

CASE STUDY: CONDO? NO CAN DO!



Organisation: Kitty Hill Resort for Cats
 Location: USA, California, Santa Cruz
 Cattery Type: Indoor
 Cattery Function: Boarding
 Number of Units: 30
 Unit Size: 6' x 5' x 8' (1.8 x 1.5 x 2.4m)
 Date Built: 1999

www.kittyhillresort.com

AN ARCHITECT DESIGNED HER OWN
 CATTERY WITH CAT WELFARE AT THE
 FOREFRONT OF HER MIND, SETTING AN
 EXAMPLE TO OTHERS WISHING TO START
 UP A SUCCESSFUL, PERSONAL AND CARING
 BOARDING CATTERY BUSINESS

KITTY HILL RESORT FOR CATS

THE FELINE ARCHITECT

Kitty Hill's owner, Harriet Butts, is an architect who wants to encourage other cat lovers to create cat resorts like hers, that provide private, walk-in rooms with furniture, windows, and lofts for the cats, rather than the commonly used (in Northern America) condo cage system.

Harriet says: We love cats and we take so much pleasure in being able to offer them cat boarding facilities that carefully provide for their absolute comfort, safety and entertainment. Not only do we have the pleasure of caring for cats, we also have the satisfaction of watching our unique and innovative resort set a new standard of care for cat boarding. Copy us - it works so well to board cats this way!

"The walk-in room design proves itself to us every single day"

Extra large rooms, like the *Presidential Suite* and *Samurai Room*, are perfect for multi-cat families. Our rooms are all so different: we have special rooms for reclusive cats, for social cats, kittens, ancient cats, for climbers, sleepers, athletic rowdies and fussy perfect princesses. We even have a black and white room, the *Music Room*, for black and white cats!

SWEET SMELL OF HOME

Owners are encouraged to bring something that smells of them and also some of their cat's familiar possessions - toys, scratching post, blanket, brush etc so their cat will have the familiar smells and comforts of home around them. Sometimes we get their owners to mail a 'scent letter' which is a fresh sweat-wiped paper as a greeting!

BIGGER AND BETTER

We do not ever mix cats from different households together, each room we provide is only for one family's kitty or kitties. No two rooms are alike; they all have their own names and special features. The *Western Dude Ranch* is 4'6" x 10' x 8' high, the *Sun Room* is about 8' x 7' and has windows on 3 sides with a twin bed in it. Our average size is about 6' x 5' x 8' high (1.8 x 1.5 x 2.4m high). All rooms are the same price: \$22 per night for one cat (around £12), \$36 for two (around £20). We know all too well that ROOM sized accommodation takes up much more space, costs more, and takes more cleaning and care, *but it is well worth the trouble!* As our cat guests relax and unfold themselves day by day, we are able to establish intimate relationships with them and these relationships sustain both them during their stay, and us as we scoop litter and work on their behalf.

We offer skylight lofts, climbing poles, cat-walks, shelf lookouts, ladders, nooks, hiding spots, lounge chairs, beds, bins and baskets. The rooms have operable screened, grilled windows and heated floors covered with padded vinyl.



What are you most pleased with?

When I watch people enter Kitty Hill for the first time, the surprised, delighted and relieved look on their faces just makes me light up inside. This is something I didn't foresee. It is kind of addictive working here - soaking up all the good feelings from cats and owners! I am especially thankful to my sweetheart, Dale Gatlin, for doing such a super job building all our beautiful custom cat rooms.

What would you do differently?

I think Kitty Hill was built a little too open. This works well for humans - light and airy, but it's a little more than the cats need. We accomplish the 'feel-safe factor' by closing-in with drapes for more privacy when needed. In 2006 we will add another 20 large rooms which we will make a little more closed in. I look forward to the fun of building, among others, the French Laundry Room, an Egyptian Room and the Art Studio!

OUR PHILOSOPHY

We have two Cat cuddlers who pet, flatter and cuddle our guests. Anita comes every morning to murmur sweet encouragements, and Annette, who lives at the Resort, cuddles late into the wee hours of the night. We consider this cuddling to be essential, not optional. This one-on-one time helps our guests relax, eat normally, and feel that boarding is entirely acceptable. We want the kitties, and their owners, to be happy when they return for their next visit with us

ROOMS V CAGES: OUR PHILOSOPHY

The traditional rationale for boarding cats in small cages is that :

- Cats feel secure in small spaces
- Cats exercise isometrically and so do not need much room
- Unlike dogs, cats are independent creatures and do fine alone

Well, we disagree!

While it is true that cats love small spaces to hide in, and it is also true that frightened cats feel more secure in small spaces, this does not make it right for a boarding facility to offer **ONLY** small spaces for boarded guests. Something is very wrong if a boarded cat is frightened the whole time.

All cats should have a place to hide, but they should also have a place to come out from hiding and play. Actually, small cages are not very good for hiding either; they offer little to hide behind, or in. Sadly, many cages do not even have enough room for both a regular litter box *and* a cat, so they use little cardboard trays for elimination.

Cage-boarded cats get depressed, they stop grooming themselves, and they don't exercise. They don't have scratching posts, they can't jump or climb, or do much more than turn around and stretch their backs. A short stay in a cage 'exercising isometrically' won't harm their musculature, but longer stays will. We've seen the loss of muscle tone a number of times from cats that have been boarded for weeks in cage-style boarding kennels.

The cats that visit Kitty Hill Resort are companion animals; they are loved pets who are used to being an integral (if not pivotal) part of their family's life. **The old-fashioned labelling of cats as 'independent' creatures ignores the emotionally connected side of family cats.** In their own ways, they are very involved with their human families, very loving towards them and they miss their families when they are separated. They don't understand why they should be put in a cage, and they don't like it. *Who would?!*

CHANGE IS COMING

A change in attitude towards cat boarding is taking place all across the USA. Newer upscale boarding facilities offer 'condos' which are multi-level cages. **While this is obviously a BIG step in the right direction, we do not feel it goes far enough.** Most people don't approve of boarding cats in cages. They don't want to do it, but often have to because they have few options.

Super-friendly cats are the exception, not the rule, in a boarding situation. There are scaredy cats and shy cats and

cranky cats – lots of wonderful cats who are simply not 'ready to purr and be friends' with just anyone in a new, strange environment. How do you establish a relationship with these cats? They certainly do not want a stranger to hold them. Do you reach into their condo to pet them while struggling to keep them from jumping out?

In a room like those at Kitty Hill you can have a seat, get comfortable, and let the cat's curiosity bring him or her out to make friends with you.

CATS NEED SPECIAL CARE

The ROOMS at Kitty Hill help cats in two vital ways; the space we provide allows our guests to move about comfortably, surrounded by their own scratching posts and bedding smelling of home, and allows our staff to establish relationships with them easily and naturally.

This combination creates purring kitties and grateful owners, which makes us happy Kitty Hill cat-lovers!

"Most people don't approve of boarding cats in cages. They don't want to do it, but often have to because they have few options"



CATISFACTION

BUILDINGS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

As an architect, I am very aware of the way in which the three dimensional reality of a building embodies a human value or idea. A good building is a value made visible, tangible. Once we finished building, I no longer had to explain in words what I was trying to do, the building was more fluent and persuasive than I could ever be! **Rooms at our Resort are perfect for making friends; you can sit on the furniture or lie on the floor and let the cat come out to you from the safety of their own hiding place!**



CAT BOARDING IS HARDER TO GET RIGHT

In terms of psychological health, cats are harder to board than dogs. At Kitty Hill, cats are given comfortable rooms. They have their own toys and bedding smelling of home, and the loving relationships they have with Harriet and the staff sustain them. Except for the phone book and the internet, we don't advertise. **Our clients advertise for us;** they can't wait to bring back a friend or colleague! Kitty Hill's philosophy, embodied in our facility, sells itself – with the help of our kitty guests lounging in skylight lofts (as shown above and right).

“We hope lots of people will follow our example and set up similar cat boarding facilities of their own”

CATS DESERVE THE BEST

Kitty Hill tells the story that its cat guests are treasures of infinite worth, deserving of the best love and shelter we can offer. **We love to watch the amazed delight and appreciation on the faces of our new clients as they enter, look around at something they have never imagined, and immediately love.** Their idea of ‘appropriate boarding for cats’ is changed forever! Our clients love their cats so much, as I do mine, I think many of them are almost embarrassed about it; they don't always admit the depth of their feelings to others or sometimes even to themselves. **We see lots of tears at drop off and pick up times. Owners have brought us their hearts for our safe-keeping.** As we carefully listen to their special concerns and help them set up their cats' rooms to their liking, we validate their feelings, and reassure them in their vulnerability. Many have never boarded their cats before and tell us fiercely they ‘would never kennel their cats!’ We who ‘work’ at Kitty Hill are rewarded with all the gratitude and the thanks we get. And better yet, our nice clients leave, and we get to play with their cats!

RESPONSIBILITY & SATISFACTION

Yes, our responsibility is enormous, but what could be more satisfying? This satisfaction happens on a number of different levels: First of all, we have happy and contented boarded kitties. That's wonderful right there. Second, we have a facility that can be copied by others, so that a greater number of cats can be boarded this way around the world. **We have proved the viability of our business by becoming financially successful.** This is more than enough satisfaction, but there is a third source that is even more important to me. This has to do with the idea of cats as treasures. What does it imply to board a cat in a small cage? It implies that the cat is of small worth, reinforcing the whole concept of the limited worth, rights and value of any cat. We are changing as a country, moving closer to becoming guardians of our pets, of all animals, of our beautiful planet. I hope Kitty Hill helps to strengthen the sense of worth and value of cats (and all animals) by validating the love and concerns of the owners, by setting a standard for boarding, and by teaching by example. I would love to feel that we helped push the world in the direction of compassion, caring and connectedness, even just a little bit, through our efforts. **On so many levels I feel very fortunate to have started a business which brings me so much comfort and pleasure. It is truly a labor of love, and I would recommend it most highly.**



KITTY HILL RESORT



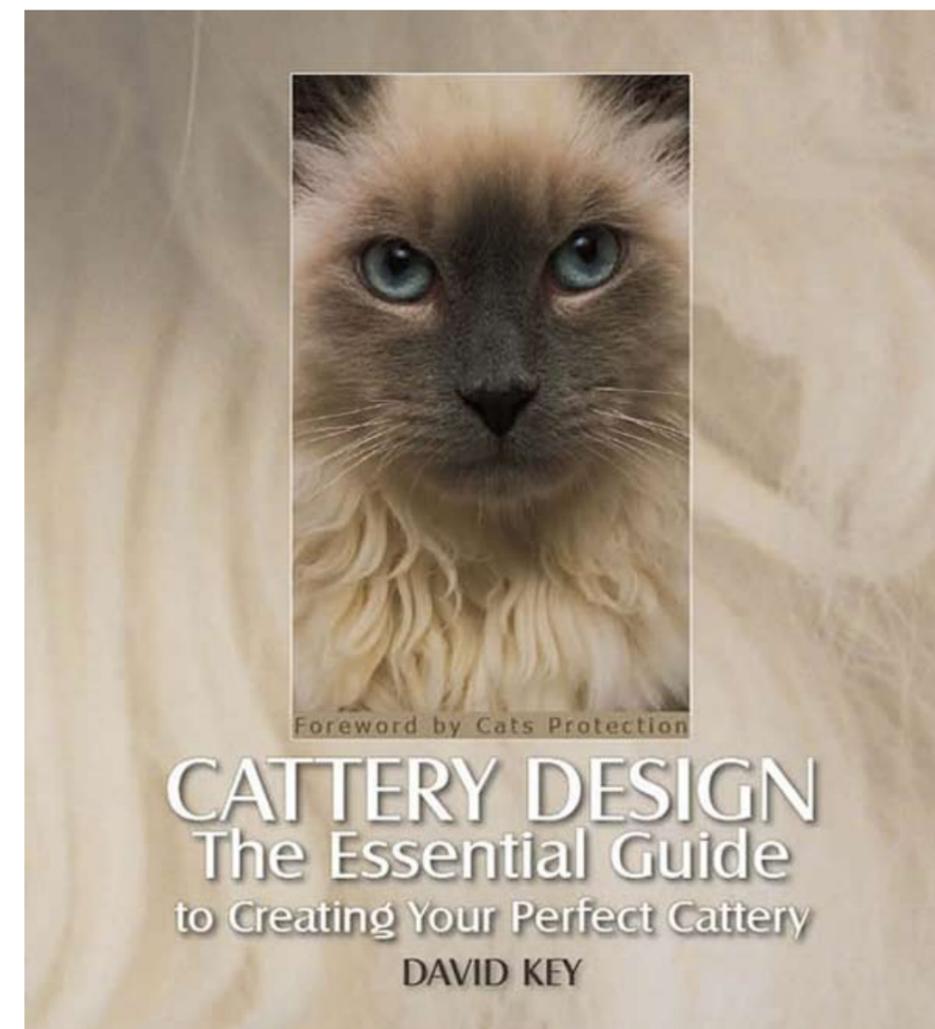
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EXPERT CATTERY-BUILDING ADVICE

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This essential guide will provide you with an easy to read, encouraging and inspirational overview of cattery systems, equipment and materials. With step-by-step guidance for creating your perfect cattery design at your fingertips, and real life case studies, this book will help you understand how catteries can be improved with cat welfare knowledge.

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