

BMW ON

KING OF THE ROAD



Apres Riding



Wine Open Spaces

APRES (FRENCH, AFTER) SKIING? NOT for us. We don't have a lot of snow in the Chihuahuan Desert of the Big Bend of Texas. When we do get a light dusting, it's usually gone within hours, so we don't ski here, much. Not on purpose. What we do do is conserve water. The source for our water here in the desert is rain catchment, and with an average annual rainfall of about 11 inches, we've learned to be quite frugal with water. But a shower at the end of an intense day of riding all but impassable dirt roads? That would be priceless!

When we moved here in the spring of 2006, we didn't even have much of any way to catch water, and the 45-year-old water truck used to haul well water from a nearby bentonite mine had outlived its usefulness. Over the years we've added lots of refinements to our basic 1500 square foot, 40-year-old, adobe home, including water storage tanks and a miniature water treatment plant. Initially we had only a claw foot bathtub, so to conserve water we hung a camping shower on the back porch. You know, the kind that holds two gallons of water and is warmed by the sun. We do have lots of sun! Our motorcycle touring in

southern Africa gave us lots of ideas about showering outside. It does help that our nearest neighbor is a quarter of a mile away and on the other side of the highway, so we do have complete privacy out back. After being inspired by what recycled wine bottles could be used for, I began to dream of building a really unique outdoor shower.

For six long years, I bided my time, saving the wine bottles that we, and many visiting friends, used to celebrate evenings with our large open and empty expanse of desert and sky, viewing fiery sunsets and mountains to the west. Then, on one of our rare sunless days in January, I told Paul this was the day and started bringing my bottle collection to the back porch to begin planning how to do it.

Paul is a problem solver, so seeing my activity, he got into problem-solving mode. "How big?" he asked.

"Big"! I said. He put his arms about three feet wide and asked "Like this?"

I said, "Oh, no. I'm thinking from here to way over there. We've got 12 acres. Might as well use some of it."

"Rocks? Mortar?" he asked.

"Too heavy," I thought. A wood frame

might be nice. A floor of those unusual but abundant rocks would be perfect, but would take more planning.

So, we began scraping and digging to make a smooth flat surface. Then we arranged the rocks like puzzle pieces to fit together. That took all of the first day. We sifted sandy clay as a bed for the rocks and to fill the seams between them. Once the rocks were in place, we wet it all down to set it. Our "soil" is quite unique, and once it has been soaked and dried, works just as well as grout or cement might have without all the bother.

We needed a wood frame to hold the bottles. Drilling holes in rock ensured the base was solidly anchored. Then it was time to measure and create.

Once the frame was up, we started laying the bottles on their sides, but soon realized we'd run out too soon with that construction; so we stood them up side by side. Though we tried Gorilla Glue, we found it doesn't take sunshine well, so ultimately we ended up using Lexel, a clear construction and roofing adhesive, applied with a caulking gun on the adjoining sides and the bottom of each bottle.

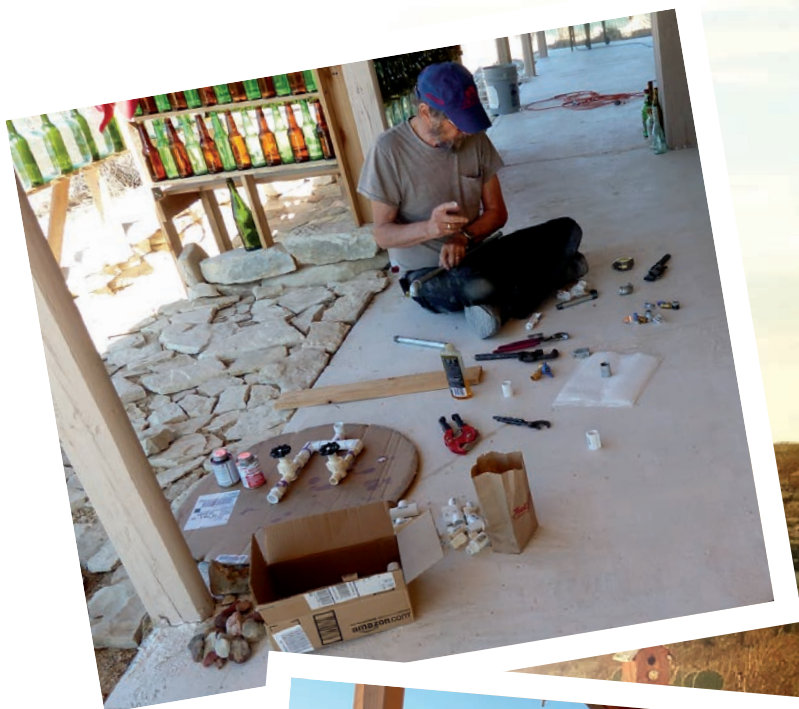
By Voni Graves #13337



"Done," I said, as I strolled to the hanging solar shower at sunset.

"Not quite!" Paul said. "I could plumb this into the house plumbing and we could have abundant hot water any time." He designed the plumbing to go up to ceiling level, then into the house and down to the bathtub pipes. This was close to the water heater, so we don't waste water waiting for the hot water to arrive. He also included valves so the outdoor piping can be shut off and drained for those rare, but occasional, nights it gets below freezing. To conserve water he installed a pull-chain shower head, so once the shower water temperature is adjusted, the shower can be turned on with the simple pull of the chain. This led to our pull-wet, off-scrub, pull-rinse shower routine.

We've lost a bottle or two to wind or hail over the two years of the shower's life, but they are easily replaceable. We've modified the design by adding a row of bottles to the top to keep our cat, Stormy, from climbing on the roof. But that's another story for another time. Sitting on the back porch, watching the sun set on our big screen sky, we see a different show every night. And a shower whenever we feel the need. Wind? That just adds a musical flair with the song of the bottles. ☺



(Above) Paul Glaves works on shower plumbing, (right) Empty bottles wait to be set in place forming the walls of the shower, (far right) The completed shower outside the Glaves Texas home.



