



Living Homes: Stone Masonry, Log, and Strawbale Construction

By Thomas J. Elpel

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The house of your Dreams does not have to be expensive. The key is all in the planning. How much a house costs, how it looks, how comfortable it is, how energy-efficient it is - all these things occur on paper before you pick up even one tool. A little extra time in the planning process can save you tens of thousands of dollars in construction and maintenance. That is time well spent!

Living Homes takes you through the planning process to design an energy and resource efficient home that won't break the bank. Then, from the footings on up to the roof, author Thomas J. Elpel guides you through the nuts and bolts of construction for slipform stone masonry, tilt-up stone walls, log home construction, building with strawbales, making your own terra tile floors, concrete countertops, windows and doors, solar water heaters, masonry heaters, framing, plumbing, greywater, septic systems, swamp filters, painting and more!

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Editorial Review

Review

This highly creative guide helps the non-builder become conversant with terms, materials, and techniques necessary to build one's dream home. -- *The Islands' Weekly Newspaper. Lopez Island, Washington.*

June 15, 2004. (Review of the 4th Edition.)

This isn't mere theory but is firmly grounded in Elpel's hands-on experience creating durable, energy-efficient buildings on a shoestring. --*Fine Homebuilding. February/March 2003. (Review of the 4th Edition.)*

This hefty book (250 pages, 8.5" X 11") is chock full of detailed information, personal musings, photos and diagrams, and practical tips. Thomas Elpel is a do-it-yourselfer after my own heart, and what he has compiled here chronicles his adventures of building his own home in rural Montana as well as experiences with other building projects. He and his wife were forced by circumstances to find inexpensive solutions for all of the challenges of building their home, and they managed to do this without sacrificing their commitment to energy efficiency and sustainability.

Their home is a true hybrid, with the first floor being slip-formed stone masonry and the second story of logs, all sourced locally and ecologically. Thomas explains in great detail exactly how he put together this house, sufficiently for others to follow his lead without much more need for instruction.

In addition, the book is liberally dosed with Thomas's philosophy of how to homestead ecologically in the 21st Century. He starts with how to choose an appropriate location, then proceeds to describe strategies for disaster-proofing your home. He emphasizes how important it is to define the goals you have for your home before even coming up with a design.

Part Two of the book explores principles of energy efficiency, delving into a discussion of the need for excellent insulation, coupled with thermal mass and solar gain for a truly ecological house. The pros and cons of various insulation systems are defined, with charts of R-values. etc. There is a chapter devoted to interior air quality.

Part Three launches into the nitty gritty of exactly how to build using the methods that the author is familiar with. There is a thorough review of various strategies for creating footings, foundations and floors. This leads to a primer about the properties of concrete and how to mix and pour it. The instructions for building stone walls are specific to slip-forming, which tends to be fairly straight forward and simpler for folks who are not skilled in the art of free-form stone masonry.

The log-building technique that Thomas chose to use for his house is one of the simpler approaches, where little notching and careful fitting and trimming is required. Round logs are just stacked one on top of the other, using rebar pins to hold them in place. It is possible to build entire walls this way, and then cut out doors and windows later. The spaces between the logs are eventually insulated and chinked to make the wall air tight.

The basics of strawbale building are presented in one chapter, detailing how a large load-bearing strawbale shop was built. The information about strawbale is not as thorough as it is with the previous chapters on stone and log building, but there is enough of an overview to give the reader an idea of what is involved.

All of the wall-building techniques described so far require a framed roof of some sort, and the author goes into some detail about the possibilities for doing this. One method shown is fairly simple and straight forward, where a log ridge pole is placed first, and then rafters are bolted together on top of this, supported at the other end with another log. This can then support a variety of roofing materials, such as metal sheets or shingles.

In order to present a thorough overview of all of the basics of house building, the author also has surprisingly comprehensive chapters on plumbing and electrical wiring. Strategies for solar water and space heating are discussed.

All-in-all I give this book very high marks for providing useful information compiled in a logical and detailed manner. A person really could attempt to build their own house using nothing but this book as a guide, which is more than can be said for most building how-to guides. --Kelly Hart, GreenHomeBuilding.com

From the Publisher A Positive Relationship with Nature

Our culture teaches us that we are separate from nature. We spend most of our lives in houses surrounded by manicured lawns, living in towns or cities where recreational activities are based on human-centered sports. Nature is something we go to a park to see, or we watch a show about it on TV.

Those of us in the field of environmental education try to preach a different message, telling people that "all life is interconnected" and that "we really are part of nature". But in the next breath we tell them to stay on the trails and to practice "no-trace" camping. We tell them to look at nature and photograph it, but not to touch it. We tell them our modern way of life is destroying nature, and that we need to stop mucking up the planet. In other words, we tell them we are part of nature--the bad part!

Here at HOPS Press, LLC we advocate a positive interactive relationship with the natural world. We want people to get involved in nature, to be a part of the process on many levels:

Through Participating in Nature: Thomas J. Elpel's Field Guide to Primitive Living Skills and the Art of Nothing Wilderness Survival Video Series, you can experience an intimate connection with nature as you rediscover the skills our ancestors used to survive for tens of thousands of years. Instead of merely camping in the wilderness or passing through it, you will become part of the process as you learn about nature by using it to meet your needs for shelter, fire, water and food. Learn to set aside the trappings of modern culture and step directly into nature with little or nothing, to experience nature on its own terms.

With Tom's book Botany in a Day: The Patterns Method of Plant Identification, you can connect with the wonderful diversity of plants and flowers all around you in a way that you may have never imagined. Instead of seeing the green world as little more than pretty wallpaper, you will learn to know the individual plants, wildflowers and weeds as if they have been your life-long friends. Our book Shanleya's Quest: A Botany Adventure for Kids Ages 9-99 utilizes the same patterns method of identifying plants as Botany in a Day, but in a metaphorical story form where children of all ages can join young Shanleya on her journey to learn the plant traditions of her people.

In Living Homes: Integrated Design & Construction you will learn how to make your home part of nature, as well as how to make nature part of your home. Learn the secrets to building low-cost, high-efficiency homes with stone masonry, log-building and strawbale construction methods. With this book and Tom's Slipform Stone Masonry DVD/VHS Video you will be able to build your quality, earth-friendly Dream home on a

budget, even while the "experts" say it isn't cost effective.

Finally, in Direct Pointing to Real Wealth: Thomas J. Elpel's Field Guide to Money, you will learn to see the economy as an ecosystem where money is a token that represents calories of energy. Learn the basic rules of this economic ecosystem and you will be empowered to use your resources to more effectively achieve your desired quality of life, while making the world a better place to be. You will be able help convert an economy that harms planetary biodiversity into an economy that helps restore it.

From the Author

"Our house may look expensive, but the reality is that we only have about \$10 a square foot into it. The whole house cost about as much as the average new car. Yet I have seen some million dollar homes that looked like junk. Appearance, like energy efficiency, is more a product of design than of cost. You can take the same materials and arrange them poorly or arrange them well."

"With a combined income averaging \$10,000 to \$12,000 a year we lived simply and invested everything we could in building materials. Construction proceeded slowly throughout the process, due to our chronic lack of money. We moved into the house after the second summer, with no doors, few windows, and no insulation in the roof. Winter stopped about three feet from the stove. This might all seem a little rough, but I later realized that we saved at least \$150,000 in interest payments by eliminating the need for a loan. That is not a bad wage for a couple years of camping out!"

Users Review

From reader reviews:

William Lee:

This book untitled Living Homes: Stone Masonry, Log, and Strawbale Construction to be one of several books which best seller in this year, honestly, that is because when you read this publication you can get a lot of benefit into it. You will easily to buy that book in the book retail store or you can order it through online. The publisher in this book sells the e-book too. It makes you quickly to read this book, because you can read this book in your Cell phone. So there is no reason to you to past this e-book from your list.

Gail Kennedy:

A lot of people always spent their free time to vacation or even go to the outside with them family members or their friend. Do you realize? Many a lot of people spent they free time just watching TV, or perhaps playing video games all day long. If you would like try to find a new activity that's look different you can read some sort of book. It is really fun to suit your needs. If you enjoy the book that you simply read you can spent all day long to reading a book. The book Living Homes: Stone Masonry, Log, and Strawbale Construction it is quite good to read. There are a lot of those who recommended this book. These were enjoying reading this book. When you did not have enough space to bring this book you can buy the particular e-book. You can m0ore quickly to read this book from your smart phone. The price is not too expensive but this book has high quality.

Billie Luster:

Living Homes: Stone Masonry, Log, and Strawbale Construction can be one of your nice books that are good idea. Many of us recommend that straight away because this e-book has good vocabulary which could increase your knowledge in vocabulary, easy to understand, bit entertaining but still delivering the information. The author giving his/her effort to place every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing Living Homes: Stone Masonry, Log, and Strawbale Construction nevertheless doesn't forget the main stage, giving the reader the hottest and based confirm resource info that maybe you can be one of it. This great information can certainly drawn you into completely new stage of crucial considering.

Katie Harper:

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