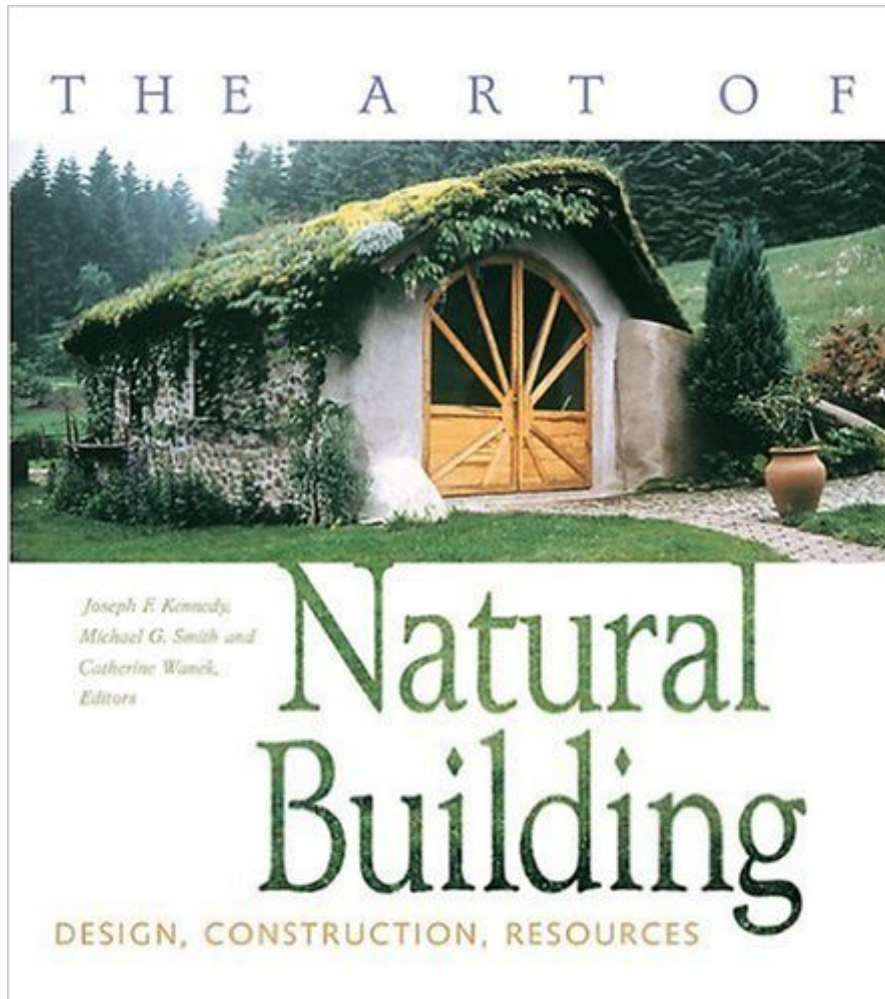


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# The Art Of Natural Building: Design, Construction, Resources



## Synopsis

The Art of Natural Building is the encyclopedia of natural building for non-professionals as well as architects and designers. From straw bale and cob, to recycled concrete and salvaged materials, this anthology of articles from leaders in the field focuses on both the practical and the esthetic concerns of ecological building designs and techniques. Includes examples of diverse natural dwellings, from a Hybrid Hobbit House to a thatched studio and a cob office. Catherine Wanek is the publisher and editor of The Last Straw Journal. Joseph F. Kennedy has expanded the boundaries of ecological architecture with NASA's space station habitability module. Michael Smith is the author of The Cob Cottage (Chelsea Green, 2001), among others.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Today, around 5 million people on Earth work and live in buildings made of adobe, stone, rammed earth, straw bale, cob, wattle and daub and so forth. That is, most of our planetary brothers and sisters live in earthen houses that rely on renewable human labor and local resources like mud, straw, rock and tree. These houses are less energy intensive, more durable, and are often more esthetically pleasing than so-called "modern" homes, as this book shows. "The Art of Natural Building" questions the environmental responsibility of a 5,000-sq-foot, 500,000-dollar house. As more and more people begin to make the kind of money it takes to buy their own American Dream house, we must question the feasibility of our contemporary building practices. Would it be possible to cover the globe with modern homes? Building companies certainly think so, but aside from what a

project of this immensity what mean environmentally, the resources are simply not available. There is simply not enough lumber, brick, cement, and processed material to go around. Our building industry would gladly sell us into oblivion if it meant a buck or two in the short-haul, but we need to get away from this kind of thinking. We also need to consider the environmental impacts of our current practices. What are these impacts? As this book reminds us, buildings already account for one quarter of the world's wood harvest, two-fifths of its material and energy use, and one-six of its fresh water usage. In the past 100 years the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has risen 27 percent, one-quarter of which has come the burning of fossil fuels just to provide energy for buildings. During the same period, the world lost more than 20 percent of its forest.

This is a very interesting book. It's mostly not about natural building, but rather a book about alternative wall building. Of the four major parts of a house - foundation, floors, walls, roof - this is an awful lot of information about walls, and very little else. Foundations covered in a few cursory pages, almost nothing on roofs, and nothing on floors at all, except for ground level earthen floors. There is less world-saving going on than meets the eye. Almost all the bad stuff whether large amounts of timber, or reviled composites is in the roofs, floors, and foundations. When it comes to having wildflowers as part of the roof, they even embrace some pretty nasty membrane products. There is also a fair amount of self-delusion going on. In the section on timber frames the author mentions the savings to be had by timber framed walls vs. stud walls, but makes no mention of the unsustainable old growth used in timber frames. Nor does he mention that the infill to timber frames is either the same studwalls he claimed to avoid using, or highly toxic SIPs. In total most timber buildings are built twice once for the frame, and enough infill material to again carry all structural loads. The same comments can be made about straw bale, cordwood and so forth, often as much wood is used avoiding studs as using them. Natural building is completely unlikely to make an ounce of green difference in the West. It mainly won't be used, and where it is, it will just be another trophy home "look". Still it's all great stuff for dreamers, and the odd few who will actually build their own little earthship. Because of all the authors contributing, the standard of information is highly inconsistent, but in the main good.

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