



ESBG 2015

EUROPEAN STRAWBALE GATHERING MONTARGIS | PARIS



Being and Guiding Self-Builders: Ideas, Thoughts and Suggestions

by Rikki Jennifer Nitzkin



Do you want to be or work with self-builders?

Building a self-built house is a
Journey not a job...

Are you prepared?

Can anyone build their own home ?

Everyone SHOULD Build their own home!

Ejemplos de
Autoconstrucción en el mundo animal



Building (for non-pros) is a learning path :

The way to build self-confidence is to start doing things you're not sure you can do.

Once you start, keep at it.

Never give up.

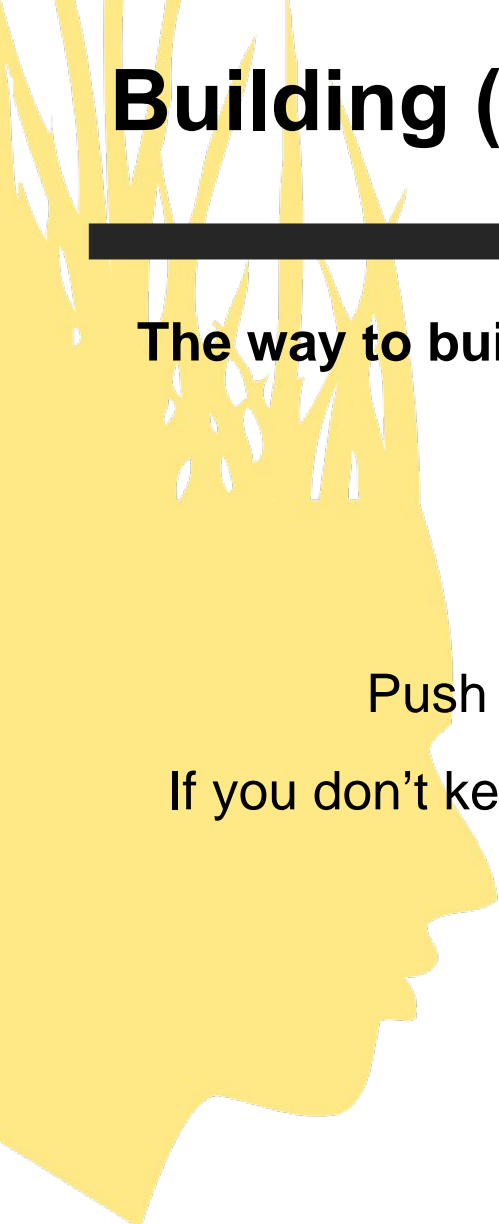
Push harder when you have to, relax when you can.

If you don't keep going until you're satisfied, you will never know how much you can do.

You can do anything.

Your strength is equal to your need.

- Paul Williamas, *Das Energi*



What can you learn, learning to build ?



SKILLS

- Building skills
- Decision making skills
- Problem solving skills
- Team building skills

Personal Growth

- Gain confidence in yourself
- Learn to work with others
- Learn to take care of your own needs



Why NOT Be a self-builder ?

Are you emotionally prepared for this journey?



- Time: can I take a sabbatical?
- Physical Effort
- Responsibility: can't blame anyone else!
- Complicates personal Life: Take care of your partner!
- Must be Flexible about aesthetics

Other reasons to Be a Self-Builder ?

- Who is going to be more careful than you?
- Easier maintenance; you know what is behind the plaster
- Independence from “standardization”: my house MY way
- Less pressure “Time = Money” means less stress, less accidents
- Save money!
- Make a HOME not a building.



Myths : Professional Builders don't make mistakes, but I will....

All builders make mistakes!

Don't Blame the MATERIAL, Blame the Builder...

Learning to Solve the problems leads to
EMPOWERMENT!



Three Steps to Problem Solving:

- 1) Stop, observe, think. 1-3 people max.
- 2) Sleep on it!
- 3) Call someone and ask for advice.

Mistake ? Or Divine Intervention ?

Be creative!



Before Building : advice

Plan ahead!

- Study: visit buildings, read, volunteer, courses, etc.
- Money budget: 30% extra
- Time budget: double!
- Design-plan the details: find a self-builder friendly architect!
- hire help (if necessary) money is never wasted in expert advice or guidance. You can be the helper.
- Permissions/legal responsibilities: investigate, don't lament.
- Choose and Gather Materials: ecology ,economy, local resources
- Organize the work site: everything in the right place!

How to Save Money

Plan ahead!



Money

Time

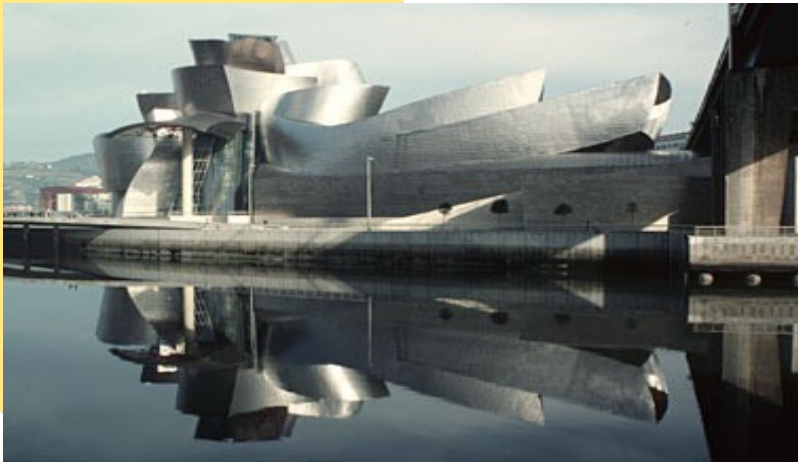
- ▣ Buy the house
- ▣ Hire someone to build your house
- ▣ Hire someone to direct the build, you and friends/family as workers
- ▣ Hire a consultant
- ▣ Do everything yourself
- ▣ Use local materials
- ▣ Use recycled materials

The Design

Who is going to build it?

Make sure you design something YOU can build! **Simplicity!**

If you are an architect, hired to design a house for a self-builder... choose **SIMPLE** technique. “Can Do” is more important than “perfect”



The Design

Start Small



- ▣ Start with a tool shed or small cabin (to sleep in while you build) before doing the house.
- ▣ Use a Modular design

The Design

Dream of a HOME not just a building



Remember that HOW you build is as important as WHAT you build !

Be the change you want see!

Permaculture applied to Building :

Take Care of the Planet

Take Care of the People

Share the Excess

Time To Build : Advice

Prepare for the “long haul”

- Establish work hours
- **Celebrate every small step!**
- Don't rush
- Share the experience





Take naps when you need them!



Everyone can Participate !

- People with less strength can cook, or keep the tools organized
- Kids can gather loose straw and cut string!





Other Advice:

Keep it clean!





**Other
Advice:
Keep it Safe!**



Workers : hired or volunteers ?

Hired Workers

- Specialized skills
- Same crew the whole build
- Regular hours
- Predict times
- Responsable for their work
- Don't have to “take care” of them

Volunteers

- Need teaching and SUPERVISION
- Desire to LEARN and do things well
- Good Vibes! Make new friends...
- Relaxed work environment
- Have to see to their needs
- Suggestion: minimum time comitment

How To Work with Volunteers : social and emotional needs

- **Offer CLEAR and HONEST information on what you expect and what you offer (work hours, living conditions, instruction, etc.)**
- **Recieve them well, and thank them for coming!**
- **Make a space for daily sharing- before or after work- how is it going?, do they (or you) need anything?**

Remember: many of these people can become friends for life!



How To Work with Volunteers : work needs



- Ask for a minimum time commitment (5 days)
- Not too many at once (2-5)
- Put new volunteers to work in pairs with experienced volunteers (buddy system)
- Don't be afraid to say NO.
- Don't be afraid to correct their work
- Don't be afraid to ask them to re-do something.

Remember: They have come to LEARN;
if they are not doing good work it is because they
need your Guidance.

Paid Courses or Volunteers

Is your focus on learning/teaching or building?

Courses:

- Focus on learning/teaching
- Want to be always doing new things, not practicing over-and-over what they have learned
- Less work done
- Short period of time
- Camping and catering need to be “decent”
- Paying students are Demanding



Volunteers:

- Take responsibility and pride in their work
- Can become specialized in their work
- Are grateful for the chance to share/learn
- Can help with cooking, cleaning, etc.
- Less demanding (infrastructure, organization of work)
- Can become friends/family.
- Drawback: they need supervision!



Combine them, with care !

Is your focus on learning/teaching or building?

Start with a (paid) Course to Train your volunteers.

- Give them a discount the longer they stay to help out!

Hire an expert to Direct the Build- to assure quality of learning/work

- Charge a nominal fee (10-20€/day) to help pay the Pro and the Food

Pause the Build every couple of weeks to do short courses to explain each fase of the work being done.

- Your Volunteers can attend with a discount.



Realism

Be flexible!

Don't expect your first home to be “perfect”

Are YOU perfect?

Do you still love your-self?

You **WILL** love your home

Perfection can be boring and stressful.

Everything out of control?

RELAX! It will all work out in the end...

My home... far from perfect. But it IS home.

Relax!

...Thermal bridges, drafty windows, not enough cement in the foundation, cracks, mice, etc... Who cares? Not me.

Before



After

In 12 years, I have had no Major problems. I gained a Beautiful Home & a new profession. It is easy to heat, no cooling necessary, Natural, local, recycled, and CHEAP!

Straw Bale Building can be Addictive !

Be Careful! You HAVE been warned



Journey of a Champion... Denmark 2004

Matts Myrmann and Judy Knox

These “Parents” of the Straw Bale Revival are a great INSPIRATION.

They infused the movement with Generosity, openness, and personal growth.

Judy, We Remember and Miss you!



Judy Knox's philosophy : learning to build with straw is the « Journey of a Champion »

Choices!

...above all, begin – try it on – the only sure risk is not to risk at all

Our choices... are an essential part of both the problem and the solution

Straw-bale construction is one possibility for change, as long as we don't graft its attributes of utilizing an agricultural waste product, reducing depletion of our natural resource capital, and of super energy efficiency, onto old paradigms of “too much”, disconnection from the real costs of your other building materials, and our all-to-human tendency to build ego statements rather than life-affirming harmony into our homes.



Remember

The 3 little Pigs :

**The Moral of the Story is not
« don't build a house with straw »**

Instead you should be careful ...

“...Don't
let a PIG
build your
House!”



Drawing: Leonard Leslie Brooke

Build with Friends !



It's more fun !



Just DO it !

