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What's in Those Leftover Holiday Shipping Boxes? Cats

Pileup of cardboard from shopping online inspires craftiness; Todo's fortress



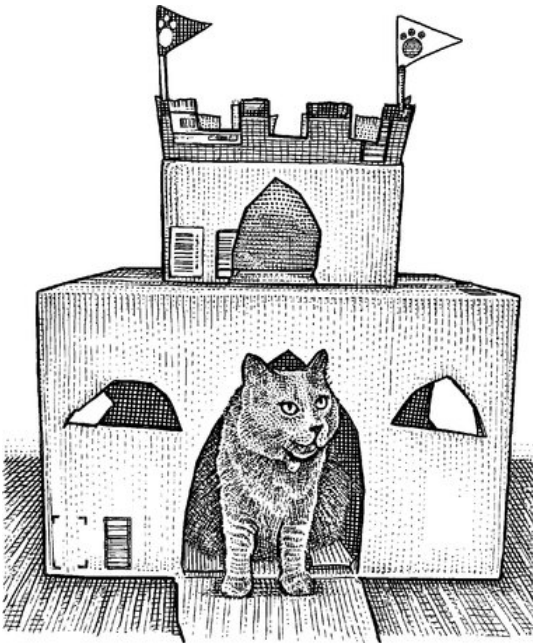
Andres Acosta's cats Ricky and Rocky with their box castle in Orlando, Fla. PHOTO: ANDRES ACOSTA

By *Laura Stevens*

Updated Jan. 2, 2018 7:16 a.m. ET

Like most cats, Ricky and Rocky love boxes.

Their owner, Andres Acosta, bought them a \$40 pet house online, but “they ended up sniffing it and never looked at it again.” So as Amazon.com Inc. holiday orders stacked up in Mr. Acosta's Orlando, Fla., home, he used one of the large boxes to craft a turquoise and white fabric-covered “cat castle” with a blanketed roof deck for the pair.



Bear, the cat

“The cats went nuts,” says the 27-year-old student.

A pileup of boxes from a boom in holiday shopping online is inspiring Yuletide craftiness. Amazon alone was expected to ship more than 1.2 billion packages in the U.S. in 2017, about double what it shipped five years ago, according to estimates by MWPVL International Inc. People are putting the cardboard to work.

Carolyne Krupa, for example, surprised her 3-year-old daughter on her December birthday with a castle whose turrets were made from LG appliance boxes, and windowed walls from Amazon packaging. Tyler Feder, an illustrator, says she saves up pieces that are “nice and smooth” and

decorates them for her booth at craft fairs. Peter Luha, a guitarist and singer, posted a do-it-yourself video on how to create a foot drum out of cardboard, which he used in performances.



Tyler Feder made a one-room house with paper shingles for her cat. PHOTO: TYLER FEDER

Even packaging pros have projects on the side. International Paper Co. spokesman Tom Ryan says his wife uses leftover boxes to line their garden as a way to prevent weeds. Sealed Air Corp., maker of Bubble Wrap, maintains an Instagram feed of repurposed material including children's art of stuffed, smiling clouds raining Bubble Wrap raindrops and a voluminous clear,

plastic dress.

Amazon says it has been working to reduce packaging but doesn't mind customers coming up with uses for what it can't cut back on. Amazon's Director of Customer Packaging Experience, Kim Houchens, says she frequently hears of creative uses for the company's boxes. "There's far more than just cats," she adds.

But few have benefited more from the cardboard bounty than cats, which frequently shun toys, scratching posts and pet houses in favor of empty e-commerce containers. To perfect the art of the cardboard box cat castle, there is a cottage industry of YouTube training videos, library seminars, books and blogs.

Chris Poole, who used to work as a media producer at Big Cat Rescue, a sanctuary for exotic cats in Tampa, Fla., now works full time on videos and social-media content developed around his cats, Cole and Marmalade.



Chris Poole's cats, Cole and Marmalade, with their multiroom gingerbread house. PHOTO: CHRIS POOLE

In December, he and his wife posted a video to YouTube showing their nearly 700,000 followers how to make a giant, multiroom gingerbread house from leftover online shopping boxes and some heavy-duty cartons from Home Depot. After cutting out doors and

windows and hot glue-gunning the structure together, they used paper plates and halves of plastic Easter egg shells to create a candy effect for the roof. They used red and white wrapping paper to decorate cardboard posts and wallpaper the inside.

The gingerbread house, in their living room, replaces the couple's traditional holiday decorations, which the cat destroys by climbing on and eating, says Mr. Poole. "Marmalade is the reason we can't have a Christmas tree anymore," he says.

Mr. Poole says cats like the smell of cardboard in part because it is made from trees. The material is also handy for indoor pets who want to rub and scratch, and curling up in a box can help a cat feel protected and warm.

The feline love for cardboard has scientific backing. A study published in 2014 found that cats arriving at a Dutch animal shelter and given a box were able to better cope with stress and acclimate more quickly, according to the Applied Animal Behaviour Science journal.



Laura Peden says the fortress she built has helped calm down her 1-year-old cat, Todo. PHOTO: LAURA PEDEN

Laura Peden says the 3-foot tall, four-room fortress she built has helped calm down her 1-year-old Bengal, Todo. She and her husband taped together four brown and purple boxes from Chewy.com, left over from their litter, cat food and cat treat orders, and added a big white tube

running out the front for Todo to crawl through. Todo climbs, perches and guards her territory—all important qualities for the breed.

“She’s high energy, and we were desperate,” adds Ms. Peden, describing Todo as “basically a dog and toddler in one.”

The Memphis, Tenn., resident also attached string to the walls inside for clawing and taped a sign out front with their cat’s name: “Todo’s House.”

“The only issue is that she wants to pull the tape,” holding the structure together, Ms. Peden adds.



Morgan McBride’s cat Bear sits in his turret PHOTO: MORGAN MCBRIDE

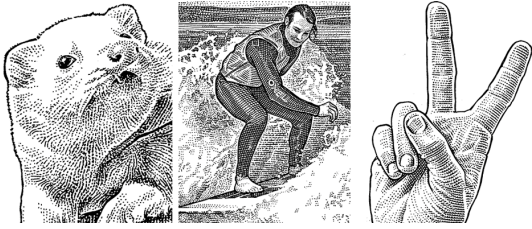
Morgan McBride of Charleston, S.C., the owner of a cat named Bear, constructed a two-story castle out of two brown Amazon boxes, complete with pink and yellow paw-printed flags. The top story is cut out like a turret, with Amazon’s black and blue tape advertising its Prime membership service marking each peak.

“I like making things pretty,” Ms. McBride says. “I think that most cat stuff is really ugly, so the idea

of making something cute really appealed to me.”

The Spokane Public Library in Spokane, Wash., held “Build Your Cat a Castle” events at two of its branches late last year as a way to whittle down its mountain of book and supply-order

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boxes. Librarian Cathy Bakken says the idea was “an instant click” when she saw a recently-released book titled “Cat Castles: 20 Cardboard Habitats You Can Build Yourself,” on the returns cart.

For the classes, Ms. Bakken put together a slide presentation with some of the ideas from the book,



The Spokane Public Library in Washington state held 'Build Your Cat a Castle' events as a way to whittle down its boxes.
PHOTO: SPOKANE PUBLIC LIBRARY

accompanied by pictures. One man crafted a “Yellow Submarine,” with a porthole opening and a paper-towel tube periscope. Two youngsters made a cat castle with a working drawbridge. More than 50 people attended the two events, and Ms. Bakken is planning two more for this year.

“People can build these things for their small dogs, but I think there’s just this innate love for cats,” she says, “even though they don’t seem to give us hugs back.”

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