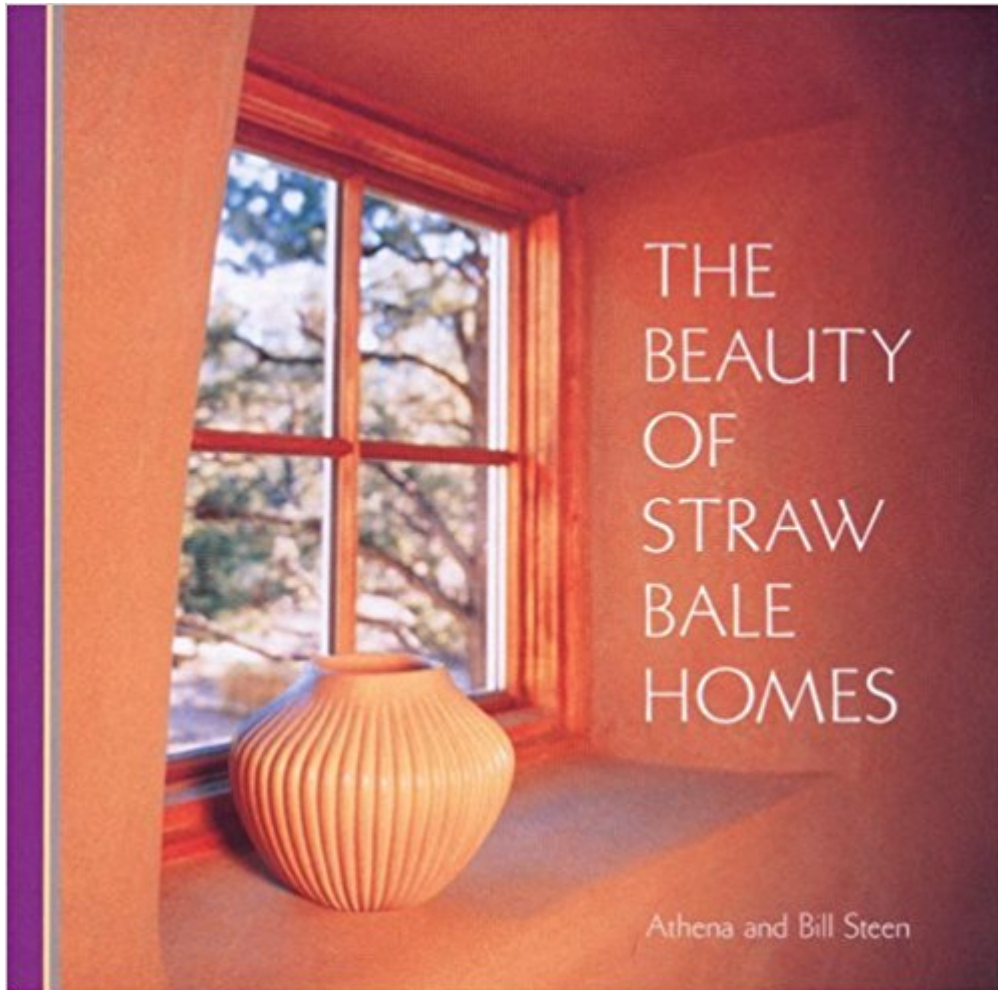




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The Beauty Of Straw Bale Homes



Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

Athena Swentzell Steen grew up in Santa Fe and at the Santa Clara Pueblo, where she began building with natural materials at a very early age. Bill Steen is a photographer and collaborative builder who is especially interested in combining building techniques with community-enhancing approaches to design. Athena and Bill are co-founders of the Canelo Project, through which they conduct ecological design and construction workshops in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. They live in Canelo, Arizona.

DESIGNING A BEAUTIFUL HOMEWhat makes a house beautiful? Is it complexity of design, square footage, or money spent? Is it the prominence of a "view-obsessed" starter castle on top of the hill? Or the prestige of having an architect's "showcase"? Perhaps beauty originates somewhere beyond all that, in elements more internal and more related to the human heart. Isn't beauty closer to the fullness you feel when sitting in a cozy corner? Or the feeling you have after working hard all day, then standing back to look at your work with a childlike pride? Beauty is more easily found in that which has been touched with love and care than in polished details and lavish furnishings. For us, the most memorable houses have been small and simple, and those with which the owners have played an integral part. Many of these are not finely finished, nor are they examples of superb craftsmanship, but they are rich with character and ingenuity. All too often, homeowners relinquish to the architect and builder the opportunity to be personally involved in the creation of their home. From a distance, they monitor the building and the shaping of spaces they will one day inhabit. Someone else designs it, another person builds it, and in the end they are left with a house for which they did little else than pay. Most modern houses are not much more than purchased commodities that tell of our increasing dependence on specialists and our loss of ability to craft our own lives. Most such house are impersonal and empty of feeling. This is not to say that architects and builders don't have a place in the process of making homes, but simply that there is a tendency to over-rely on them. Speed and efficiency dominate conventional building. The builder is expected

to build as fast as possible for the least amount of money. Under those stressed circumstances, there is very little time or space for intimate creativity. To stay on schedule and within budget, it is presumed necessary to rely primarily on mass-produced industrial materials that don't encourage deviation from their intended use and that require the extensive use of power tools. The best-intentioned designers and builders find themselves confined to a narrow range of possibilities, and not surprisingly the results are often boring and predictable. On the other hand, we have discovered in our own work that using natural and local materials encourages a very different way of building. These materials often have an inherent beauty that stands out without the need for complex forms and shapes. Lacking uniformity, rigidity, and angularity, they naturally lend themselves to soft, organic curves. They resonate with the textures and colors of their natural context, reminding us that the building belongs where it is placed. They are forgiving, and beg to be sculpted by hand or worked with simple tools, opening the door for more people to be involved in the process. Although many houses built from natural materials are beautiful, the use of such materials does not guarantee that a house will be beautiful. We have seen many straw bale houses that feel no different than any other building. When incorporated into conventional construction, natural materials become subjugated to the same stresses and patterns. Straw bale walls can rapidly become a very insignificant part of the whole house. We once asked a friend how she liked her new house, and she responded, "I really wanted a straw bale home, but what I got was a house with straw bales in the walls." Her house was beautiful in the typical meaning of the word. It was well built and nicely finished. And yet it lacked the texture of her presence. Its abstract perfection kept everyone at a distance, including her. The walls surrounding us day in and day out need to embrace us, our dreams and passions woven into their very fabric. They need to sing the story of who we are. Otherwise our houses will never become our homes. And it is in the depths of this magical transformation where genuine beauty lies.

cool ideas

Beautiful photos! I can't say enough about how awesome straw bale homes are. We had one in AZ and plan to build one here in TX Hill Country!

Straw is such an amazing building material, I'm surprised more people aren't using it. This is a great book to help you on your journey to building a straw bale house you will love to live in.

Reflects natural subtle style of straw bale construction. Ms Steen did a good job of showing different design methods and how they blend living areas into each other. Delivery was timely.

Inspirational photos of straw bale homes. Highly recommended!

I loved this book. It was the first I purchased and was very impressed. I would recommend to anyone wanting information about strawbale homes.

As advertised

I really like this book.

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