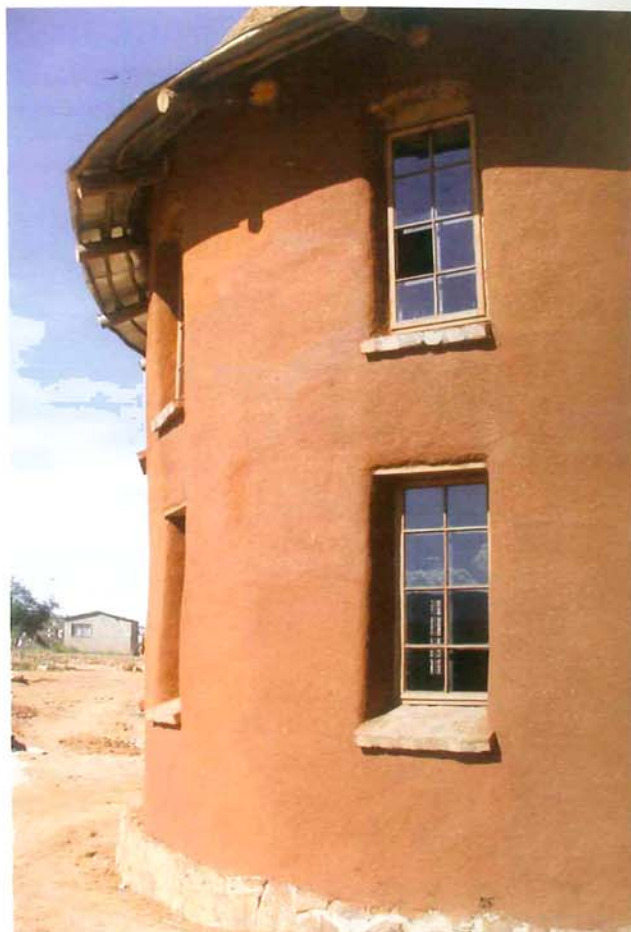


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Surviving on sustainable solutions

Article by Edith Webster

Rural South African builders should hone traditional mud-brick building skills, as used at the Seven Fountains Primary School.



With little or no funds, indigenous South African communities – more particularly the women in those communities – have long made their own bricks and plastered their walls with natural materials. The skills have been passed down through generations and although some structures have withstood the test of time, others have not.

Andy Horn of Eco Design Architects, natural-building consultant and trainer in the award-winning Seven Fountains Primary

School project in Shayamoya near Kokstad, KwaZulu-Natal, tells *Building Africa* that traditional mud-brick homes are not stable because they are not built on solid foundations. It is precisely at the foundation level, or rather plinth, where local builders should be using alternatives to mud bricks and this should ideally be raised above ground, separating the mud bricks from the earth. "We had to teach them to build with durability." During the project, through a number of workshops, a total of 36

previously unemployed women – many of them mothers of learners at the school – made 16 000 sun-dried adobe bricks under Horn's guidance. Materials for construction, which was funded by Oprah's Angel Network, were sourced on or very close to the site.

The entrepreneurial skills of the local women were also honed. "It is common practice in similar groups to take orders and sell to various communities. However, this industry has not been formalised, although it operates throughout

KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. It is neither recognised by the National Home Builders Registration Council nor the banks, so bonds are not available. It would help if South Africa had an earth-building standard, as in other countries like Australia, New Zealand and Germany, particularly in light of our energy crisis. Instead, our communities continue to use corrugated iron and concrete building blocks which have far more inferior thermal-insulation properties than the natural alternatives." ■

Photographs courtesy of East Coast Architects