



The Beauty of Straw Bale Homes

Athena Swentzell Steen, Bill Steen

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While enthusiasts of straw bales praise the exceptional energy efficiency of bale buildings, and the wise use of resources involved in utilizing an agricultural byproduct as an affordable construction material, the real reason straw bales have excited builders and homeowners nationwide goes beyond energy conservation, resource recycling, and affordability. People love straw bale homes because they are so often extraordinarily beautiful and inviting.

In the past two decades, the bale-building renaissance has attracted some of our most gifted architects, artisan builders, and craftspeople. Certain qualities of straw as a material--and the hands-on process of constructing walls with a completely natural substance--have appealed to both very experienced builders and those who find this to be a uniquely accessible form of creating shelter. The characteristic thick walls and wide windowsills of straw bale houses, the possibility of incorporating curves and even arches, and the rousing experience of family "wall-raising" have become well-known. Combined with older styles of plastering and earthen floors, these very contemporary buildings have a timeless quality that's easy to recognize yet hard to achieve with conventional manufactured materials.

These are buildings with personality--plus!

Athena and Bill Steen, co-authors of the original *Straw Bale House* book published by Chelsea Green in 1994, have now created a book that celebrates in gorgeous color photographs the tactile, sensuous beauty of straw bale dwellings. Their selection of photos also demonstrates how far bale building has come in a very short period of time: In addition to handsome homes, small and not-so-small, this book shows larger-scale institutional buildings, including schools, office buildings, the Solar Living Center, and a Save the Children center in Mexico.

In addition, this book includes an introductory essay by the Steens noting the key lessons they have learned in years of building with bales: insights into the design and construction process, and critical advice about design elements that ameliorate the impacts of moisture, weather, and wear-and-tear over time. Each photograph is also accompanied by narrative text highlighting a given building's special features and personal touches.

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