

To Build a Better Bat House

By Raili Roy

Three years ago, brothers Ron and Gregg Bates were just a couple of roofers with a knack for constructing things that made sense. Ron has a setup on his back patio that he calls his “permanent umbrella”; a beautifully-wrought cedar and glass octagon table and umbrella combination so tightly wedded with the ground that in a high wind the house would probably depart before the outdoor seating. Ron’s wife Joanne has cedar patio planters that are on casters and Ron demonstrates with an index finger how easily 100 lbs of soil can travel when you take friction out of the equation.

Some time after the umbrella and the planters came about, their sister asked them if they could build her a bat house... and the next project came to life as a gleam of curiosity in the Bates brothers’ eyes.

As Ron and Gregg researched, they learned that bat houses have been in use since the early 1900s and always for sensible reasons. They attract the bats that eat the bugs that like to eat us. Bat houses provide bats with a home preferable to human-occupied spaces, moving them out of our attics and sheds. And they provide bats with some prime real estate in a time when the urbanization of our society is paving over their natural habitat. Which may be the most common sense piece of all, considering the increasing number of mosquitoes that are breeding merrily in parking lot puddles and roadside ditches.

But how do you build a better bat house? Ask the bats, or at least the people who study them. Talking with experts at organizations like Texas’ Bat Conservation International (BCI) taught the Bates brothers that bats have two major criteria for a nesting-place; they look for safety and daytime warmth. Gregg and Ron learned that bats like to hang upside down in narrow areas where they can cluster together to keep warm, high out of any predator’s reach.

Historically bat houses have been shallow boxes with wide vertical grooves for the bats to nest between. The



brothers liked this common sense approach and have made some precision improvements to accommodate their lodgers.

They started with exterior-grade plywood, knowing that their sister would want to put up her bat house and never think about it again. Then they applied themselves to the exact dimensions of the nesting grooves.

“They have to be the right depth,” Ron elaborates about the grooves in their design. “Too shallow and cobwebs and detritus accumulate. Too deep and predators can enter, or wasps can set up housekeeping.” After consulting again with BCI they settled on 1/8” grooves.

Once the basic dimensions had been determined, the brothers applied themselves to the comfort of the bats. They machine-tooled each panel of wood in the groove walls to provide little bat claws easy purchase for entrance and exit climbs, and set up a machine-tooled landing pad for easy access.



The Canadian Bat Houses’ Hotel model has a capacity of a whopping 900 bats! We know what you’re thinking...and sorry, bats are sold seperately!

A decorative cedar-shake roof and front grille blazoned with their bat logo complete the house design and

The unique finishing on the exterior of the house was a natural step for the Bates brothers and another example of their knack for constructing things that make sense. They wrapped and effectively sealed their bat house with a black rubber membrane; a material they use regularly during roofing jobs. It made their bat house waterproof. It also sucked up every calorie of sunlight that touched it during the day and held it in during the night, creating a halo of warmth instantly appealing to any

make it appealing to the human eye too.

That first bat house has been occupied since soon after it was installed, and has been the parent of a growing business. With the increasing concern about mosquito-borne West Nile Disease, a growing consideration for the environment and an increasing social interest in the balance of things, Ron and Gregg Bates have found themselves running a company which offers the only Bat Conservation Institute-Certified bat houses in Canada. Today, their bat houses come in five models; Standard, Nursery, Motel, Hotel and Government & Commercial.

Two interesting recent discoveries have had Ron and Gregg laughing and scratching their heads a little. The first came in a story told by their elder aunt about their father, who unknown to the brothers, had built and installed a number of bat houses himself at camp when they were both young. The second came from their mother, who shared a little family history. The name “Bates” is Welsh in origin and in a previous incarnation, was spelled without the e: Bats. It makes sense. •

Ron and Gregg Bates can be reached through their website at www.canadianbathouses.com, or by telephone at 1 (807)768-7625.

