

HOUSE BUILDERS

It all started with a craft project. In 1996, Mark Pelletier, a program manager at Brown's Foster Home, in Gardiner, Maine, was searching for ways to engage the disabled men with whom he worked. After a few failed attempts, Pelletier brought in some lumber that his son's Cub Scout troop had been using to construct birdhouses. Something about the woodworking intrigued the group, and things started to click. Today, six years later, the men, all of whom are challenged by birth defects, autism, or behavioral disorders, have signed and dated 2,040 birdhouses. "At first, the guys needed constant supervision," notes Pelletier. "Now they do just about everything themselves." The one-of-a-kind birdhouses attract birds as well as folk-art collectors, who appreciate the group's pinecone-shingled roofs and fanciful use of woodland finds and recycled materials. "We use the project more as an educational tool than anything else," says Pelletier. "It teaches the guys a vocation and enables them to produce something they can be proud of." To order a birdhouse (\$75 each), call Recycled Reflections at (207) 582-1103; www.recycledbirdhouse.com.

