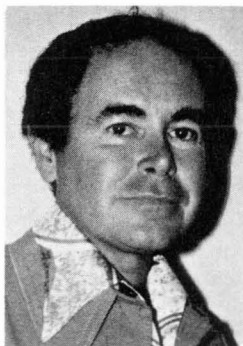




agapornis acres

by Lee Horton

A NEW BIRD HOUSE



Lee Horton

is nearly impossible to duplicate. The problem seems to be more and more evident with all the new mutations now available in very small quantities.

This problem of keeping accurate records of the breeding of the mutations can only be solved by breeding the birds in small groups of no more than three pairs or even better, in single pairs.

The pens in our bird house are six feet wide and fifteen feet long, which is ideal for ten or so pairs. There are twenty-six such pens on either side of a central aisle half of which face Southeast, the other half Northwest. It would be best if all pens faced Southeast and with any new enclosures we build this will be kept in mind.

Late this past summer we decided to build another house to accommodate single pairs. The original building had two problems. First, the birds could be seen from the street. Passersby too often stopped and looked at the birds even though a fence and many trees near the road hindered the view. The other problem was the cold air from the north. Sometimes in January the temperatures would

drop to the mid thirties and the cold air from the north would blow through the pens.

With this in mind we decided to build a new house on the northwest side of the original house and have the whole south-east side open for light and warmth. The other three sides would be closed except for a few french windows that could be opened for ventilation in warm weather. This new building would then block the view from the street and also dampen some of the noise of the birds, as well as protect them from the weather (see diagram).

To make the space for the new building a retaining wall had to be built the entire length of the building, some sixty-eight feet. A grove of King palms and a large apricot tree already in place would help to soften the appearance of the building. But to keep these plants in place some masterminding had to take place. Since our property is on a slight grade the retaining wall was a massive chore. At its highest point it would be six feet tall and at its lowest a single building block high. Because of the Apricot tree, the width of the building would also have to be altered. The building would be sixty-eight feet long and one side would be fifteen feet wide while the entrance side of the building would be only six feet wide. This gave us an entrance to the building that would be only six feet wide by twenty-four feet long with the remainder of the building forty-four long by fifteen feet wide.

After pouring the foundations for the building and completing the retaining wall, it became very evident that there was enough steel and cement to hold up a fortress. This is when my brainstorm hit.

Here in Southern California most breeders of the African Love Bird have used large aviaries and bred the birds on the colony system. But, today, we are faced with an increasing problem of mutations. Breeding ten to fifteen pair of birds in a single colony enclosure and keeping track of the mutations is nearly impossible. If you were fortunate enough to have, for example, fifteen Green split for yellow (Cherryhead) males and fifteen yellow (Cherryhead) females, there would be no problem, but this idyllic condition

Looking north, view shows finished slab and retaining walls before framing.



Downstairs during framing showing staircase center rear.

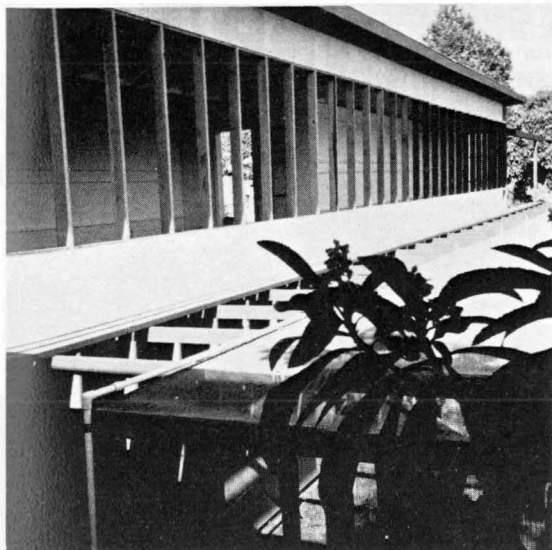


Why not go two stories? I had seen one two-decker aviary a few years back but I had really forgotten about it until now. After talking to the builder, we decided it was a good idea. This would give us double the space and with the extra height an even more protective view from the street. One of the lucky things would be the fact that since the first six feet of the building would be underground, its height would not be so visibly overpowering from the street or from the garden itself.

After some thought and discussion we decided to build small flights in the wide part of the building. These would measure two feet wide by eight feet long. A total of nineteen flights could easily be placed in the space and because of the second story an ultimate of thirty-eight flights would exist. With a four foot space for a service aisle we still had two feet along the wall to hang the breeding cages that I had devised. There would be two rows of these cages on each level giving a total of forty-four cages. These cages were made of welded wire 1/2x1 inch clamped together by metal clips. The size of the completed cage measured two feet deep by two feet high by six feet long.

A new problem occurred. There were now an additional eighty-four enclosures to feed and water. Time saving devices had to be found or my day would be totally involved in feeding. After much investigation an automatic water system was used. The system that we decided on was on a gravity flow system with water-holding tanks. Each group or bank of cages had its own tank which was built into the wall of the house. Each cage and flight inturn had its own water cup which

Outside view showing upstairs during framing.



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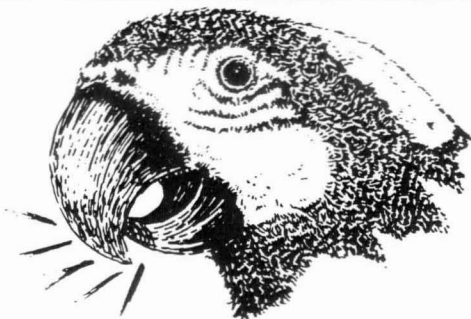
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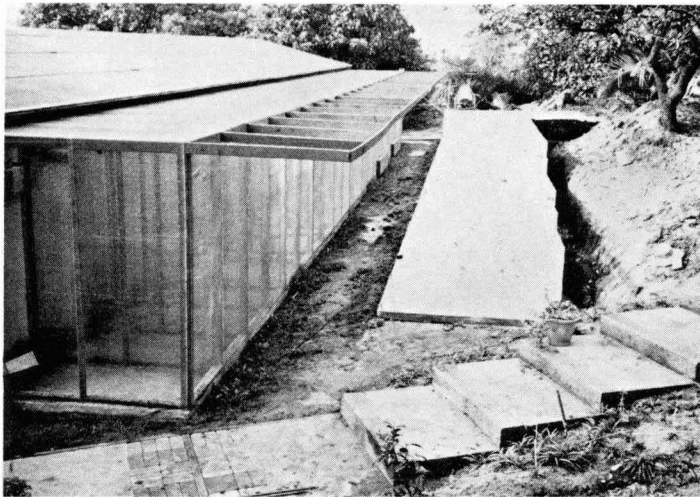
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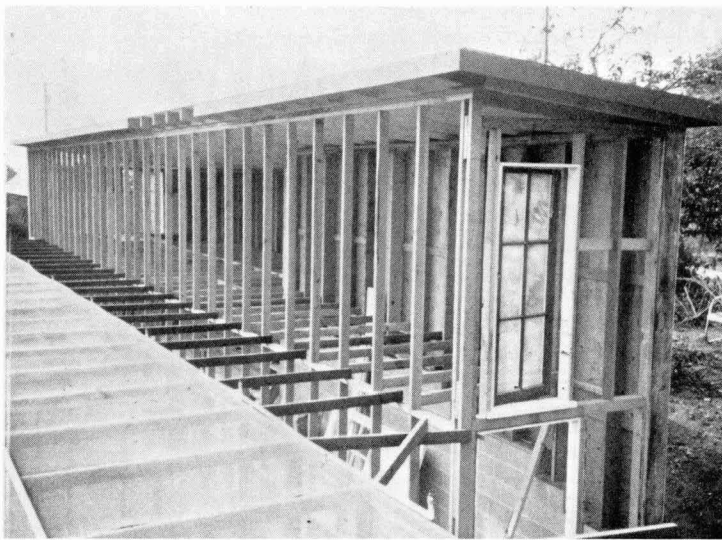


This view of foundations shows the six foot entrance side.



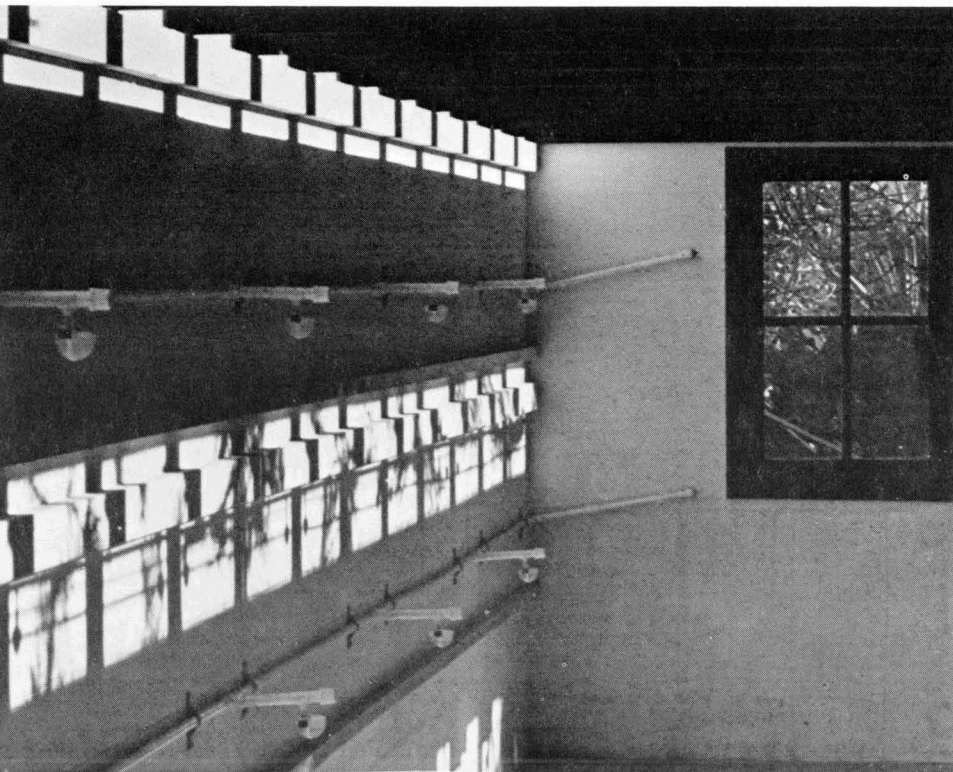
Same view showing entrance after framing.

From the same side of new aviary this view shows how new building is attached to original building. A four foot space between the buildings is left for a walkway.



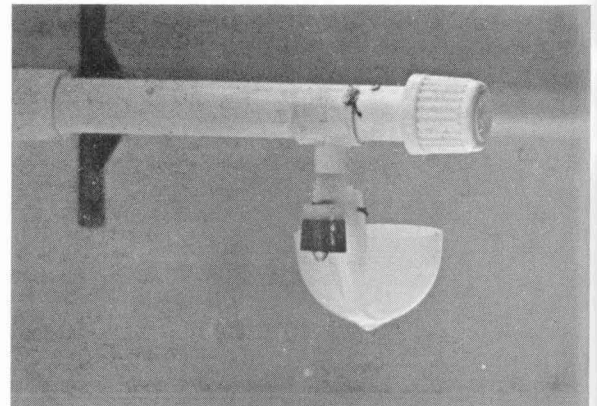
fills up with water until its own weight closes the valve admitting the water.

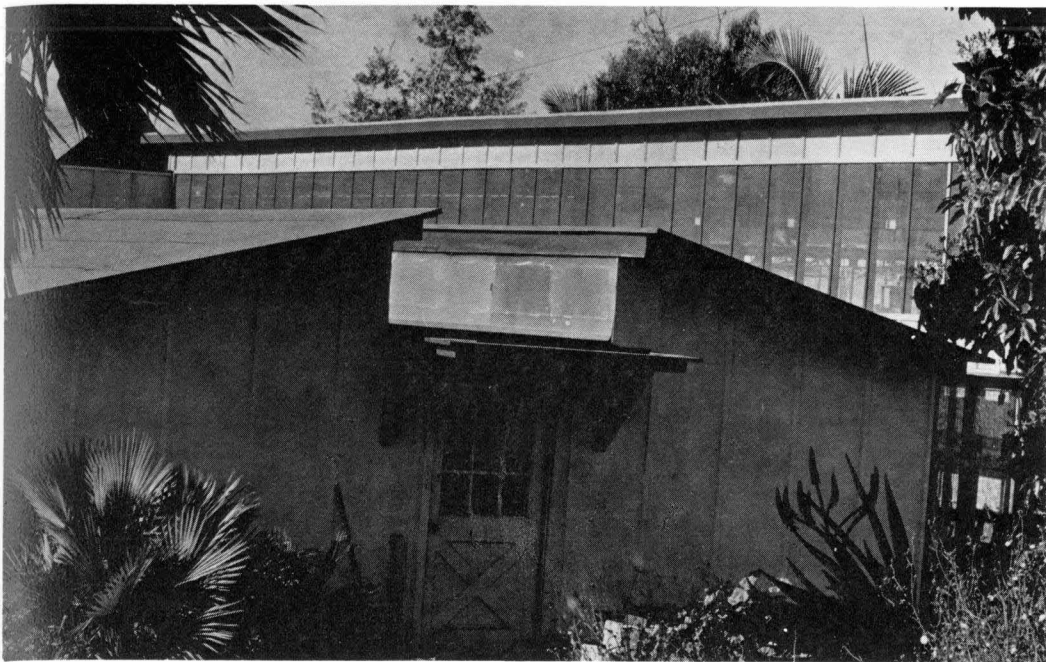
Small wooden seed hoppers are used. Each has two compartments for different seeds. They hold approximately eight pounds of seed. Two small clay dishes were included, one to hold special treats and food, the other, for grit, oyster shell and cuttlebone. All the nest boxes were mounted on the outside of the cages. This too would simplify the task by allowing us to check the nest quickly while walking down the aisleway. To facilitate the record keeping an index card was tacked on the nest. On each of these cards was listed the band number of the cock and the hen. The remainder of the space was for listing the clutches of eggs that would be laid, when, how many eggs, fertility, etc. The band numbers of the young in turn would be recorded and with the color mutations this would ease the problem of figuring out who was what. At the end of the breeding season the cards will be filed and the information logged into a permanent record book for future



Interior view shows the back wall with water fountains in place. All wire cages will be hung on the wall with water fountains extending inside.

This close-up shows the water cup used in all cages and aviaries of the new bird house. This is a gravity flow system manufactured by Marsh Farms.





Original bird house is surrounded on two sides by the new two story house.

reference.

With this new concept we hope to improve our birds by being able to select each pair for certain qualities, such as size, color, fertility, etc.

This first year most of the birds were allowed to choose their own mates before being moved into their individual cages. We did this by grouping the birds of the proper genetical background in the large flights with nests. As each pair chose its mate and nest they were removed and placed in the new house. Since the birds

had been bred in colonies in the past we were afraid that they would not like the change to single pair breeding. But, if they chose their own mates, we hoped they would breed more readily. In the years to come we realized that this would not be necessary as the young raised in cages will readily breed in them.

At the time of this writing many of the pairs (about eighty percent) are building nests and of those many are on eggs. We have great hopes that our new system will be a success.

The author headed down staircase to main floor. Left side of service isle shows cages in place. Nest boxes are mounted on outside for ease of inspection. Right side of isle shows small aviaries.



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