

the Natural Builders



UNITED STATES
BOTANIC GARDEN

Straw Bale Demonstration Home



Created in 2008, this straw bale demonstration home was commissioned by the United States Botanical Garden for the exhibit “One planet-Ours”. Though the original installation was only meant to stay in place for a few weeks, the USBG and capital hill community enjoyed it so much that it remained several months. It was viewed by hundreds of thousands in part due to its prime location directly across from the United States Capitol Building. During Barack Obama’s first presidential inauguration crowds could be seen passing by the home.

Daily banter with the men and women of the United States Senate and Congress was an added bonus. Elected officials would stop by as they walked to their respective halls of service from their nearby offices. Several members of our team were able to arrange meetings with agencies during the project’s construction period, fostering poignant dialogues around sustainability.



The US Botanical garden structure looms over the nearly completed BWB straw bale house

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This adobe and cob archway compliments the approach to the BWB house while providing comfortable seating outside.

In addition the straw bale home the team took the opportunity to demonstrate a range of natural materials such as earthen building techniques such as cob and adobe in the outdoor seating area, as well as carefully crafted earthen plasters throughout the structure. A bamboo shade structure attached to the home

A lime plaster made from regionally available materials protected the outside of the building. These durable finishes allow the structure to breathe while protecting the straw from driving rain and wind, while providing a beautiful surface.



A trained artist and natural builder Marisha Farnsworth enjoys a little sunshine, while the capital building shines in the distance.



Master plasterers Athena and Bill Steen hard at work on the interior finishes.

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Here are a few of the steps involved in weaving the patio canopy that we placed between the Bale house and the USBG building.



The structure's small scale and temporary nature allowed us to experiment with connections like this hose clamp, to hold the shade to the post.



The shade structure created a private seating area for visitors to the installation. Log seating also served as ballast to hold the structure, a woven fence at the back conceals materials and tools for demonstrations.

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The Builders Without Borders Strawbale Eco-house Construction Team:

The Canelo Project, Athena & Bill Steen
Darren Molnar-Port
DeBoer Architects, Darryl DeBoer
Derek Roff, co-director of BWB
Earth & Straw, Inc., Rosemary Morin
Eric Hempstead, Natural Builder
Green Builders, Inc., Polly Bart
Green Weaver Inc., Laura Bartels
Heliconworks, Bill Hutchins
Kleiwerks, Massey Burkes
Kleiwerks, Michael (Meka) Bunch
Mark Schueneman
MudStrawLove, Steve Kemble & Mollie Curry
OKOKOK Productions, Kaki Hunter & Doni Kiffmeyer
One-World-Design, Kelly Lerner
Sam Droege
StrawbaleCentral.com, Catherine Wanek & Pete Fust
The Natural Builders Inc., Marisha Farnsworth & Kevin Rowell

Above are a few of the finishes featured in the project. Most of the finishes in the project use lime, earth, straw, sand and natural pigments.



A few of the team members pose in front of the finished home after it's official opening.