

## Cordwood Newsletter Fall 2012



The summer has been filled with cordwood projects, consultation and plenty of cordwood "press." The cordwood workshop at Kinstone in mid-July was very special. Kinstone is an unbelievably powerful place with more than cordwood "going on." A stone circle, a labyrinth, a permaculture design and a cordwood chapel are but part of the palpable energy flowing around this unique and fascinating site.

The cordwood workshop was a melding of styles and artistic talents. Many people helped to create the walls that are gradually becoming works of art and statements of metaphors (wind, river, stars, day, night) that are true to St. Francis of Assisi's work.



The River Wall from Kinstone Chapel

Kristine Beck's vision is evolving as her dream unfolds. It is a special blessing to be a part of this creation and we are filled with gratitude for all the incredible people we met.

The group was fun, engaging, filled with passion for all things natural and organic. The walls started to rise and the following pictures may give you a sense of the project.

Links are included for a more in-depth look and lots more pictures.

<http://kinstonecircle.com/>

<http://www.cordwoodconstruction.wordpress.com>

<http://www.bluffprairiehollow.wordpress.com> This is Kaitlyn's excellent summary that includes the thatching and the whole permaculture design element led by Wayne Weisman of Permaculture Project (a *punctacular personage*). Cliff Davis was onboard from Spiral Ridge in Tennessee. It was great to have his southern sensibilities & humor

Here are some of Wayne's pictures from the workshop with his own unique blend of insight loaded with humor. [Some great photos]

<http://www.permacultureproject.com/cordwood-and-natural-building-at-kinstone/>

<http://www.permacultureproject.com/kinstone-journey-to-mordor-mortar/>

<http://www.permacultureproject.com/cordwood-and-some-swailes-at-kinstone/>



Kinstone's first 12' cordwood wall finished August 19, 2012. If you are willing to come over for a weekend to help build a wall, please give me a holler [Flato@aol.com](mailto:Flato@aol.com)



I just love it when people send me photos of their projects. Here is one from Luke & Amy Metzger of Spartanburg, South Carolina .



. Metzger's beautiful cordwood home in SC. Nicely done!



More pictures & story at <http://www.cordwoodconstruction.wordpress.com>



Tom Huber's cabin in upstate NY.

Tom Huber's SIP cordwood panel. The layers are: plywood, 2" of foam, scraps of plywood screwed to back plywood, 5" log-ends screwed to SIP and then foam sprayed around them, followed by a 2" mortar joint of CEM.



Tom is a veritable genius with stone, wood and mortar. The man has serious talent!

Just in case you haven't seen it, here is Rob Roy's review of *Cordwood Construction Best Practices*. Backhome Magazine Book Review #119 June/July 2012

**Cordwood Construction: Best Practices** review by Rob Roy

A Cordwood Compendium

Richard Flatau's new *Cordwood Construction: Best Practices* is a visual feast and a celebration of cordwood masonry. That's why it's so much fun to browse through – and be inspired by – its 196 large pages, almost all of which are in full color.

But that's just the beginning. True to its sub-title, friend Richard has gathered together a myriad of "best practices" information from projects he has worked on, as well as from colleagues who have presented authoritative papers at the two most recent Continental Cordwood Conferences: 2005 in Wisconsin (which the author co-hosted with his wife Becky) and 2011 in Manitoba, where, again, Richard was a major player and organizer.

The building of the cordwood walls themselves, of course, is covered in detail, and includes various mortar options (Portland mixes, lime putty mortar, cob and paper enhanced mortar, just to name a few) and insulation choices (sawdust and lime, cellulose, various foams and more). But the text also tells how cordwood masonry relates to other ancillary building systems, such as foundation options, timber framing, window and door installation, electric and plumbing. Always, Richard is careful to show time-tested methods which will meet code. His more than 30 years of experience in building, writing about and teaching cordwood masonry quietly permeates the entire book.

With regard to best practices, two instructional and inspirational sections stand out. The author details two recent highly successful – and code approved – structures that he and Becky have been personally involved with in recent years: the Cordwood Education Center in Merrill, Wisconsin, and the White Earth Reservation Cordwood Home in Naytahwaush, Minnesota. In these comprehensive Addendums, we see the projects progress from conceptualization to - beautiful! - actualization, and learn how the best practices described earlier are integrated for structural integrity, longevity, energy-efficiency, design creativity, and compliance. The Education Center Addendum has a thorough two-page checklist of how to organize a group to work together to complete a building project. If you have a community project in mind, these two pages alone are worth the price of the book.

Cordwood Construction Best Practices available at [www.daycreek.com](http://www.daycreek.com)  
Articles in the **New York Times**, the **Minneapolis Star Tribune** and **New Pioneer Magazine** (Fall 2012 issue) rounded out a very busy summer of interviews, writing, consultation and building.

**Backhome Magazine** published an article in the spring on how we changed the look of our metal pole barn from metal to wood. We called it Reverse Alchemy. Here is a link to the whole article with Backhome Magazine's compliments.

[http://www.daycreek.com/forum\\_images/ReverseAlchemy\\_pdf\\_June\\_2012.pdf](http://www.daycreek.com/forum_images/ReverseAlchemy_pdf_June_2012.pdf)



Here are some links that you may wish to visit as you explore the cordwood field.

<http://cordwoodconstruction.org>

<http://cordwoodconstruction.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.facebook.com/cordwoodconstruction>

[www.daycreek.com](http://www.daycreek.com)

Please keep me updated on your natural building projects. While I love cordwood, I also have a yen for all the others styles. A hybrid building using many styles can be amazing. Send me photos and descriptions of what you are doing.

Interested in hosting a workshop. Ask me to send you **How to Host a Cordwood Workshop** brochure.

\* If you wish to be removed from this mailing list, please reply with **Remove** in the subject line.

\*\* I am constantly updating my email list. These are sent as blind copies BCC and never sold or shared with anyone.

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"A house built of logs will look like none other, for it will glorify the stick." -Frank Lloyd Wright

# Build Your Own CORDWOOD CASTLE

Create an energy-smart home for less than \$20 PSF with the right saw, bartering savvy and elbow grease!

BY JEREMIAH TUCKER

For seven years at master's bid, the McAllens and their seven neighbors celebrated the end of mortgage season with a homegrown festival. Swelling in road Wisconsin, the McAllens live outside the town of Galveston, along the winding Black River, which jumps its banks during the rainy seasons creating ponds of stagnant water—an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes.

At the party two guests would be crowned King DIRT and Queen Grasshopper while everyone would sing fan-darling songs with the words changed to be about mosquitoes. A neighbor would stand at the head of the parade with a sign that said "I'm not a mosquito, I'm a neighbor!"

The annual site ended after the McAllens had cycled through all the possibilities for the king and queen but it attracted their family's home of choice, a little quirky and very idiosyncratic. When Ed and Julie moved to the property in the mid '90s, they knew they eventually wanted a house that reflected their lifestyle, and though it took a few years and a lot of sweat equity, Ed built them a unique, beautiful house for less than what many people spend on a car.

"Most of us have become big-income earners," Ed admits.



Ed and Julie McAllen, with their dog, in front of their cordwood castle. Ed built the house for less than \$20 PSF.

BY NEW PIONEER

Addendum:

The **New Pioneer Magazine** article on Cordwood was very well done. Here are two pages from the article (used with permission).

"...though it took a few years and a lot of sweat equity, Ed built them a unique, beautiful house for less than what many people spend on a car."

cordwood is arranged in a way that insulates the heat of a stove, which would be appropriate because in seven years both Ed and Julie have gone to college school and now perform locally in parades and at local evening events.

"The house knew before we did," said Julie, laughing.

### OVERALL COST

The 1,000-square-foot house ended up costing them about \$23,000, not including the well and septic system in the price of the land. Of course, the work was intensive and time consuming, taking Ed about three years to complete almost entirely on his own. Ed literally put his sweat and blood into building the house. He used his

fingers to caulk around the cordwood for a window, straight wood, working his fingertips until they bled.

Julie used ductwork because he was going to demolish himself from working so hard. "He was so intense, during that time he just let his hair grow down his back," she said.

Ed gave a long geyser, which he cut off and put in one of the boiler insulators into the wall. In another boiler is a squirrel skull, snake piles that only the family knows are there, and a visitor would never even notice. The house is heated by a woodstove, the concrete by chimney radiating heat. The heater's well-insulated thick walls keep it warm in the winter and cool in the summer, and the interior design is open and quite welcoming.

### LIVING NATURALLY SIMPLE

With a river just outside and a 5,000-acre public hunting preserve across the river, the McAllens live simply. Ed built a walk-in root cellar that he keeps well stocked with home-grown food. They collect doughnuts to grow in baskets without, and their youngest has two years of high school left.

Ed's job as a contractor gives him time to dream about new projects. Julie would like to move into town eventually, though Ed cannot imagine doing so. If they do sell the house, they'll make a tidy profit since they never went in debt to build it, and he estimates it's now worth around \$300,000. "This house was the reason they're ever here!" he said.

### Interview With Richard Flatau

## THE CORDWOOD KING

In America, there are about 1,000 cordwood homes, according to Richard Flatau, the director of Cordwood Construction Resources.

"Cordwood construction kind of started in Quebec, Wisconsin and Sweden in about the mid 1920s," Flatau said.

**BAR BREAD:** There are so few cordwood homes because they're uncommonly built, and many of the oldest examples have since been covered up with traditional replacement siding.

"Today they're most often owner-built, and if you had to live out a cordwood home you'd just be water after the beer," Flatau said. "You can't just grow it, but a log and use it in a wall."

**WHY AFFORDABLE:** The upside, however, is that cordwood homes are cheaper than traditional building, and they last great, with the wood creating a natural insulator within the walls.

"If you have water to work, you can build your walls. Inexpensively, if you are willing to do the work, a cordwood home can cost you from \$10 to \$20 a square foot—well below the industry average.

"I built my home in 1977 and 1980, and I did more for \$10,000," Flatau said. "The house was finished for that amount, and it's a 1,000 square foot home."

What really surprised is the ease—cutting, planning, wiring—but he said that most people inspired to do a cordwood home enjoy acquiring these skills as working side-by-side with skilled labor to bring the costs down.

**CONSTRUCTION TIPS:** In 2005 Flatau helped organize a cordwood construction conference in Merrill, WI, where he lives, and he has been compiling best practices for cordwood construction for years.

Flatau said to pick a soft, green wood when selecting wood for a cordwood burner's walls. It's important to dry the wood for two years, so it doesn't shrink dramatically.

If built correctly, a cordwood home "holds water away from it and it doesn't rot out," Flatau said. "Moisture soaks into the walls because a breathing, living organism. You can have a driving rain against a cordwood wall, and the next day it will dry out."



Richard Flatau holding a hardwood log and a Cordwood Education Center.

### UNIQUE DESIGN

"The beauty is simple," he said, "and easy to learn."

The two cordwood homes are even alike," he said. "We encourage people to use a custom pattern. Make it circular. Let the wall build itself."

Looking back, Flatau said building a cordwood home was one of the best investments he ever made. "I've had a mortgage-free home for 12 years. It really helped in all the ways around. Plus there's the sense of self-satisfaction in building your own home," Flatau says at [cordwoodconstruction.org](http://cordwoodconstruction.org) and [dawnr.com](http://dawnr.com).