



Building Green: A Complete How-To Guide to Alternative Building Methods

Earth Plaster * Straw Bale * Cordwood * Cob * Living Roofs

Clarke Snell, Tim Callahan

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Clarke Snell and Timothy L. Callahan, whose popular *Good House Book* helped environmentally-minded readers create an earth-friendly home, have returned with a photo-packed, amazingly complete, start-to-finish guide to "green" housebuilding.

This absolutely groundbreaking manual doesn't just talk about eco-friendly building techniques, but actually *shows* every step! More than 1,200 close-up photographs, along with in-depth descriptions, follow the real construction of an alternative house from site selection to the addition of final-touch interior details. Co-authors Clarke Snell and Timothy Callahan (a professional builder and contractor) provide thorough discussions of the fundamental concepts of construction, substitutes for conventional approaches, and planning a home that's not only comfortable and beautiful, but environmentally responsible. Then, they roll up their sleeves and get to work assembling a guest house that incorporates four different alternative building methods: straw bale, cob, cordwood, and modified stick frame. The images show every move: how the site is cleared, the basic structure put together, the cob wall sculpted, the bales and cordwood stacked, a living roof created, and more. Most important, the manual conveys real-world challenges and processes, and offers dozens of sidebars with invaluable advice. It's head and shoulders above all others in the field.

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Mathew Carruthers says

An excellent resource to keep in your DIY library. I've been looking for a used copy since I returned the copy I read to my local library. It is nice to see that traditional construction techniques are making a resurgence - build a better house with available resources for less money than a typical McMansion that has a two year engineered obsolescence built into it.

Alex says

Excellent, excellent book. It truly is a complete how-to guide. The first part of the book is a review of why one builds really making you think about what you want in a building; in the second, the authors build a multi-material building. Each step of the building (and, to be fair, part 1) is beautifully photographed with diagrams, honest about what worked well for them, and what didn't. Strongly recommend this book for those wanting to build and those curious about what's out there that's eco friendly.

Julie Armes says

Excellent book details the advantages and disadvantages of various green building strategies, and explains the entire process of building with each element thoroughly and with photos and diagrams. Their conclusion? There is no perfect, one size fits all solution, just a variety of criteria that each individual should examine to decide what options make the most sense given their own location, needs, preferences, and constraints.

Mara Elwood says

This is a massive book, but well worth it to investigate the process of four different construction systems. The authors give huge amounts of information about each of them and connect the information to the project of building a cabin with a green roof and four different wall systems (cob, strawbale, cordwood, and modified stick frame). They also talk about design and siting. There were several places where both authors had sidebars to check in with reality, and this brings a good dose of realism to what could have ended up just being a book hyping green building techniques with no thought to the fact that people reading it are not skilled construction experts such as they are. I mainly read it for the cob building and it showed me that this technique is much more difficult than some websites and information pamphlets I had read made it out to be. Still, a small cob project may still be something I would try, or cob as a sculpture technique.....

PJ says

I've become quite interested in natural building and aspire to build my own little house in the country someday in the not-so-distant future...this book is 600 pages full of beautiful photographs and conversational-but-concise show-how tips. Enjoying it very much as a primer on the subject, though it's not as low-impact as it could be (using more conventional materials and tools than I would've expected, and water and electricity from the grid).

Koen Crolla says

Stereotypically insufferable. Snell's concept of ``green'' is incoherent, informed by a kindergarten-level understanding of environmental impact and identity-based bullshit. He sure loves typing words, though. There are a lot of pictures in this book and some of them are alright if you ignore the accompanying words, and the occasional *Tim's Take* sections, while not always containing information, often aren't actively wrong (Tim Callahan, the second author, being a contractor instead of a shit-for-brains hippie). Apart from those, there is absolutely nothing of value in this book, especially for anyone living within view of other people. If you just want to build a mud hut in an American desert that will last for the five to ten years it will take you to die of pneumonia in it and no longer, on the other hand, this is the book for you.

Sally says

I learned that building "green" is not just complicated by the fact that many of the methods considered green are works in progress. But it seems that you're faced with either doing or contracting it all yourself, or dealing with a contractor, even if willing, that will likely have *not nearly enough* "green building" experience to make a smooth go of it.

Good food for thought, though. Like I'll be building a house anytime soon!

Marisa says

Holy Jesus. I skimmed through this entire thing and am completely impressed. I'm also still smarting from the in-your-face reality slap I received. This book really brought it in terms of step-by-step, thorough, pragmatic instructions for building a green home from start to finish. Various construction techniques for various materials were presented with a relatively unbiased look at the pros and cons of each. I honestly feel that I'm likely to never build my own house now and that's a testament to how good this book is. What, you mean I can't just draw up a rough plan, grab some materials, slap it together with some nails, a little glue, and a wish and a prayer and SHABAM have a completely habitable and ascetically pleasing place to call my own?? Forget my intellectual high horse. I grovel at the feet of these and other like-minded masters who deal with things in the real world and produce results.

Reed Robinson says

I am very interested in the whole green building movement. I think that it's great that we have more and more information on the subject, and I found this particular book helpful in showing specifics on a few different types of home construction. One thing that I would have liked to see is a cost analysis comparative to conventional construction. This would give those really serious about green building a better view of the project.

Jeff says

another fine study in alternative home building

Mel says

I skimmed this book, rather than read it cover to cover, as I have no immediate plans to buy or build a house. Rather, this book gave me some insight on alternate building materials, as well as the huge amount of work that goes into planning for and building a house. I appreciated the no nonsense and sometimes tongue-in-cheek advice that the authors gave. Too many "green" guides these days are so airy-fairy that it appears as if building an eco-friendly dwelling is as easy as wishing for one. Not so with these authors. They provide photographs and commentary on the various stages of the processes they go through. The test house that they built was intended to be completed in 2 months but ended up taking them 6 months.

Becky says

This book was wonderful! I am basically a construction know-nothing but found it very accessible. At the same time, it would be a good choice for someone more skilled who wanted a primer to alternative building.

The book is mostly about design and problem-solving principles that could apply to any thoughtfully sited and well-built house. There are lots of step-by-step instructions, but they're there to illustrate principles rather than teach you every possible building technique. The authors are also super-pragmatic about their use of natural building techniques and warn you against jumping on the eco bandwagon for no reason.

In fact, I decided that if we end up building our dream house, we're not likely to use any of these techniques (with the exception of lath and plaster on a stick frame). I will probably seek out another title that discusses eco-friendly stick houses in more depth, but I'm glad that I started with this book to orient me.

Robert Bagnall says

Bit too wordy and too detailed - an idiot's guide to waters that an idiot probably wouldn't steer himself into - and, as the epilogue makes clear, 'how to' is very much dependent on your context, so all this book claims, in the end, is to map one particular green building journey. So not really a 'complete how-to guide' at all.

Doug says

This was a good book. It provided an excellent overview of many different alternative building techniques by allowing us to follow the authors through the process of building their little cottage, warts and all. Deffinately an excellent resource for those considering building without using standard stick-framing methods.

Jodi says

This book is an excellent reference book for those who are interested in "building green", i.e., building with minimal impact to the environment due to the types of materials used and the ways the construction process is facilitated. Although I didn't actually read this book from cover-to-cover, I found that it had excellent and easy-to-understand descriptions of various types of "green building". The authors were not afraid to admit when they had made mistakes, and also pointed out both benefits and drawbacks of each methodology used. When and if I ever have money to build my own "green" home, this would definitely be a reference starting point for me.
