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Owner

Ken Slavin, *Cat Depot*

Architect

Barron Schimberg, *AIA*

Builder

Beyond Design Contracting, Inc.

Owner *Don Sutherland*

Interior Designer

The Schimberg Group

Other recognized craftsmen

Coleman Knott *civil engineer*

Crawford Williams *mechanical, electrical, plumbing and fire protection*

Stirling Wilbur Engineering Group
structural elements

Architect Barron Schimberg's Cat Depot Renovation

Feline Fortress

For eight months, architect Barron Schimberg's nighstand may have looked a bit odd to the casual observer. Piles of books on animal behavior, shelter medicine and veterinary ethics offset his usual stack of Frank Lloyd Wright texts. The build of 2007 would become the "Year of the Cat" for Schimberg, who was brainstorming how to transform Sarasota's Cat Depot from a cozy kitty corner into a feline utopia.

What began as a 7,000-square foot warehouse is evolving into a nearly 10,000-square foot, eco-friendly romping pad. Come May, about 200 cats will have Schimberg to thank for their illuminated playground. The non-profit Cat Sepot hopes the renovation will foster more adoptions and bring more attention to its mission as the largest feline animal shelter in Sarasota.



Since opening in 2004, the shelter has nurtured nearly 2,600 cats and paired 1,600 with loving families. Founding member Ken Slavin enlisted Schimberg in February 2007 to further the already-prospering cause, and to help turn a somewhat enclosed, boxy structure into a more eye-catching, airy one. "The point of this project, first and foremost, is to provide a better quality of life for our animals," Slavin says. "It will be larger and nicer environment for the public to interact with our felines, and hopefully find them good homes."

That new environment will have free roaming space for 85 percent of the cats, spots for customer socialization, an administration hub (for the staff of 11) and a volunteer room (for 75 aides that are currently on the books). The revamped blue-print was the culmination of Schimberg's research-scouring websites, participating in online seminars and meeting with experts in the shelter sphere. "In the cat world, people are learning more and more and the information is constantly evolving," Schimberg says. "It was fascinating."

At the start of the project, Schimberg owned two adopted cats, Moises and Alou (named after the New York Mets free agent). When Schimberg wasn't at home, observing his nimble pets as they sneaked into closets and curled up in cubbyholes, he was scheduling appointments with the architect from Best Friends Animal Society in Arizona and visiting Sarasota County Animal Services. Schimberg picked the brains of veterinarian technicians, inspected cage technology, surveyed equipment and poured over guidebooks such as *Why Cats Paint: A Theory of Feline Aesthetics* by Heather Busch and Burton Silver.

"No matter who you talk to and no matter how many sanctuaries that are out there, they're all trying to figure out what design is best for cats. The entire industry is learning," Schimberg says. "At the end of the day, there are a variety of different things people have tried. We've done what we think is the best way to handle the adoption and sheltering of cats."

Schimberg took the outline of the existing building and broadened the back and the sides, dividing the shelter into two distinct realms: human and feline. To keep costs down, he utilized the original architecture instead of razing it, and gave it a more industrial, contemporary look.

Schimberg removed the metal siding from the frame, constructed car runs, or "pods," on the east side, and built a loading dock for storage on the south end.

In the 10-by-15 pods, cats can meander "outdoors," in glass-covered enclosure beaming with natural light and spectators can view them while they pounce play. Fourteen cats per pod will remain cage-free for the majority, if not all, of the day. The idea was to offer cats as much exposure to the outside world as possible, while still maintaining their safety. Kittens and cats that need solitary attention will have their own special cages. "You can have

similar conversations about human quality and comfort as you can about animals," Schimberg says. "The more access they have to natural light and fresh air, the better quality of life they have."

About 65 percent of the say, the Cat Depot won't need to use any artificial lighting indoors. This is due in part to new CPI daylighting panels-translucent polycarbonate pieces that are three to seven feet long and run the length of the north, east and west sides of the building. The panels sit on top of the masonry walls and let in diffused light, reducing energy expenditure while forgoing an attractive, airy ambiance, Schimberg says.

Builders will use masonry instead of drywall for easier clean-up, lay the flooring in methyl methacrylate (MMA), and install a high-voltage alternating current (HVAC) air conditioning system to keep pet hair and dander from circulating. The goal is to adopt cats, so whatever way allows cats to look and act their best, and to be as healthy as possible, that's the best way for us," Schimberg says. "If the design can facilitate that or benefit the cats, that's what we want. It's the love for animals that governs the design."

