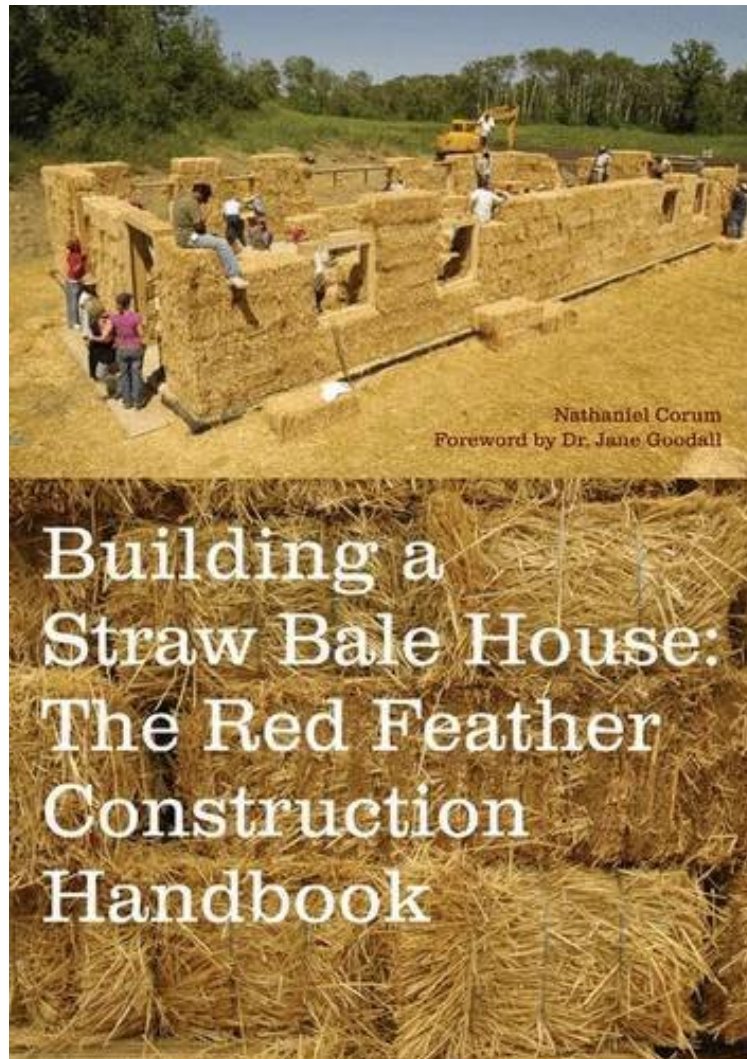


Building a Straw Bale House: The Red Feather Construction Handbook

Nathaniel Corum

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Nathaniel Corum : Building a Straw Bale House: The Red Feather Construction Handbook before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Building a Straw Bale House: The Red Feather Construction Handbook:

35 of 35 people found the following review helpful. Brief but adequate construction guide FOR WESTERN STRAW BALE ONLY By Matthew Nistico Frankly, I like this book, despite my 2-star rating of it. It has some excellent information in it as well as excellent photos, and it is well laid out. However, it is intended for very specific and limited uses, which are not really disclosed in the product description. So, read on to learn what I had to discover about

its limitations through trial and error: This is NOT a book on the theory and history of straw bale construction. It spends very little, if any, time outlining the different styles of bale construction, nor the variety of techniques and details that have been tried over the years, nor the many factors - environmental, structural, practical - affecting a particular construction project that might make the builder choose one technique or detail over another. If you are a new owner/builder at the conceptual stage, trying to decide if a bale house is right for you, or how exactly to build the bale house that is best for you, this is NOT the book you want. This book focuses on one philosophy of design only. It is a guide, not on how to build a bale house, but on how to build one specific bale house. What I find troubling is that it does not even explain, in most cases, why the methods being described were chosen. If you already know a good deal about bale construction, you will quickly read between the lines to see why the authors consider their chosen techniques most suitable for their situation - I did, and quickly determined that little in the book was applicable to my own situation. Ok, fair enough. But, if you do not already understand the basics of straw bale architecture, I can easily imagine the reader following this book down what might well be the wrong path for his or her own project and, at best, wasting a lot of time in the design stage considering inappropriate techniques. At worst, the reader could end up making some very poor and costly choices without realizing why they are poor. So, what is this book good for? It presents a straight-forward, step-by-step guide to project planning for a particular type of builder attempting a particular type of project. It does not present enough technical details or drawings to be a comprehensive construction manual (what book does?), so it will not take the place of preparing blueprints or having them prepared for you. But, it is nonetheless an excellent place to start IF AND ONLY IF you are...1) ...Poor, or otherwise interested in building a small, simple, budget-oriented house for a single family. Don't get me wrong: the house this book describes is perfectly sound, perfectly livable, and should last longer than most conventional houses, but it is definitely "no-frills." Frankly, all Americans should be focusing on more modest, economical, and sustainable housing, regardless of income level. Be that as it may, if you are wanting something bigger - multiple stories, luxury oriented, more architecturally unique - you will not find it here.2) ...Part of a large community or very large family interested in helping you build this house quickly through a massive and intensive volunteer effort. If your access to volunteer resources is more modest and your construction schedule, therefore, more relaxed, you could well run into serious problems trying to follow the path laid out in this book. If you plan on hiring only professionals to build your house for you, well, you probably shouldn't build a bale house in the first place, but at the least you will need to find different books.3) ...West of the Mississippi and building in a very dry environment. All throughout this book you will find details - 3 string bales, metal rebar inserted into the bales, moderately sized roof overhangs, cement-based plaster with ground-to-ceiling stucco mesh - that are either unique to the West or generally appropriate to a desert or prairie climate. For builders in other areas, most of this book likely does not apply to you.4) ...Interested in a load-bearing straw bale design. See my note on rebar, cement plaster, and stucco mesh above. There is also much in the book on full structural window and door bucks as well as building a roof-bearing-assembly top plate. Of course, there is nothing wrong with load-bearing bale walls, but in many parts of the country they are no longer the most widely-accepted design solution.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Vital knowledge for the straw-bale builder

By L. Taylor Even though we could not use this technique (load-bearing straw-bale) in our state, due to code, the information is still good and much of it still applies to post-beam construction. If you are really interested in this building method, you should read everything you can get your hands on before building. HOWEVER - do recognize that some things in this particular book are no longer used in SB building, such as chicken wire outside the bale walls. Be aware that there is still little consensus about particular SB building techniques - you'll find one architect or builder married to one method and another who is equally passionate about his style. There are some things you'll want to avoid because they have been proven in actual testing (don't use rebar coming up from the concrete foundation to skewer the first few course of bales, for example - rebar wicks moisture up from the slab into the bales). Just read everything you can about the various methods, including what's been actually researched, and decide which method would work best for you. If you can build a load-bearing SB house in your area, this book is the premier handbook on the subject, as long as you have researched what's changed since its writing. It's quite detailed, has lots of good photos and would get you well along the way constructing your SB house yourself.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A true construction handbook

By Cocoa This is a great how-to book. Not a lot of theory or "why straw?". If you are already convinced that you need a reasonable size straw house, you can just grab this guide and go. Very in depth detail, from site selection and preparation for zero depth foundation ,to step by step numbered instructions with photos. I haven't built one yet using this book, but I could. The only thing I found lacking was info about codes. I suspect that since they are building on reservations they don't have to deal with that. This is a load bearing bale wall and those are not accepted everywhere. The foundation is also not standard. They have proven that this system works, but can you sell it to code enforcement?

"This book is a timely and important tool for the empowerment of communities facing housing deficits. The Red Feather project is extremely important; it is truly making a difference." Jane Goodall For more than a decade the Red Feather Development Group, a volunteer-based organization, has built and repaired straw bale houses for Native

Americans. Somewhere along the way and this was certainly not the plan they created an architectural phenomenon: This inexpensive, environmentally sound, easily constructed, and downright beautiful form of building has, for good reason, caught the public's imagination. Here, Red Feather provides a step-by-step, easy-to-follow manual for would-be strawbale builders indeed, they supply everything you'll need but time, energy, and lots and lots of straw. Informative sections on safety, design, tools, and materials, and case studies picked from over thirty-five Red Feather projects give a comprehensive overview to straw-bale building. But this book is much more than a construction manual. It is also the inspiring story of Red Feather itself, a tale of community action and cooperation that suggests a can-do solution to the growing housing crisis on America's Native American reservations.

Concise and useful, this handbook is recommended for specialized collections or where there is demand. -- Library Journal, Dec 2005
Corum's colorful book takes the reader from the foundation up to the shingles... -- Columbus Telegram, Oct 30, 2005
Corum's is the rare how-to book that adds its voice to the dialogue on the global housing crisis...fascinating reading. -- Architecture Magazine, Nov 2005
The real treasure of Straw Bale is the...form of construction that...should become a popular option for affordable, sustainable housing. -- Resonance, Nov/Dec 2005
About the Author
Nathaniel Corum is community design director for Red Feather Development Group. Previously a Fulbright Scholar in North Africa, he studied design at Stanford University and has a Master of Architecture degree from the University of Texas at Austin.