

# CATTERY DESIGN

## CATS ARE PEOPLE TOO!



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By Craig McAllester

**M**ost often when we hear the word kennel, we assume that it is referring to a place for boarding dogs. By definition, that assumption is correct, however, many times I have seen a city zoning ordinance define the term kennel as, any building that houses more than three animals. So, if you had four chickens in your hen house, it could be defined as a kennel too.

When speaking about cats, however, a more accurate term might be a cattery. When planning for a new facility to house cats, there are some specific design considerations that are unique to the species.

More often than not, cats are boarded in condominium enclosures. These 'cat condos' are usually stacked two or three units high, and they most often have separate areas for living, sleeping, hiding, and a compartment to house a litter box that offers easy access for cleaning.

#### THE CONDO

Having a condo front with a metal grill will allow air to circulate. Some brands of condos incorporate air channels that provide continuous filtered air flow through the condo that is supplied by the buildings' mechanical system.

Though somewhat costly, this may be a good choice in preventing the spread of airborne disease. As the air exits the condo, it is drawn back into the return air duct, and then exhausted to the outside.

#### FINISHES

There are a lot of choices in finishes for the enclosure itself. Unfinished wood, and even painted wood, should not be considered. These simply cannot be cleaned properly. A melamine covered wood product is likely the most common condo finish, however, these will not last forever. Melamine has been known to sag even under its own weight. With a heavyweight boarder, its lifespan may be shortened.

Barking noise from a kennel, for example, should be considered when space planning a cattery. The cattery should not be a passage that connects other spaces in the building. If at all possible, separate the cattery and kennel with other quiet spaces.

A fiberglass enclosure will offer a more durable finish. The surface is a bit more comfortable to lie on too. Fiberglass is easy to clean but it will scratch over time. Another choice is stainless steel. This is most often the choice for isolation rooms as they are easy to clean, scratch resistant, and will likely last for many years to come. They are more costly, however, you will only buy them one time.

Regardless the finish, it must be water resistant, and easily cleaned. Any metal grill or other hardware should be aluminum or stainless steel. A painted, powder coating, or other finish will likely not stand up to years of abuse.

A clear tempered glass or plastic rear panel will allow lots of light to enter in when the condo is backed to window. The condo usually offers a perching shelf or two for lounging. Positioned just so, the occupant may have a nice view of birds in the yard.

Strategically placed window boxes can make a nice resting place, while allowing a nice view outside too.

I once designed a cattery that had a large fish tank that made-up one wall of the cattery. Visitors from the reception area could peek into the cattery by looking through the fish tank. Quite the conversation piece; perhaps, even for the cats?

#### BEYOND THE CONDO

During the day, cats may be turned loose in the cattery. Here, wall mounted shelves or tubes may wrap around the room, giving each cat a place to call home, away from home. Many such products are commercially available, but I think I would make my own. Thousands of ideas are available online. The biggest concern would be safety for the animal and the caretaker too. Ensure the walking

surface has enough gripping-power for the activity intended. Make sure the items are mounted securely and that they are wide enough. Remember, a cat only has nine lives.

#### NOISE CONSIDERATIONS

Plan the cattery so that it is away from other activities in the building.

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#### DRAINAGE CONSIDERATIONS

Another consideration when planning a cattery is the use of floor drains.

Drains are so important in a kennel, but in a cattery, if any cat litter were to work its way into a drain and then got



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wet, the litter would swell up and stop-up the drain. I'm not a big fan of using mops in a kennel, or a cattery for that matter. Simply put, they are usually filthy and spread that filth everywhere they are used. But having floor drains in a cattery, without a hair trap, is likely going to cause plumbing troubles. The hair trap would need to be inspected weekly, if not more often.

## CEILING CONSIDERATIONS

When designing a cattery, perhaps the most overlooked item might be the ceiling. The ceiling you ask? Yes, the ceiling. More often than not, grid ceilings are used in commercial spaces. They are cheap and allow quick access to any equipment above the ceiling. The water resistant ceiling tiles make them even more inviting. The trouble starts when a curious cat, perched on a high catwalk, somehow finds its way into the attic space. It is nearly impossible to retrieve a cat

from the void above the ceiling grid, who has no intention on being captured. For this reason, I strongly recommend a hard ceiling in a cattery with high mounted catwalks.

## AIR QUALITY

In an office building, the air is continually being re-circulated. In the winter, the air is warmed, sent out through the ductwork to warm the rooms. That same air is drawn back to the heat source, rewarmed and returned to warm another part of the building.

Cats are very susceptible to Upper Respiratory Infections (URI's), far more so than dogs. As mentioned earlier, the air in the cattery should be exhausted to the outside. This air should not be reused anywhere within the building. Using a proper Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) system, the air from the cattery, and from any

isolation area, should not be reused in the building.

## SCREENED PORCH

Giving access to fresh air is always good in fair weather. A heavy mesh cattery enclosure will protect both the cats from escaping, and prevent any would-be predator from entering in. Conventional screen material will not due for security. ■

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