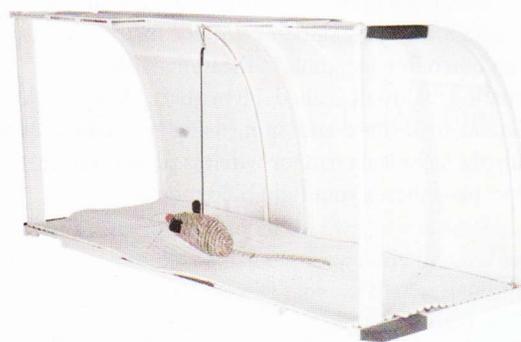


Exploring the Outdoors, Indoors

COUPLE'S CAT WINDOW SEAT
PROMOTES TUNNEL PLAY, PRIVACY
WHILE PRESERVING BLINDS

BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN



I often get inquiries to manufacture new pet products, so I know there are many dog and cat inventions brought to market every year. If you Google “new dog and cat inventions,” you get 45.9 million entries!

Cats are explorers by nature, whether inside or outdoors. My little old indoor kitty, Missy-Pups (it's a long story), likes to climb up on her soft window perch to observe the outside world.

The WindowKitty® cat window seat allows the kitty to enter into a cylinder and look out the window while leaving your blinds unharmed. Christina and Brian Martinez of Temple, Texas are the couple behind the invention, which was named a 2016 Fave Find by Modern Cat magazine and won the votes to be a QVC Sprouts product.

Edith G. Tolchin: Tell us about yourselves and your backgrounds. Is this a team effort?

Christina Martinez: Brian and I are married and have five boys ranging in ages from 9 to 18, seven cats, two dogs and fish. We are both veterans, having served in the Army as military police. We both work in information technology in the private sector; Brian is in health care and I am in life insurance. We are looking forward to working on WindowKitty full time. We lean on each other during the tough times, and both bring different strengths to the WindowKitty brand.

EGT: How did WindowKitty come about?

CM: WindowKitty is a place where cats can play or bask in the sunshine, or just have some privacy in the enclosed tunnel. This idea came about because our cats were sitting on our window-sills and pushing the blinds off the sill, or breaking and/or bending our blinds to sit at the bedroom window. The cats liked to sit

in a particular window as it faced the street. We had neighbors who were always outside. I thought they could see in through the broken blinds. We raised the blinds for the cats, but I didn't really like to leave the blinds raised. I searched online and found that this was a pretty big problem that had no solution.

EGT: How is it different from other cat window perches?

CM: WindowKitty is a multi-functional pet product. It differs from other cat window perches as it blocks the view into the window, so people outside cannot see in. Window blinds rest safely out of your cats' way on top of the product. It's a fun tunnel; cats like to be enclosed, which gives them privacy. There are two toys: one hangs inside the tunnel and one underneath. These features are also the advantages of buying a WindowKitty over a regular window perch.

EGT: How did you create your prototype, and how many versions did you have before you knew WindowKitty was a hit?

CM: We had about 10 prototypes made. Brian and I tried to make a few with items from a home improvement store. We had a prototype 3D-printed locally, and the others were hand-made prototypes by our manufacturer.

EGT: Tell us briefly about your patent process.

CM: Initially, I reviewed the United States Patent and Trademark Office's website to understand the process. I knew that I

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHRISTINA MARTINEZ



"This idea came about because our cats were sitting on our windowsills and pushing the blinds off the sill, or breaking and/or bending our blinds to sit at the bedroom window."

—CHRISTINA MARTINEZ,
SHOWN WITH HUSBAND BRIAN

would not be able to do the patent search myself and found a patent lawyer based in Kansas to help us with our patent search in late 2013. If our search came back positive, we would move forward. We received positive results and decided to file a utility patent with the same lawyer. We filed in early 2014. In late 2015, our claims were reviewed. We did complete a few adjustments and were patented in March 2016. It was very exciting to receive the actual patent!

EGT: Have you encountered any product development challenges?

CM: Yes. We found a fancy product design company based in California that drew our designs for us. They were awesome to work with, so we continued with them for the design drawings. The company did not deliver like they did on the drawings. We were not making progress, and we were not receiving deliverables. The design process was scheduled to take three weeks; it ended up taking over six months. We escalated to dealing with the owner. He backed up his personnel and told us we weren't worth their time.

There were a lot of sleepless nights, and we lost a lot of money with this company. We submitted the designs to our manufacturer and found the drawings were not complete. We found a local engineer through MakeXYZ.com. We had him review the designs and fix them. From his corrections, we were able to get the product manufactured.

EGT: Are you manufacturing in the United States, or overseas? How has production gone?

CM: We were not able to find a U.S. manufacturer and are manufacturing WindowKitty in China. Our experience has been very positive with our manufacturer. While the price may be cheaper for the product, shipping from China is very expensive. When working with China, you must take into consideration the holidays. All work stops for the Chinese New Year. Shipping takes a month or longer, so it is a very long process. Also, it is a good idea to purchase open ocean cargo insurance in case you lose all your products in the ocean! We were lucky to have a shipping representative explain the entire process.

EGT: What about your logo and packaging?

CM: Working with a company to develop a logo and packaging

is very expensive. We created our logo through LogoGarden and then purchased different designs and colors through Fiverr.com. For packaging, we just went with a plain brown carton and black ink, sort of like Amazon. The next time we order inventory, we will have a new box design. We will be using our own pictures for a display box. On our website we use a pink and black logo, which I think captures our brand effectively and will be on our next box.

EGT: What are your sales channels?

CM: Currently we are selling through our website, as well as on Amazon and eBay. We also attend local shows such as cat shows, fairs and pet expos.

EGT: What about PR and marketing? Have you tried crowdfunding?

CM: We just completed a four-month PR campaign and have met with marketing firms for consultation. The PR campaign

was helpful in getting us linked up with bloggers and in magazines for features. We tried two times to raise funds through Kickstarter; both were unsuccessful in reaching our funding goal. But we did meet our manufacturer through our campaign, so in that way it was successful.

EGT: Any advice regarding the invention process?

CM: Be patient, as it is a slow process. Find as much help as you can from local companies. Have a business plan (and stick to it), and ask questions if there is something you don't understand.

EGT: If you could invent a new product for world peace, what would that be?

CM: In my experience, when a baby is born in the hospital, music is played. When you hear the music, it promotes hope in new life. I think that if a product could promote hope for all people, maybe we could have world peace. 🎵

Details: WindowKitty.com

Edie Tolchin has contributed to *Inventors Digest* since 2000. She is the author of *Secrets of Successful Inventing* and owner of EGT Global Trading, which for more than 25 years has helped inventors with product safety issues, sourcing and China manufacturing. Contact Edie at egt@egtglobaltrading.com.



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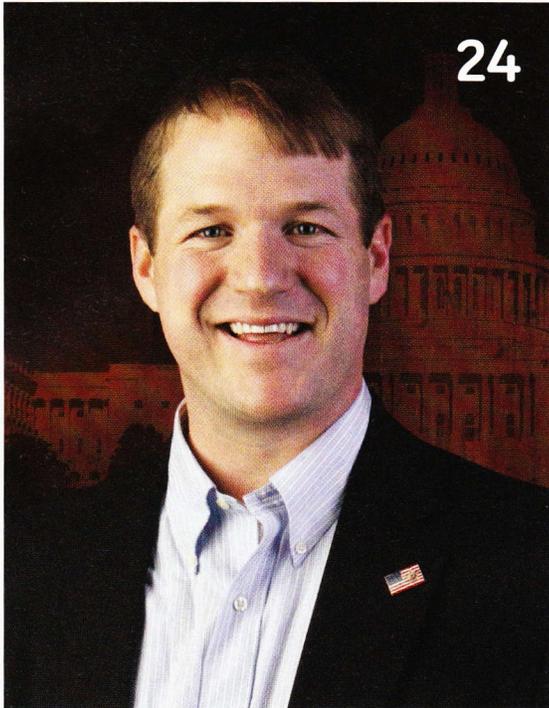
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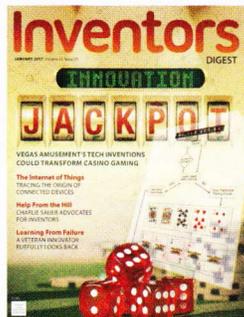
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Vegas Amusement photo illustration by Jorge Zegarra

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EDITOR'S NOTE



Ring In the New, Savor the Tried and True

January 1 is not just a time to make resolutions and start anew; it's a time to renew our appreciation for people and things that make our lives better. In the case of *Inventors Digest*, that means our regular contributors—subject-matter experts in their respective inventing-related fields who are the backbone of this magazine.

A new year seems like the perfect time to provide readers with a fresh look at these industry professionals that goes beyond the bios that appear with their stories. Here's a little more about them.

Jack Lander has the longest ongoing association with *Inventors Digest* among our regular writers, having written "Lander Zone" for the past 20 years. He's an electromechanical engineer with corporate experience as a manufacturing engineer and new-product designer. Jack has 14 patents, four of which are for the world's first disposable laparoscopic surgical instruments. He mentors inventors and start-up entrepreneurs.

The first ID article by **John Rau** was 19 years ago this spring. In addition to his role as president/CEO of Anaheim, California-based Ultra-Research Inc., he is a board of directors member of Inventors Forum, one of the largest inventor club organizations in the United States. He mentors student entrepreneur teams in Southern California and is a certified counselor and mentor for the U.S. Small Business Association's SCORE organization.

Edie Tolchin, who has contributed to the magazine since 2000, has another writing life. "I've written nonfiction for almost 20 years," she says. "My obsession for the past 2 1/2 years has been my new comedic (debut) novel called 'Fanny on Fire,' based on my growing up as a naughty outlier from the Bronx." She's seeking a publisher for that and working on her fourth book for inventors, which she says will have a feminist twist.

Patent attorney **Gene Quinn**, our Eye on Washington watchdog, has contributed regularly to the magazine for nine years and has been a monthly contributor for two years. He's heavily involved in improving his IPWatchdog.com resource, as well as re-dedicating himself to working out. Gene loves football, especially fantasy football. "Inventing is the story of creating what the mind's eye is inspired to dream," he says.

Jeremy Losaw, an engineering manager for Charlotte-based Enventys who has been a regular contributor for four years, loves solving problems and building prototypes. He says he's into photography, building model cars and growing orchids—"sometimes all at once." Jeremy's claims to fame include: "once raced against Kyle Busch and lost; have been to AC/DC concerts on two continents; have two 3D printers, and neither of them works."

Don Debelak, who began contributing to *Inventors Digest* last June, runs the website onestopinventionshop.net, which helps inventors patent, license and market their inventions. He loves the unique approaches of inventors, especially their "unlimited tenacity and persistence to achieve success." Don likes to play golf and find ways to minimize some of the costs inventors pay to launch their products.

Join me in appreciation for these well-rounded professionals.

—Reid (reid.creager@inventorsdigest.com)