

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 meander "outdoors," in glass-covered enof Frank Lloyd Wright texts. The build of 2007 would become the "Year of the Cat" for Schimberg, closure beaming with natural light and who was brainstorming how to transform Sarasota's Cat Depot from a cozy kitty corner into a feline spectators can view them while they pounce utopia.

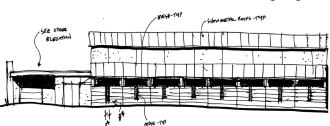
What began as a 7,000- square foot warehouse is evolving into a nearly 10,000square foot, eco-friendly romping pad. Come May, about 200 cats will have Schimberg to thank for their illuminated playground. The non-profit Cat Sepot hopes the renovation will foster more adoptions and bring more attention 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 similar conversations about human qualfamilies. Founding member Ken Slavin enlisted Schimberg in February 2007 to further the already- ity and comfort as you can about animals," prospering cause, and to help turn a somewhat enclosed, boxy structure into a more eye-catching, airy Schimberg says. "The more access they one. "The point of this project, first and foremost, is to provide a better quality of life for our animals," have to natural light and fresh air, the better Slavin says. "It will be larger and nicer environment for the public to interact with our felines, and hopequality of life they have." fully find them good homes."

That new environment will have free roaming space for 85 percent of the cats, spots for cat- Cat Depot won't need to use any artificial 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 energy expenditure while forgoing an atthe New York Mets free agent). When Schimberg wasn't at home, observing his nimble pets as they tractive, airy ambiance, Schimberg says. 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. Schim- of drywall for easier clean-up, lay the floorberg picked the brains of veterinarian technicians, inspected cage technology, surveyed equipment and ing in methyl methacrylate (MMA), and poured over guidebooks such as Why Cats Paint: A Theory of Feline Aesthetics by Heather Busch and install a high-voltage alternating current Burton Silver.

"No matter who you talk to and no matter how many sanctuaries that are out there, they're all pet hair and dander from circulating. The trying to figure out what design is best for cats. The entire industry is learning," Schimberg says. "At goal is to adopt cats, so whatever way althe end of the day, there are a variety of different things people have tried. We've done what we think lows cats to look and act their best, and to 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, way for us." Schimberg says. "If the design dividing the shelter into two distinct realms: human and feline. To keep costs down, he utilized the can facilitate that or benefit the cats, that's 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 governs the design." east side, and built a loading dock for storage on the south end.

Ken Slavin, Cat Depot

Barron Schimberg, AIA

Beyond Design Contracting, Inc. Owner Don Sutherland

The Schimberg Group

Coleman Knott civil engineer

Crawford Williams mechanical, electrical, plumbing and fire protection

Stirling Wilbur Engineering Group

structural elements

In the 10-by-15 pods, cats can

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

About 65 percent of the say, the lighting indoors. This is due in part to new

CPI daylighting panelstranslucent 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

Builders will use masonry instead (HVAC) air conditioning system to keep be as healthy as possible, that's the best what we want. It's the love for animals that

