

Building for Animals

Unique Design & Construction Challenges

Imagine a space designed and dedicated to your animals' comfort and safety. A place where every detail is intentional and shaped by the builder's experience and knowledge. Building with these principles in mind has taught me valuable lessons that have helped me become a better builder overall. The insights and creative problem-solving I've gained from designing animal shelters have shaped the way I approach all kinds of building, well beyond animal structures.

The Rise in Demand for Animal Shelters

The demand for purpose-built animal structures has grown dramatically since I first began building chicken coops with The Hen House Collection. Since starting my businesses, I've noticed that customers are looking for custom-designed shelters for their animals that cater to their unique needs, not just a generic new or renovated shed. For every animal, there are different needs that must be met. For example, dogs and chickens bring



Dog kennelling facility in Connecticut.

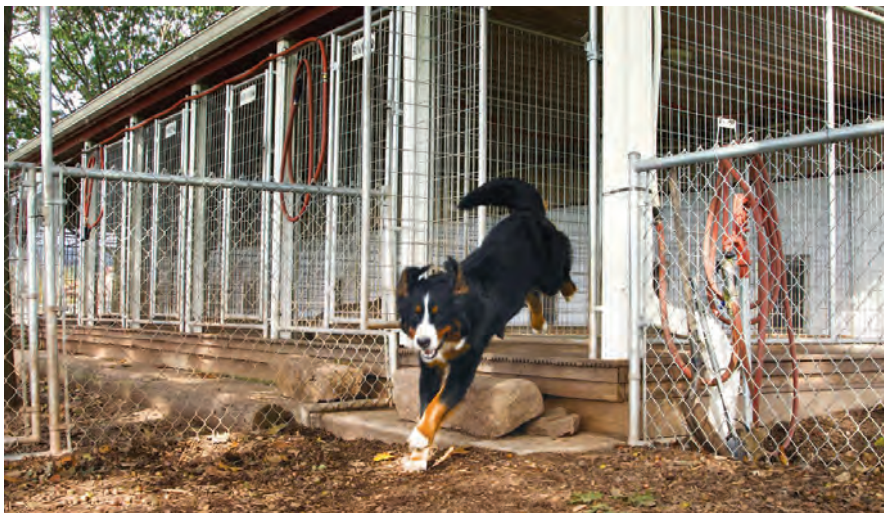
moisture through water bowls, urine, and by tracking in rain, snow, and mud. If left unchecked, this can easily lead to mold, rot, and rust in the shelter. My team and I address these challenges by starting with our initial design layout and building by prioritizing the animals' well-being and safety. Providing these structures to

our customers has helped to expand the market for thoughtfully designed, long-term-use shelters.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that customers are looking for shelters that are durable, above all else. That's why there is such high demand for builders who specialize in animal-specific construction. Only those specialized builders who have spent years creating chicken coops or dog kennels understand the importance of predator-proofing, species-specific ventilation, and durable animal-safe materials. Their experience equips them to anticipate the unique challenges animals pose, such as chewing, digging, or pecking, ensuring the completed structure is both safe and functional in ways that general builders may overlook.

Common Building Trends in Pet Structures

Lately, there has been a basic trend in layouts for pet structures, while still allowing owners the option to choose how they want their structures to look



The team at The Dog Kennel Collection designs structures that prioritize animal comfort and safety.

aesthetically and how they want their structure to fit into their own space. There has also been a strong emphasis on more robust door systems, improved drainage plans, and integrated ventilation rather than add-on vents. Now more than ever, builders are paying closer attention to the materials they use to ensure the comfort and safety of the animals, including the effects of moisture and cleaning chemicals on both the structure and the animals.

Staying Clear Of Unmodified Sheds Or Generic Outdoor Structures For Animals

Using sheds as the base foundation for these projects can be hazardous for animals if you don't know what you're doing. General-purpose sheds will rarely meet the requirements for an animal shelter. It's important to note that manufactured sheds are designed for static storage, not for housing living animals, and frequently lack proper ventilation and sanitation. Overlooking these renovation needs can lead to complications such as poor air quality, moisture buildup, and unsafe surfaces, which can all result in injury to your shelter and animals if not addressed, especially without animal-friendly materials. However, you can convert these generic sheds for pets if you take the right steps. When making such adjustments, builders should rework the wall structure to improve airflow, upgrade the flooring to withstand repeated moisture exposure, and reinforce the doors and hardware to



Smooth, sealed floors and walls that resist moisture and won't trap dirt. PHOTOS COURTESY OF ELAM MILLER, THE DOG KENNEL COLLECTION.

support thermal regulation. In general, it's better to just design or build a structure specifically with your animals in mind.

How A Dog Kennel Is Different From Other Structures, Such As A Chicken Coop, A Shed, Or A Barn

A valuable mindset for any builder is to think like a specialist, even if you're not one. For example, a dog kennel builder must pay close attention to how dogs interact with their environment: chewing, scratching, and pacing demands tougher fasteners and damage-resistant materials.

Chicken coop builders focus on more predator-proof features and controlled ventilation, while barn builders prioritize scale, weight distribution, and equipment access.

Building For Animals: Key Considerations Ventilation:

Ventilation doesn't just keep animals cool in the summer. Ventilation also helps remove moisture year-round, which will help your animals stay warm and comfortable even in the winter. For many enclosed shelters, the best year-

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Closer Look

round ventilation for an animal shelter is mechanical controlled ventilation (MCV) or a zoned HVAC system with negative pressure. This will ensure air is exhausted rather than recirculated.

Durability:

Animal structures experience more wear and tear than most other buildings. That's why it's important to use robust framing, strong fasteners, and materials that can withstand chewing, scratching, or pecking from either dogs, horses, cows, or birds. High-density polyethylene (HDPE) panels are non-porous and resist damage, while fiberglass reinforced panels (FRP) offer extra strength and are resistant to moisture. Choosing durable materials like these means less maintenance, fewer repairs, and a safer shelter for your animals.

Sanitation:

Proper cleaning and disinfection minimize pathogen load, reduce pest populations, limit zoonotic disease transmission to humans, and improve livestock productivity. Install smooth, sealed floors and walls that resist moisture and won't trap in dirt, such as epoxy moisture barriers and coatings. Sheet vinyl is also an excellent choice for damp areas that are prone to moisture buildup.



Smooth, sealed floors and walls that resist moisture and won't trap dirt. PHOTOS COURTESY OF ELAM MILLER, THE DOG KENNEL COLLECTION.

Materials:

Use pressure-treated wood with more animal-safe, less hazardous preservatives like alkaline copper quaternary (ACQ) or copper azole (CA), and avoid chromated copper arsenate-treated wood, which is toxic. Seal or cover any areas animals might chew or peck with a non-toxic, durable, animal-safe barrier such as water-based coatings. This will prevent animals from having direct contact with the pressure-treated wood.



Fetching Results

A valuable mindset for any builder is to think like a specialist, even if you're not one. This means approaching every project with the attention to detail a specialist would bring. For example, when considering ventilation, durability, sanitation, or materials, a builder should consider how these factors apply specifically to each animal and environment. By applying a specialized approach to each aspect, builders can create better, safer spaces that will best meet the needs of animals and their owners. In my experience, adopting this mindset has helped my team design structures that truly prioritize animal comfort and safety. **PB**

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