

People who live in glass houses shouldn't (and Charlie Yelton doesn't) throw stones . . .

by Jock Lauterer

In case you've been fretting over what to do with those non-returnable bottles, 68-year-old Charlie Yelton, of Forest City, has the answer.

Build yourself a glass house (and don't throw stones).

It all started in 1970 when Yelton was crippled by a house trailer collapsing on him. When he recovered he found "I was used to working and I was getting aggravated sitting around not having anything to do — so I figured up I needed somewhere to put my bottle collection..."

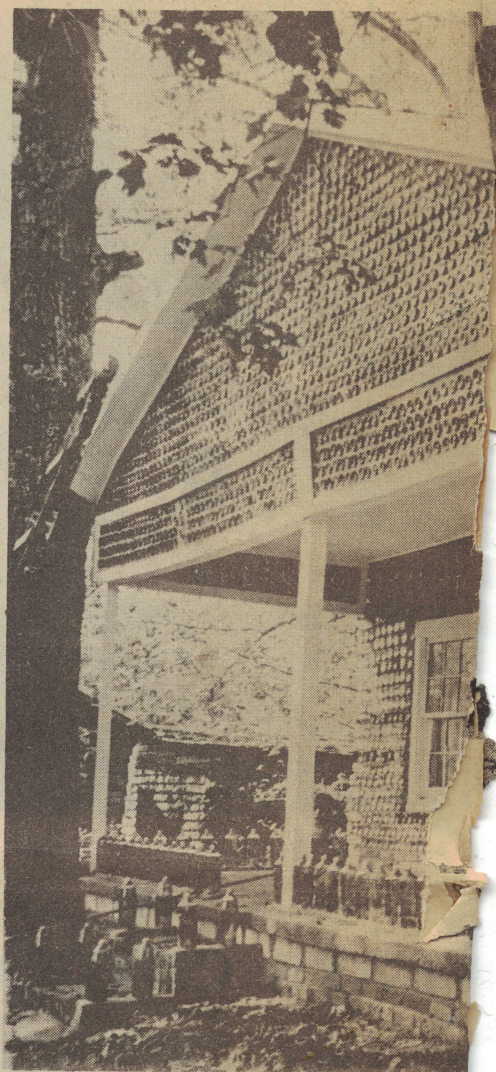
In Yelton's case, the end was the means, as his bottle collection turned into a house. But that was four years ago — it took him that long to finish the major part of the work collection turned into a bottle house.

So he began stacking up bottles and plastering cement between them. Yelton started figuring out different designs to make with various colored bottles. He built it by "eye" and feel. He faced his bottles inwards and capped them. "They told me if you turned them outwards, the wind blowing past would make a terrible racket."

6,318 quart bottles, 5,666 beer bottles, and 57 milk of magnesia bottles, and four years later, Charlie Yelton had himself a glass house.

And he built it despite his age, a bad leg and no help. "I just worked at it slower than I would have if I hadn't of been hurt. It took longer, but I was just careful so as not to fall," the grey-haired, ruddy faced Yelton said proudly. "I built it without a level, square or 'T' — I just up and did it — did it for something to do. There was no hurry, I never meant it to be a place to live in."

Yelton's glass palace is not obvious to the everyday driver along Cherry Mountain Rd., between Forest City and Bostic. But once located Yelton is happy to show visitors around. "Just as long as



It took Charlie Yelton 12,000 bottles to build this house. It was finished this August . . .



Lotta people hav' come around — including one college professor who came twice. He had fits over my bottle house. I knew him from a kid when I'd taken warts off'en him. He said he was gonna come back, but he never did." Yelton led up between the barn and waved in the direction of his bottle house.

First impression: like some Southern Hansel and Gretel coming upon the Wicked Witch's gingerbread house; only this time the fantastic structure is built out of bottles — stacked and mortared in orderly fashion. There are patterns of rings and stripes out of green bottles — most of the house is built of clear quart bottles. Over the main gable is a cross — a blue cross formed out of pint-sized milk of magnesia bottles.

"H'its not perfect," humbly Yelton wags his shoulders, "but it's up." Yelton's cheery grandson in little overalls chirps, "I helped him."

Inside the house looks like a one-way bottle stained-glass window. And there *is* something holy about the place — to Yelton at least. One room is reserved with a red-carpeted throne, and a picture of Jesus laying in the seat. "This is my prayer bench — I come in here and it's just me and the Lord."

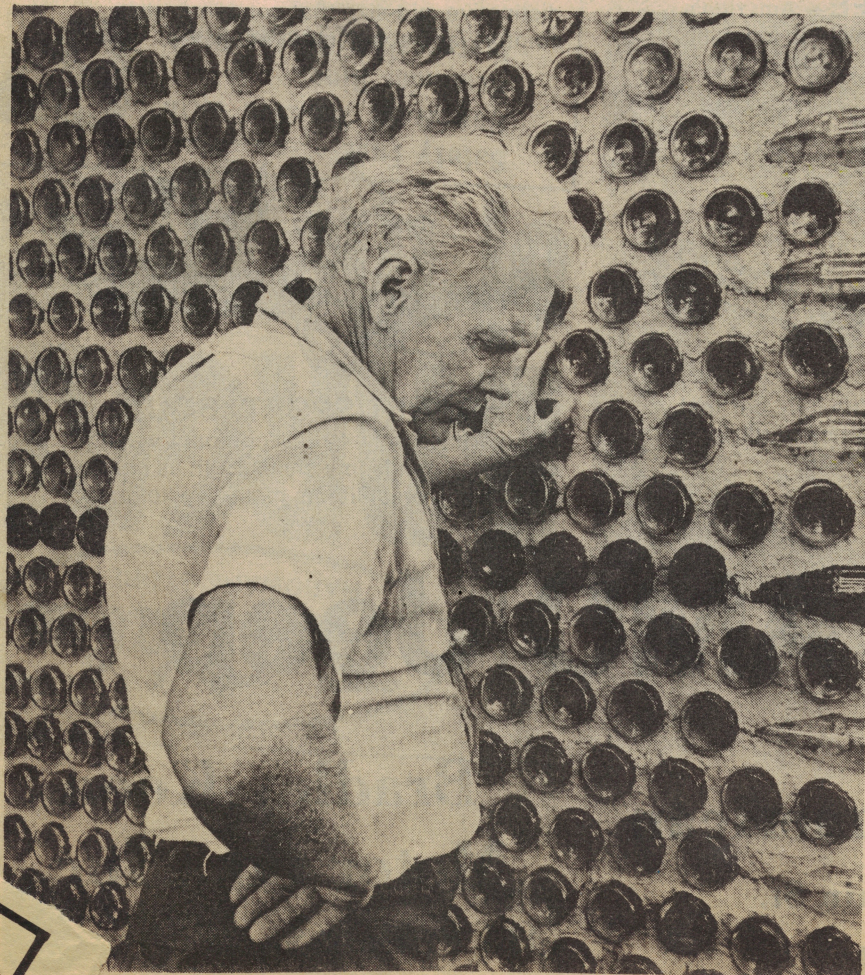
Yelton's vast bottle collection includes some rareties, but for the most part the collection that forms the house are simply non-returnable quart bottles.

"6,318 quart bottles and 5,666 beer and liquor bottles," he says jauntily, blue eyes laughing. "Why, do you think I would build something and not *know* how much it took...?"

In the bright sunlight, the inside of the house has an eery glow to it. Yelton added "You oughta come up here and see in on a good moonlighty night..."

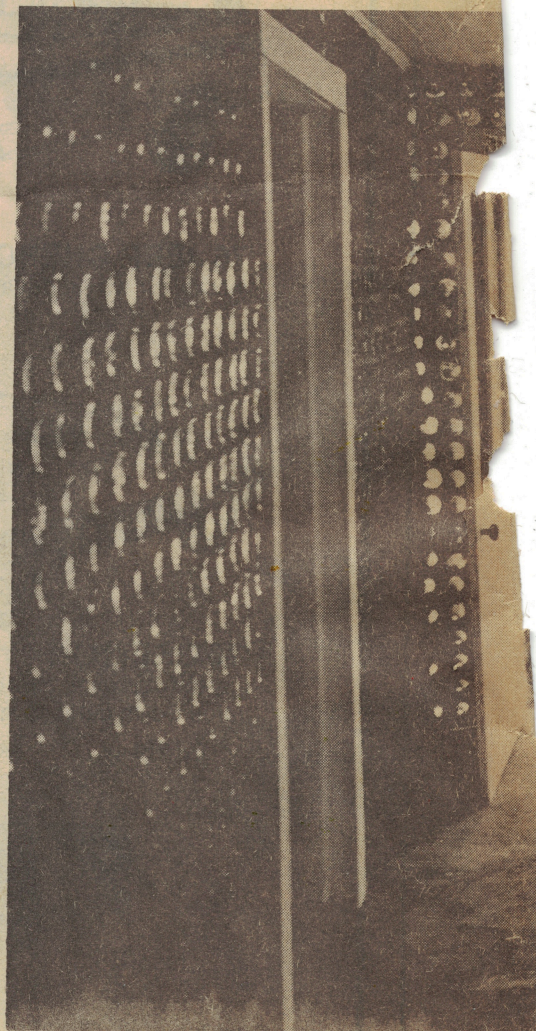
But where did Yelton get his idea to build a bottle house? He's not sure. "It just came to me," he said. "I *had* to be a'doing something. Why, there ain't no more hard-working man alive than me..."

"But the other day, some boy come up here and seen this bottle house and just begged me to build him one," Charlie Yelton slapped his mortar-worn hands together and exclaimed "Lord no, I told that boy I ain't startin' nary another 'un!" □



"I'm the hardest working"

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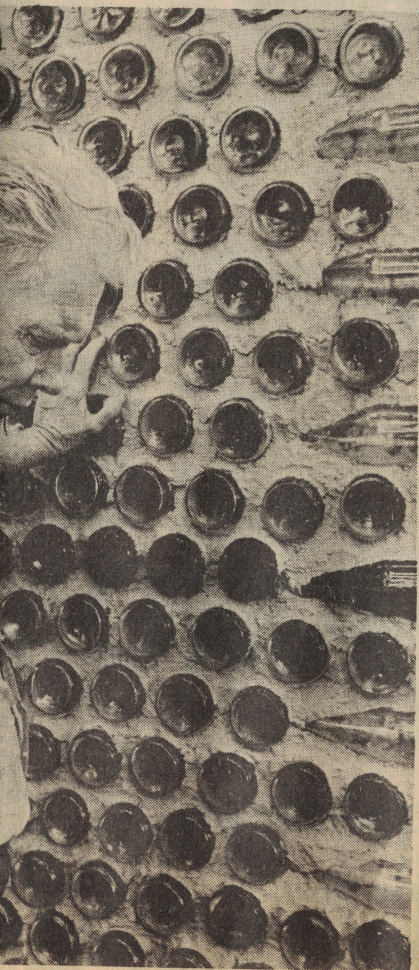
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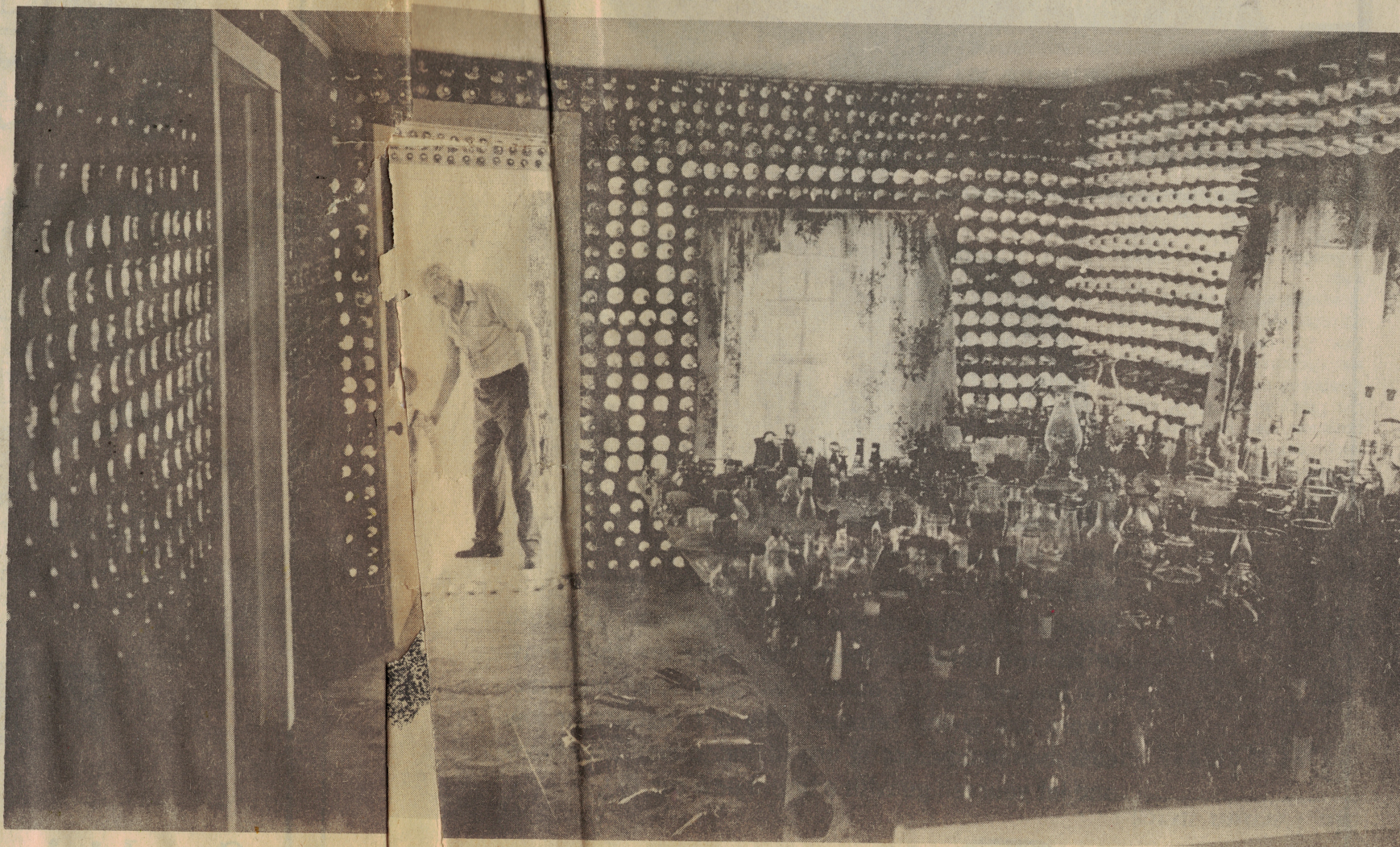
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photograph and text by jock lauterer



Inside the house - Yelton stores his bottle collection within and without . . .

"Built it without a level, or a square" Charlie Yelton discusses the four year building process . . .

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man there alive," Hardy glass-house builder Charlie Yelton off Forest City

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