

Cataquarium -The Newest SDHS Design

By Stefanie Wenceslao, Allied Member ASID

When I was first approached by the San Diego Humane Society about redesigning the Cool Cats room in their lobby, I thought it was impossible with the timeframe that I was given. But when it comes to the SDHS, as always, I accepted the challenge! With only a few weeks to gather interest, we had 19 ASID, Allied & Student designers show up for the initial meeting. The designers had two weeks to submit their design concept and the SDHS had one week to select the winning design. Once the winning design was selected, the designer had only 3 weeks to prepare before the 5 day installation. No problem!!

And the winning design... 'CATAQUARIUM' designed by Anne Kellett, ASID. So Anne, where did you find your inspiration for your design concept? "I used to have an aquarium screensaver on my computer and my cat loved it. She would sit nose to screen for hours. That sparked my imagination and the ideas grew from there. One of the design constraints was that the design promotes the concept of cats as house pets not outdoors. Turning the room into a 'marine media room' was my way of solving that. Making the entire back wall into a virtual aquarium complete with a 58" plasma TV showing an underwater DVD, 'seaweed' towers to access the catwalk and Plexiglas tubes through the walls made it come alive."

Anne, can you tell us about the preparation & installation? "Actually, it felt as though I became 'possessed' by the project. I really didn't have the time to devote to it since it was the last two weeks of the semester (I teach at Design Institute) but I couldn't stop thinking about it. I did a lot of research and product search on the Internet. I knew I had to find items that could be quickly shipped because of the time constraint.



Muralists Grace Ann Piano and Derek Delibertis

I decided to work with the Facilities contractors at SDHS rather than bringing in outside ones because they were already familiar with the building and with any animal-related challenges. They were outstanding. For two solid weeks, we worked at building a curved bench, 4 cat towers, put 12" holes through the walls, and attached a 7' sisal wrapped 4x4 to the wall. Dr. Mark nixed my plan to use cork over wood as the cat walk so we decided on 'Trex' instead, a new material for all of us.



Cat Aquarium designer Anne Kellett, ASID

Working 'behind the scenes' in the areas of the building not seen by the public, allowed me to see how truly dedicated the staff is about their mission. And the fact that I didn't take an animal home with me is a miracle!"

So Anne, how does it feel to see your design completed? "Opening day felt a bit surreal but it was great fun watching 2 dozen kittens frolicking in the space. When I held up one of them up in front of the TV underwater scene his little ears perked up and I knew I had hit the mark.

The next day I came back when it was quieter and I was struck by how the space (especially the big TV screen) draws you in the minute you walk in the front door. Since one of the purposes of the space is to facilitate more cat adoptions, I'm hopeful the public will also be drawn to it and the awaiting kitties wanting a new 'forever' home.

It feels very gratifying that all 2 dozen kittens were adopted the first day and that many more will be in the future. It also feels cathartic to have the design out of my head

and in real space. Even though the 'possession' is over, I'd do it again in a heartbeat."

Not only was Anne Kellett a winner in this competition, but we have two other winners as well. There was a tie for the runner-up position; 'Perfect Retreat' designed by Susanne Swenddal, ASID and 'Picture This' designed by Alexandra Roocroft, Student Member ASID, Holly Kohen, Student Member ASID and Janae Hoffman, Student Member ASID.

Thank you to all the designers that expressed an interest in this project. Now please, go check out Anne's stunning design at the San Diego Humane Society on 5500 Gaines Street!!



Dr. Mark Goldstein, President SDHS with Anne Kellett, ASID



Anne Kellett, ASID, student assistants Maria Goff, Student Member ASID, Gerald Bouvie III, Student Member ASID, Joanne Levreault, Student Member ASID