

How To Set Up A Money-Making Maize Maze

No one does corn mazes better than Brett and Nicole Herbst, who have been designing them for 10 years. Even they are "amazed" at their success.

"We were surprised when we hit 10 mazes a year, then 30, then 60, and now we do more than 100 per year," says Brett Herbst.

Their first maze was in their home state of Utah in 1996. It drew more than 18,000 visitors in three weeks. Since then, they have designed and helped develop more than 450 mazes in North America and Europe.

For an up-front fee of \$1,500 the first year (\$500 for succeeding years) plus 6 percent of ticket sales, their company MAiZE, provides clients with a custom design, a video describing how to cut the design out of standing corn, a web page on the company's site, and exclusive rights to a MAiZE maze in your area. A training guide offers help on site selection, maze creation techniques, farming techniques, legal/liability, marketing materials and planning, as well as employee training. A cutting team to help those who choose not to cut out their own maze costs an extra \$1,200 plus travel.

Even with all the help MAiZE provides, running a maze isn't for everyone, stresses Brett Herbst. "Obviously the first requirement is to be enthusiastic about the project and about working with people," he says. "You also need a population base to pull from. If you have 50,000 people within an hour, you can be successful."

Herbst says most entry fees are priced between \$5 to \$9 for adults and \$3 to \$6 for kids. He suggests discounts for field trips or church groups. Some maze owners only charge enough to cover costs, especially if they do it to draw business to pick your own pumpkins and other on-farm businesses.

Of course, like any kind of farming, weather is a risk. Herbst relates that hurricanes in the Southeast this past year took out about half the planned MAiZE mazes. An exception was a farmer in Tennessee who lost every corn field on the farm except for his maze.

Successful maze operations don't stop with a single attraction, says Herbst. "Each year they add attractions for a fresh look and to keep people coming back," he explains. "We've had people do everything from hay rides to corn cannons to sandboxes of corn



The Herbsts provide a custom maze design, a video describing how to cut out the design, a promotional web page, and exclusive rights to a maze in the area.

for kids to play in. You want to make it a unique experience that is very memorable."

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"Easy" Ways To Put Up Stone Walls

Old-style stone masonry is slow, challenging work that requires a lot of experience and skill. Thomas J. Elpel of Silver Star, Mont., says he's found a couple new ways of putting up stone structures, including "tilt-up" walls that he constructs on the ground and then tips up into place.

"I would like to see much greater use of stone, since it is such a long lasting and beautiful material," Elpel says. "Old-style stone work was done completely free-form, usually using poles with strings as guides to ensure the wall was straight."

In contrast, most modern stone masonry is attached as a veneer on the surface of concrete or block walls. The problem with this, says Elpel, is that sometimes the veneered stone separates from its supporting wall over time.

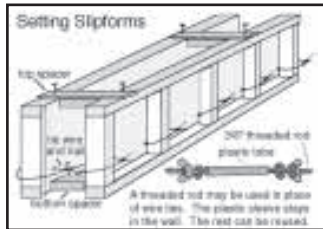
In addition to tilt-up stone work, Elpel has perfected a method called "slip forming" which he says anyone can use to put up a quality stone wall, even if you have no previous experience.

While slip forming may take a little longer than pouring a concrete wall and adding a veneer, Elpel says the cost is lower and the quality is higher.

"With slip forming you don't have to have the skill it takes to do the traditional hand-laid stone work," he explains. "With this system, you're using forms on both sides of the wall. You place the rock against the outside forms and pour concrete in behind it. It's up to you if you want a stone face on both sides of the wall, or just one. Rebar is used to properly reinforce the walls."

"With slip forming, you fill short forms (up to two feet tall) with stone and concrete, then slip the forms up for the next level," he says. "It makes stone work easy, even for the novice. It results in a random or 'rubble-stone' appearance, without the uniform joints or sharp, clean lines of most modern masonry."

Although slipforming isn't a new idea, Elpel came up with a number of his own innovations.



He says slipforming is comparatively messy, "and you will often find cement drips permanently adhered to the face of the rocks when you remove the forms. But these stains giving the stone work an "antiqued" appearance." He says he rarely removes the drips, although he could.

Elpel and his brother, Nick, produced a step-by-step video of their slipforming techniques, and Thomas included an in-depth section about it in a book he authored, called *Living Homes: Integrated Design & Construction*.

After building a couple of homes using the easy but still labor-intensive slipform method, Elpel started dreaming of ways to mass produce highly efficient stone houses using modern technology. Tilt-up stone masonry seemed like a logical choice, and his brother Nick figured out how to do it.

The solution was to pour stone walls flat on the ground and set them in place with a crane.

Tilt-up stone masonry is faster than slipforming and eliminates the joints between sections.

Elpel emphasizes that tilt-up work is not for beginners. It requires an experienced carpenter and mason, and it is really suited for mass-production, where the same forms are used again and again.

"For one thing, you will not save any money on materials versus the slipform method described earlier, because there is just as much concrete, and usually more rebar, in a tilt-up stone wall, versus a slipformed stone wall. Lifting the stone walls is also dangerous," he adds.



"Tilt-up" stone walls are poured into a form on ground, then put in place with a crane.

"Nevertheless, for the experienced builder, or someone who wants to make numerous copies of a single structure, tilt-up construction may be the way to go. With the appropriate building site and a set of plans optimized for that site, there would be a definite savings with tilt-up stone work. More importantly, you can build a low-maintenance structure that will truly withstand the test of time."

Tilt-up construction is discussed more specifically in Elpel's book as well, as well as on his website.

His book is available for \$30 plus S&H, and the 1-hr. 50-min. VHS video (also available on DVD) about slip-forming costs \$25 plus S&H.

Elpel will be offering slipform stone masonry classes several times this year, the first ones beginning in May. He urges anyone interested to contact him about registration.

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