of horse evolved in Europe…. And, in the land of Thoroughbred racing and foxhunting, this type of horse has, relatively recently, entirely disappeared in favor of a much more horizontal animal.

Angela has a tale to tell. “Years ago, I was working in New York in a very junior post and a 14-year-old, Anne Boorman, who had a property near us, said, ‘Angie, I’ve found you a horse.’ I said I was working and she said, ‘You’ve got to come, she’s going to be dead by tomorrow’”—the horse had injured someone and was destined to be put down.

“She was at Harriman Stables and was going for the price of
meat and therefore I could afford to buy her. I knew I couldn’t afford to keep the horse, but eventually, I met John Bulmer who became my husband and I had a place for horses in England.

“I kept saying to John, this horse I saw in America looked so much like the statues in London—tiny, upheaded, small head. Some of these European horses, never a breed with a registry as such—remember the Thoroughbred did not have a registry until 1836—went to America and that, to me, is very interesting. You, over here in America, were preserving this horse that had disappeared in Europe.”

Angela is a prominent (to put it mildly) sculptor in England. It is interesting that it was public statuary that would initially link her mind to the Morgan breed: “I think my work inevitably makes me look at things grasping the main bulks and forms more readily. The brain has been asked to be very comprehending about shape and form and mass.

“As an artist this caught my attention. My mission was to bring this type of horse back to England. Any of the countries who have imported Morgans, they have, without exception, tried to make them look like the horses that were already there. In Europe, until recently, all the trainers have been race horse trainers,” Angela says, lamenting a tendency of horsemen to try to lower the position of the Morgan forehand whether for dressage or for hacking. “Very few people like to stick their necks out and do something different than their neighbors. The thing I think is important is upheadedness. That upheadedness in the one thing I think important for everyone importing horses to keep in mind. I, as an artist—that’s what I felt was precious and wanted to keep going.”

Before moving on to more about Angela and her Morgan horses, let’s put her in perspective for a moment. The artist has her own page on Wikipedia, which opens by saying “Angela Conner…has exhibited internationally and has large scale...
FOCUS ON WOMEN IN OUR INDUSTRY ～ Angela Conner Bulmer

Above (left to right): British Morgan Horse Society (BMHS) team display at the Duke Of Devonshire’s Chatsworth House over three days with 72,000 in attendance; Flag bearer Tryjas Sweet Charm and a BMHS Youth Member at the Horse of the Year Show.

Sculptures in public and private collections around the world."

Some things of note. In England she is friendly with a roster of artistic icons. Playwright Tom Stoppard (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead and the movie Shakespeare In Love) has sat for her. She counts among acquaintances and friends the likes of Dame Maggie Smith (Downton Abbey and the Harry Potter films). She casually mentions that her sister, Penelope, was married to “Johnny” Osborne. Osborne wrote Look Back In Anger, the 1959 play that resulted in the coining of the phrase “angry young men” to describe a generation of playwrights who would employ gritty realism, as opposed to the escapism of early theater fare. Penelope herself was a film critic writing for both The New Yorker and the The Observer. Angela has done official busts—she calls them “portraits”—of members of the royal family and others, such as art patron The Duke of Devonshire and fellow artist Lucien Freud. Conner was commissioned to sculpt from life Queen Elizabeth II by the Knights of the Garter to celebrate The Queen’s 80th birthday.

Most of her “portraits” have been done from live sittings. She does not like to work from photographs. “People always think, even in England, that a portrait is always a painting. I find the third dimension best,” she divulges. “Character is very interesting to me. You can make a mold of anyone’s face. But a bust looks very dead if you do just a mask. It’s very fascinating that the exchange between an artist and a sitter does bring someone’s multi-faced character out the way nothing else can do. It has to be a live sitting, Photos won’t do.”

She also acknowledges that, once someone is sitting, she works very fast sculpting. This is intrinsic to her process and, as she explains it, there is a comparison to riding: “It’s about not getting intellectual, not over thinking too much. It’s the same with riding. If I think too much I’m a walking disaster. If I don’t think, I’m OK. It’s a funny process.”

She has done 95 of these bronzes now and all the molds are stored in a shed at Monnington, the country estate whose long-term renovation has been a passion for her and her husband John Bulmer.

There’s lots more. The following, also from Wikipedia, discusses the work for which Angela has become best known: “Conner’s kinetic sculptures are concerned with utilizing ‘natural elements like water, sun, gravity or wind to create movement that entices viewers to stop and watch.’ The motion of Conner’s sculptures entirely depends on the natural forces they react with and not electricity. ‘If mankind were suddenly to die out, and if as a result there was no artificial power, the sculpture would still continue its pattern of opening and revealing, then closing and embracing’—Rob Cassy garden designer describing ‘Revelation’; declared one of England’s best water features by Country Life magazine.

Angela, in our interview, again related the subject of her work to the topic of horses,

“Bob Brooks helped me for no advantage to himself,” Angela recalls, “We went all over the East Side of America looking for horses on a very limited budget, but you can’t start a breed in a new country without good stock.”

“Since early childhood I’ve been fascinated by nature. I use natural forces to make things move. That’s why they are referred to as mobiles. You can’t cheat on gravity. You’re putting wind, water, or the sun’s shadows to make things move. I’ve done a sculpture...
SCULPTURE BY ANGELA CONNER BULMER

1. Renaissance, 2016, water mobile, stainless steel and resin, 7.9 m diameter, permanent installation at Hatfield House; 2. Angela and her mobile entitled Rocker; 3. Angela and Her Majesty The Queen share a laugh during a portrait sitting at Buckingham Palace (Photo © Bill Burlington); 4. Her Majesty The Queen; 5. Tom Stoppard; 6. Poise, installed at Monnington Court; 7. Wave is the tallest sculpture in Europe (Photos 1-2, 4-7 © Jon Bulmer).
that, in the beginning of the day, throws a ragged shadow on a piece of marble. As the sun comes round that shadow becomes a perfect linear circle. You could argue that the philosophy behind this is that even within something that appears ugly and hopeless and formless there is the capacity to produce something that is perfect and amazing. I do believe that. You come across a child that is maniacally awful or a horse that persists in being difficult or a garden that just won’t work and in there is the nub of something that can be extraordinary in a positive way.”

A final entry from Wikipedia is noteworthy: “In her long career Conner has created many notable large scale kinetic sculptures which are entirely powered by natural forces. Conner’s 129 foot water and wind sculpture ‘Wave’ at Park West Dublin is the tallest kinetic water and wind sculpture in Europe.”

Angela adds, “Maybe there’s a perversity in me, because I’ve made some of the tallest mobile sculptures in the world. You don’t need to build the largest sculpture in the world.”

Something similar could be said about scouring the East Coast of America in the 1970s, along with her husband, to assemble Europe’s foundation herd of Morgans.

“T he original group of horses that Angela assembled were remarkably uniform in looks.” This is Mike Goebig chatting in an email prior to my interview with Angela. Mike was among the Americans who assisted Angela in her original quest. He continues, “At that point her exposure to Morgans was limited, yet this group still influences the breed.”

Angela’s first assist came from the late Bob Brooks, breeder of “Pepper Power” Morgans and the author of our breed’s original judging standards.

“Bob Brooks helped me for no advantage to himself,” Angela recalls, “We went all over the East Side of America looking for horses on a very limited budget, but you can’t start a breed in a new country without good stock.

Angela is a prominent (to put it mildly) sculptor in England. It is interesting that it was public statuary that would initially link her mind to the Morgan breed:
What distinguished Bob Brooks before we had any horses at all, was that he did take notice that I was serious and I really wanted to get things right. He took me in his car all over the East Side. This was done on a shoestring. You need heart to do almost anything, but money is a help!

The paucity of funds in acquiring this early group is a common theme Angela will strike. She describes sleeping on people’s sofas and having home-cooked meals made by her hosts as they searched for horses of quality that could be bought for a few thousand pounds.

The commitment to finding exceptional animals comes through in this tale when Angela is asked if she was conscious she was establishing a foundation Morgan herd for Great Britain.

“Oh yes, definitely. On a lunatically low budget. I had 3,000 pounds each from two other owners. We had imported a stallion for one of their friends, but we didn’t own it. But my darling husband, John, bought it for me. His name was Tarryall Gene Thiery [in America] and we registered him Tarryall Maestro as we don’t have a male name of ‘Gene,’ so it was mistaken for ‘Jean.’ Not a helpful name for a stallion!”

“In the first few weeks of 1975 I started a British registry and got the registry over here in America to recognize ours. I started blood typing before you did. I thought it was important to keep the breed genetically pure.”

Angela and John were also active in these days with taking their Morgans to shows (14 horses to one show between the two of them at one point) and representing them in public displays.

“Anyway, Maestro was truly ravishing. I remember seeing this man in the crowd crying—a big rough coated farmer and tears were coming down his face—and I asked him it he was OK and he said, ‘No, it’s that horse. He’s so beautiful!’”

In addition to Bob Brooks, others were instrumental in guiding Angela.

As already mentioned one was Mike Goebig. Angela says, “Mike Goebig, I have to say, was the most giving and understanding of men. I saw him riding when he was 18 or 19 years old and the style of riding back then was with their arms out like chickens and he didn’t do that. When we thought something could be done, I certainly looked him out. And that dear man fed me and gave me a bed and it’s not something I will ever forget. I owe him so much—and later when Dwayne [Knowles] joined him. They’ve come over to England at great expense to themselves and they’ve helped so much.”

Another relationship is equally legendary and that is with Jeanne Mellin Herrick—two artists, both romantically in love with the Morgan breed.

Angela recalls the incident that started the friendship. “Well, it began with me seeing Tarryall Cadenza who Jeanne had also seen and wanted to purchase for Saddleback Farm. When she heard that we were starting the breed in England she gave way to me, which was an act of generosity and excitement about the Morgan being in another country. I went to their farm and noticed that all the horses moved straight, rather than winging or dishes. Their horses were very sound. I had hospitality in their house many times and she often came to England. Jeanne did magnificent drawings. She and her sister Joan Osgood came a total of 33 Atlantic trips at their own expense to help the breed for which we were eternally grateful. But again, the generosity of Americans was unforgettable.”
I like to play a game sometimes with people I interview. It’s word association, I say a horse’s name and we get our subject’s immediate response to what that horse is like, what it means to them. In such spontaneity there is great honesty.

BALLAD OF GOESHEN
“She was the one who was going to be put to death the next morning. She was the sole beginner of the breed in England. She had no papers. I’m not an authority, we had no proof she was a Morgan. When Bob Brooks came he said, ‘Oh yeah, that’s a Morgan.’ She never had a foal so there was no issue there, but she began the Morgan in England by inspiration.”

TARRYALL CADENZA
(Applevale Cadence x She’ll Do)
“Dr. Robert Edgar, his prefix was Tarryall. They were in Colorado. She was beautifully conformed. She was not a stepper. I learned to drive with her. She was at Bob Brooks. I went to Bob Brooks to look at another mare and saw Cadenza and said, ‘That’s more like it.’ She got herself into the Sunday Times, which helped the breed a bit. She was a good solid start to it all.”

SPRINGERVEALE PECORA
(Applevale Donelect x Ledgewood Pecora)
“She shook hands with every American judge that came. At Chatsworth, over three days, there would be 72,000 people in the audience. I was trying to get rid of this concept the British had that a park horse was a manic thing. I left her standing in the middle of the ring with a small child on her because I had trained her to do all kinds of things. She was a fabulous mare and she did so much. There is a special program on telly called “Blue Peter” and we took her on the program twice. It was a help, because it had a huge audience. She was so obviously a star. She was so intelligent. When they had the horses of Venice, the famous statues from Venice, they are very much the old fashioned horse. I arranged that Pecora should go in and parade on the telly. I took her in rush hour down Piccadilly. I realized she’d never been in a traffic jam. She was fine. We rode her through the arches. You could see people typing away and gasping from their offices. I cannot think what went through my mind. She was a very useful PR horse. Born to the job.”

SPRINGERVEALE KRISTEN
(Applevale Donalect x Cherokee Maid)
“She was a totally different kind of horse. Very good at endurance and that sort of thing. The English understood her because she was not a stepping kind of horse. Huge capacity for work.”

TARRYALL MAESTRO
(Applevale Cadence x Michele’s Desiree)
“Aha, he was a star. There’s a photograph with a huge crowd and you just saw his head above. And there was that farmer who cried because the horse was so beautiful. All of these horses were so good at these early stages. We were lucky to have ones that made a mark in people’s heads.”

SADDLEBACK SPITFIRE
(Saddleback Superstar x Wawayanda Magic)
“She was my personal horse. I sculpted her special boots because a pastern had completely collapsed. She had style and flair. She was wild and difficult in many ways. We kept one of her offspring, Monnington Quicksilver.”

CHARLESTOWN SUPER SONIC
(Philharmonic x Festival Pride N Joy)
“Aha. Wonderful. He’s got the most beautiful paces. You can get him to change leg every two steps. He’s got size, which, in England, is a help. For me he has the most wonderful nature. He’s still with us. I still ride him. He was a great success. He would always do his job. He came to England and had a good influence on the breed. He is upheaded so you are half way there. He’s also visibly black which people love.”
FOCUS ON WOMEN IN OUR INDUSTRY ~ Angela Conner Bulmer

VERSACE
(Futurity’s Avitar x Vendela)
“I’m the hand that sits inside the glove and the glove is Versace. Even a practice ride on that mare amazes me. It’s wonderful when the bulk of an animal can reflect precisely something that is in your mind. I remember when I first had her and she was superbly trained, she would be as clear saying ‘don’t bother me, I’m working.’ She would let me come in on a job. Now it’s a bit different. She’s been a European champion every time.”

Currently you are championing the electric VL Zaia. How did you come to buy her?
“Well it was the brilliance of my dear friend David Rand. Darling David brilliantly found this horse from the Kelleys. He did quite an amazing job on this mare. It is artistry at its nth degree. If I practice enough and I have a great deal of luck I hope I can do her justice. He’s done a magical job with this horse.”

What was it like having her win the English Pleasure World Championship as a four-year-old last year?
“It would be very hard to be bored. It’s always lovely to see a really great painting or sculpture, or a horse. It’s always magical to see something done artistically.”

What are your hopes and plans for her?
“Well if David thinks I’m capable of showing her I will try to show her. As it happened with Versace. For a while I was effectively a passenger and it took a while before I could be that ‘hand in the glove!’”

More needs to be said to complete the “portrait.” Angela and her husband John Bulmer own and are constantly renovating the estate known as Monnington on Wye (where, Wikipedia notes, “they breed Morgan horses”). John was able to buy the nearly 1,000-year-old estate and buildings, in disrepair in the 1960s, for the 5,000 pounds he received from a photography commission. “Even when it was in a terrible state it had its own feeling of being in a womb, protecting from everything. There’s a feeling in the place regardless of what we have done or not done. We changed the cow barn into a stable. The milking parlor became our first indoor school. We later made our own indoor school. When [trainer] Lionel Ferreira, who is married to our daughter Georgia, came we extended it even more. Then we extended it again and said when are we going to stop? When we end up being like any horse, rather I want to preserve the specialness going to be a flood alert, Angela notes adding, “Quite rightly, the government says you cannot build on lands that flood. So we are curiously protected by the land going down to the river as it is not allowed to get built on. We’re very lucky.”

The farm is regularly the home of a clinic and a show, usually held over Easter weekend. American clinicians and judges come to officiate and Morgan lovers from all over England and Europe descend on Monnington to learn and to exhibit.

Angela’s husband is also an artist, in this case a photographer. Recently he has had vision problems, but even that cloud has its silver lining. Angela says, “Having lost the sight in one eye, it looked as a photographer that his life might be over. But he has tens of thousands of photos. He’s on his third sell-out book now and he goes around lecturing. He has more fame and success now than when he had two good eyes. It’s wonderful for him.”

While Angela rides, John drives. Over the years there have been many pairs including, at one time, a sire and daughter, Charlestown Super Sonic and Monnington Aura. Today visitors to Monnington will quite likely be given a tour behind John’s current pair, Monnington Cassanova and Monnington Aura.

When she was 17 Trudy Connolly earned a scholarship awarded by Angela. It enabled Trudy to travel to the United States and work with prominent trainers here. “Endless trainers allow this scholarship person to come. They feed them, take them to a horse show, and send them home with another trainer.”

In the first few weeks of 1975 I started a British registry and got the registry over here in America to recognize ours. I started blood typing before you did. I thought it was important to keep the breed genetically pure.”

They see a very high level of training,” Angela notes. Today Trudy is manager and trainer at Monnington.

And last, but not least, the Bulmer’s daughter Georgia married South African Saddlebred trainer Lionel Ferreira. Together they reside in Kentucky, at America’s Monnington Farm. Lionel rode Marc Of Charm to the Five Gaited World Championship in August 2015. So there is additional appreciation of America’s high stepping, high headed breeds in the family.

Which brings us back full circle to talking about the unique shape of the Morgan silhouette. “We are lucky that [this undertaking] has leant itself to open arms for so many people in Europe,” Angela observes. “When John and I were first trying to get this off the ground, I realized that the kind of people who might get interested in the breed, were people who were not traditional English horsemen. They already had something going that was working very well—thank you.

“I think it would be sad to have the breed we’ve tried to start ending up in a snaffle slugging through the mud as a hunter or a hack. Don’t get me wrong, I’m all for that as are all Englishmen, but the Morgan is capable of so much more. I don’t want it to end up being like any horse, rather I want to preserve the specialness of the Morgan. They’re very special. Thank God you Americans preserved this kind of a horse.”