

Aviary Design

*a first person singular
"How I Did it."*

by Don Winter, Maitland, FL

I am going to describe in prose my two aviaries. The first is for seed eaters and the second for lorries. I love to build and rearrange things, so I am constantly tearing out my aviaries and rebuilding them. If I were wealthy, I would have large wrought iron Victorian aviaries. But, alas, I have had to compromise.

I began by building traditional aviaries as outlined in the books and magazines. I soon found myself mired in a never ending task of maintenance, cleaning and pest elimination. I came to my first conclusion. Whatever next aviary I constructed, even though I live in Florida, it had to be indoors, it had to be constructed of inert materials, it had to be quickly cleaned, and everything would be standardized.

My 20 by 20 foot two car garage became my seed eating aviary. I already parked my cars outside; so, I stripped it of everything and placed all lawn and garden items in a separate utility storage building. Only the washer and dryer remained. I added a sink and simple shelf to attend to food and water.

The rest of the garage was stripped of the doors, all wood molding, all crevices filled and the entire room painted. There was no place for roaches to live. Fluorescent lights were installed on the ceiling. The floor was covered with ceramic tile. Since cost was a factor, I was not fussy about color. I chose an inexpensive not particularly slippery tan color. The garage doors were replaced with two pair of 30 inch French steel doors and glass blocks, allowing as much light into the room as possible and allowing two 60 inch openings to roll cages outside.

Attached to the outside of the garage I added a simple 10 x 16 foot

screen room for escaped bird safety. I can open all four doors for fresh air for my birds and I can roll all my cages out to be hosed down, while I mop and clean the entire garage. I use all manufactured cages on casters. I slanted the tile towards the thresholds and poured a very small concrete ramp outside so that rolling the cages would be easy. It is attractive, easy to clean and has virtually no material that water can damage. I also installed a mister on a hose so I can spray all my birds each morning. Overall, it was expensive but I was tired of the alternative. About \$2500 for the materials and I provided the labor.

For my lorries, I chose the screen room behind my house. I wanted something that could be hosed down daily. This room evolved over several re-buildings until I finally decided it needed to be varmint and weather proof.

I discovered quite by accident that there is a shift in home remodeling in America. People are replacing their glass sliding doors with more decorative double doors. These old glass doors can be found in the trash, for sale in the newspaper, and so forth. At first I paid about \$10 to \$20 each for them. As word got around, I located about 60 of them, mostly for free. Then guess what? I learned the glass within the frame is tempered and no matter who the manufacturer, they are all exactly the same size. If I recall, 34" by 78" for a three foot door for example.

So my new screen porch is glass enclosed. I used two glass panes sandwiched together about an inch apart. I simply stripped all the aluminum

frames off, since each one was different (and recycled them for the money too). I built walls out of pressure treated 2 x 6s; and used 1 x 2s to frame each panel. Construction was very rapid. Surprisingly, I get no heat build up, and the appearance is like a modern mountain cabin. The roof is a conventional truss and shingle, but anything would work. I have a few doors and openings for ventilation.

The floor is loose brick laid on the dirt ground. Then, I purchased grout used for Mexican tile, swept it into the cracks, sprayed it down with a hose, and the next day had a solid picturesque floor. This is a highly technical process I carefully developed over a period of 15 or 20 minutes.

Next, I ran all my plumbing and electrical on the ceiling. All outlets, switches and so forth are on the ceiling. No water can get into it. And ugly piping doesn't cross in front of windows and cages.

Now that I had a lorry aviary that was indestructible, I moved on to the cages. I liked the idea of suspended cages, but I found a major drawback. The posts were always in my way and debris would collect around them when I hosed. I tried a few suspended from the ceiling, and found plumbing, electrical, and logical obstacles.

Finally I settled on something that did not appear to work on paper. In appropriate places I drilled and installed four inch bolts protruding from the 2 x 6s. Then using large fender washers and extra nuts, attached the rear wire panel of each cage sticking out from the wall. Then I assembled the rest of the cage in the traditional manner, and now had my suspended cage attached to the wall. Less to clean

and nothing in the way. You cannot easily get to the glass behind the cage for serious scrubbing, but the hose gets 90% of the dirt anyway.

Refinements in an aviary are a personal taste. There are things I feel save much time. The issue of hosing down an aviary seems simple on the surface, but is actually a complicated task. Every imperfection, obstacle and so forth must be dealt with. The hose always seems to be caught on something, so it is very important to eliminate as much of this as possible. My hoses are on wall mounted reels. I build up my aviary floor corners with a triangular berm so debris will not collect. I use expensive very flexible hoses with good quality nozzles. I do have an electric pressure washer; but found they have a short life. They are difficult to store in the aviary in an unobtrusive quick access fashion. I may revisit this refinement later. All debris and water drains into a "dry well" and an electric sewage pump moves everything from there into a compost area in my back yard.

One interesting comment. I found

that every "feature" I added to any aviary that did not save me any time or never seemed to get used, should be removed. It would always be in the way and need cleaning. I found that most of my complicated time saving devices did not actually save any time at all. After trying many feeding arrangements I came to the conclusion that one large door on each cage was all I needed. Food was served by simply placing it in a large ceramic bowl that the birds could not turn over. I do not use "bump outs" or holders that need additional cleaning. I found it easier to wash all the dishes twice a day.

I was astonished how much electricity was needed for my aviary. I now have added eight 20 amp circuits. I run those little electric ceramic heaters during cold winter nights and some oil filled ones. Each one has to be on a separate circuit, so a last remodeling trip has added all those circuits. I also added a separate hot water heater and a stainless steel sink and drain board from a restaurant auction. All my dishes are run through a dishwasher every night.

As a decorative touch, I keep hanging plants throughout the aviary, I found a few potted plants on the floor are OK, but too many and it becomes an obstacle course. In one area I have a small water pond. There is a theory that water noise has a calming affect. I am considering adding one to the garage aviary; but, I am concerned about humidity. However, my 150 gallon aquarium in the kitchen seems to offer no problems so another small pond probably would work fine.

Decorative trinkets seem to become roach homes in my case, so I keep them to a minimum. Then frogs live nearby to catch the roaches. One day when cleaning behind my 12 inch diameter cheap plastic temperature gauge, I found two frogs apparently waiting for the bugs to come by.

To summarize, I believe the goal in a successful aviary design is the use of inert scrounged materials, assembled in such a fashion that you keep the heat in and the varmints out and that can be hosed down to perfect cleanliness in a picosecond.

Happy building. 



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