



The Hand-Sculpted House: A Philosophical and Practical Guide to Building a Cob Cottage: A Practical Guide to Building a Cob Cottage (The Real Goods Solar Living Book): 10

Ianto Evans , Michael G. Smith , Linda Smiley

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Use the oldest, most available materials imaginable — earth, clay, sand, straw, and water — and blend them to redefine the future (and past) of building.

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From Reader Review The Hand-Sculpted House: A Philosophical and Practical Guide to Building a Cob Cottage: A Practical Guide to Building a Cob Cottage (The Real Goods Solar Living Book): 10 for online ebook

Jessica says

I seem to give a lot of high ratings. Well, I don't see the point of reading books I obviously don't want. If I can't stand a book, I don't finish it. What's the point.

I love this book but it'll take me forever to read it, it's just so detailed. Like a textbook. Another book I borrowed from the library but I'm going to have to buy it for myself and money well spent in my opinion.

These are the most beautiful houses you'll ever see in your life. They are like something out of fantasy stories, something you'd expect fairies and kitchen witches and Druids and all manner of magical things to live in. But they're REAL and you can make your own, how amazing is that? I have to learn how to do this.

This was the only book on cob houses that was available in my library system, on loan from the Plainfield library. But it seems pretty perfect to me. Of course I'll read other ones too, but this book starts out with the reasons, the idea, the oneness of it all.

Daniel Rolnik says

This book is epic! It gives you everything you need to run out in the middle of the forest and build yourself a shelter. My wife and I went to visit the Cob Cottage Company that Ianto and Linda started and its incredible. In person, everything in the book comes to life in such a magical way.

Emrys Csato says

This is probably the best book to get a general idea of building with cob as an alternative building material. But it's missing a lot of practical stuff, it doesn't go in depth on how to attach a roof to a cob wall, for example. Or maybe it's my lack of building knowledge. So while it is a good first step, it's not the complete guide, if you know what I mean. I'd love to build a cob house one day and when I do I will definitely consult this book. But I will need other resources as well

Rebekah Gamble says

What a fantastic book! Information is detailed and comprehensive, provides multiple ways of doing things and looking at processes for different ways of thinking, and has excellent, extensive resources and recommended reading. By the time I got to chapter two I had looked up the company behind the book and booked a ten day workshop with them (I leave this week!).

Aaron says

this book is sort of at the center of the natural building world. an essential read if you are interested in natural building, simplicity or sustainability.

Nora says

This book has well-earned it's nickname "The Bible of Simplicity".
My copy is splotted with mud and torn in multiple places... if you shake it copious amounts of sand will fall out... all signs that it has been used and loved (the authors would be proud to see the sorry state of my copy).
It is far and away the most valuable resource in print for creative builders looking for low-cost, environmentally friendly, old fashioned labor-intensive building methods. It's no substitute for experience and experimentation on your own land, with your own soil, but it's as close as you can get to capturing that hands-on wisdom on paper.

LOVE it.

Josh says

So far it's a good well thought out book, I'm really enjoying it and it's getting me psyched up to build my own cob house.

Aileen says

Wow. Radical new ways of thinking of practical, very personal spaces and how to create them yourself using natural materials. I took this out of the library by mistake, but am glad to have had my eyes opened to some surprising ideas.

John says

Imagine, for a moment, that you could build your own home for less than \$10,000 (plus the land to build on). Imagine how much money would be saved compared to the cost of a typical home, which might sell for \$100,000 and, with 30-year mortgage, will end up costing over \$200,000. Imagine further that, once this home is built, it will be more energy-efficient than a traditional home, thus reducing your heating and cooling costs over the life of the house (a life expectancy which is several times that of a conventional home). This, at least in part, is the promise of The Hand-Sculpted House. More than these material claims, though, its back cover describes the book as "a bible of radical simplicity," which gives a sense of what the book is really aiming for: this is not just how to build a house--though it certainly is that--but also a philosophical meditation on how we design and build, why we make the decisions we do, and the benefits that can come from stepping outside our usual boxes (so to speak) and choosing to build differently.

Specifically, though, these three authors are writing about building with cob. Now, most people's first reaction when I talk to them about cob construction is "Corn cobs?!" No. Cob refers to construction with a mixture of clay, sand, and straw. "So you're building a mud hut?" Well, sort of, but that doesn't really capture the sense of what's going on here.

If you look around the web, you'll find a variety of pictures of cob homes, most built by the people living in them--often with little prior building experience--and most quite attractive. It's cheap, durable even in rainy climates, and has great thermal mass which, when combined with passive solar principles and a "rocket stove," can easily be heated and stays relatively cool in the summer. The writers also discuss the psychological/spiritual benefits of building one's own house with cob, which evidently are abundant.

The book gives a great overview of how to build with cob, including all aspects from siting to design, foundations, floors, walls, windows and doors, roofing options, and the plasters that finish it. There really is a lot of valuable information in this book, from justifications of why building with cob is a good idea (including all sorts of testimonials and personal experiences) to the nuts and bolts (also including a lot of personal experience) and recommendations for further reading. Highly recommended.

Deozaan says

A really good book on the construction methods of cob buildings. The authors definitely come across as socialist, environmentalist hippies; one of them (the second author) even mentions the possibility of sculpting the bust of Karl Marx on your mantelpiece.

I'd recommend skipping the entirety of the third section, which was written by Linda (or was it Laura? I can't remember the other two authors' names). It's just "happy feely" crap that contributes next to nothing when it comes to learning how to build a cob house.

But don't let those complaints dissuade you from reading this book, as it contains a wealth of knowledge that you'll want to have if you're planning on building a cob house.

Not only is it a practical How-to guide, but it also kick-starts your creativity with ideas on how and for what purposes to design your house. Things like putting in a small window which always has a view of the North Star. Or even a window that frames a special view that only comes around for a few days a year near the winter solstice. Creating rooms not for a noun (bedroom, bathroom, family room, etc.) but for a verb or activity (sleep, eat, cook, dance, play, etc.).

The ideas in the book bring you back to having a house with purpose. Instead of building big, square rooms that are so empty we buy things to fill all the nooks and crannies with, this book suggests smaller, more intimate, and purposefully designed room. The suggestion is so simple and sensible, yet so foreign to our society.

I'd recommend mentally filtering out the hippy Marxism so you can enjoy the true value this book has to offer: Thinking about home-building in an entirely different way than what is presented as "The American Dream" of a big, expensive house with lots of space and things to fill it with. The reality of that "dream" is all too often lifelong enslavement to debt. Everyone who is looking to buy or build a home should at least be made aware of some of the alternatives, and this book certainly does its part in presenting the cob alternative.

Robert Coogan says

Not recommended if you want to learn how to build a cob house. Much of the book is spent learning either the history of cob, or what makes it so "amazing." I was really disappointed with this book, and consider it a waste of money on my part.

Adam Shand says

This is a book full of stories, philosophy and practical and artistic ideas for building your own home. This is the only book I've ever read which made the idea of building my own home (something I've vaguely fantasised about since I was a kid) seem like a practical reality.

My ideology is quite similar to the authors so I had no problem with his philosophy (though other reviews I've read do) and actually found it quite refreshing to hear somebody being even more extreme than me in my views. If you have more time than money, are interested having a lovely place to live and don't mind small houses ... this is a book of inspiration and beauty.

If you just like reading stories and seeing the pretty pictures, it's a nice browse as well. :-)

Jack Stephens says

I had the privilege of working side by side with Ianto Evans and Linda Smiley for several years and could not more highly recommend their expertise, or that of Michael Smith. It is the best book published to date about cob construction, and there is a healthy dose of practical wisdom as well. One of my very favorite books and subjects.

Eric says

This book fueled one of my great spouts of enthusiasm for various possible projects that I could do given enough time and leisure. The book's title is aptly descriptive of the contents and is very inspiring. The examples of cob (a building material made of sand, straw, and clay) houses are, to me, wonderfully evocative of . . . well a hobbit house. So if you like Bag End in The Lord of the Rings you might enjoy this book and the thought of building a hand sculpted house.

Ingrid says

I literally was too excited to sleep after reading this book. Amazing, and very accessible. I ended up attending two cob workshops by the author - life-changing. We plan on building our house out of cob.
