

A purrrrrrrrr-fect home away from home for your cat



TOP: 'Cat Cuddler' Anita Levasseur holds her client in the Presidential Suite. **ABOVE:** Fluffy looks splendid in a lion coif as he lounges in the Animal Kingdom Suite.

Kitty Hill Resort treats felines as though they were its own

✓ **'Many people refused to travel and board their cats before coming here; now they say they can leave and have a good time.'**

HARRIET BUTTS

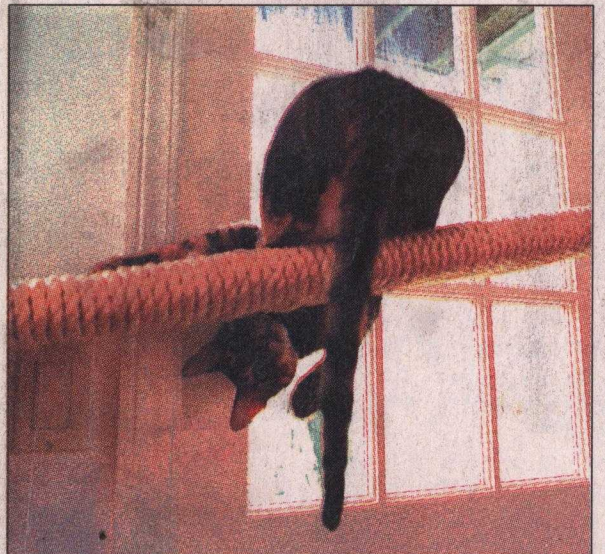
By **MARGO MATEAS**
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

SANTA CRUZ — Cat lovers looking to board their cats in a safe and loving environment may have found their wish come true in Santa Cruz's own Kitty Hill Resort.

The 25-room cat resort is unlike most others, providing a unique cage-free environment for boarders. Instead, cats stay in individual rooms like the Bridal Suite or the Greta Garbo, outfitted with comfy beds, sofa-like areas and soft perches. Each room has plenty of windows, nooks and climbing areas. Some even have skylights. Cats here have life on a silver platter — dinner is served in china bowls nestled atop a shiny silver serving tray.

Owner Harriet Butts has worked hard to provide cats a true "home away from home" by creating warm, intimate spaces that replicate a home living environment

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

There's plenty to do at Kitty Hill Resort.

Kitty resort

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where cats will feel comfortable and safe, down to cozy linens and pillows to the art on the walls.

"I wanted to create a wonderful environment for the cats, but just as importantly, for their owners," Butts says. "People tell us all the time how grateful they are to have a place like this to leave their cats. Many people refused to travel and board their cats before coming here; now they say they can leave and have a good time, knowing their cat is really in a great place getting all the individual love and attention it needs while they're away."

To make sure boarders get plenty of love, Kitty Hill Resort employs a full-time residential resort manager who lives on the property. In addition, the resort has its own "Cat Cuddler" who comes in four hours each day to personally play with and cuddle the cats.

"Cats, especially house cats, need more than just fresh food and water," Butts believes. "They need to have that personal connection, that feeling of love and adoration. I don't know what it is about someone cooing to them that they're beautiful and wonderful, but it definitely makes a difference."

One of the ways Kitty Hill Resort differs from other boarding facilities is its architecture and unusual use of space and light. A licensed architect, Butts personally designed and decorated each of the cat rooms, taking special care to provide for cats' needs for climbing, security and, of course, superiority, by providing plenty of high retreats, step ladders and arches. She's a proud advocate of adaptive reuse.

"Many things here were adapted from other uses," she says of the doors, linens, pillows and pictures throughout the charmingly decorated resort.

Butts, 53, started Kitty Hill Resort three years ago because she was frustrated by the approach boarding facilities took with cats, objecting to the prevalent use of stainless-steel cages and none of the touches of home. As a result, she says animals suffer and can sustain long-term physical and emotional injuries.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Professional 'Cat Cuddler' Anita Levasseur makes her rounds, spending quality time with each and every cat that stays at the Kitty Hill Resort.

One older cat came to her after being boarded in a veterinarian's office for three months in a steel cage. The cat was completely unable to walk at first, then gradually relearned after Harriet and her staff began working with it and building a custom climbing environment to strengthen its legs.

All of this is part of Butts' mission to change the way people think about cats.

"That whole, 'they're just cats' mentality has to go. Cats are unique, wonderful creatures who have rights," she said. "When owners bring their cats here, they feel validated because we understand how important their cats are to them, and we really do treat them with respect and love, just as

they would."

Butts says she likes to tell people that she is "under the care of several cats," as opposed to "owning" them.

"They take care of me. They've helped lower my blood pressure and they give me tremendous unconditional love," she said.

Some of that love gets circulated when the owners come and retrieve their pets.

"I get hugs all the time," Butts says. "People are so grateful we've taken good care of their pets. What better job could there be?"

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Kitty Hill Resort

WHAT: 25-room cat resort, providing a unique cage-free environment for boarders.

OWNER: Harriet Butts.

FEATURES: Cats stay in individual rooms like the Bridal Suite or the Greta Garbo, outfitted with comfy beds, sofa-like areas and soft perches. Each room has windows, nooks and climbing areas. Some even have skylights. Dinner is served in china bowls nestled atop a shiny silver serving tray.

INFORMATION: 427-CATS.

RATES: \$18 a night; \$12 for second cat.

FUTURE PLANS: To double in size and add another residential manager.