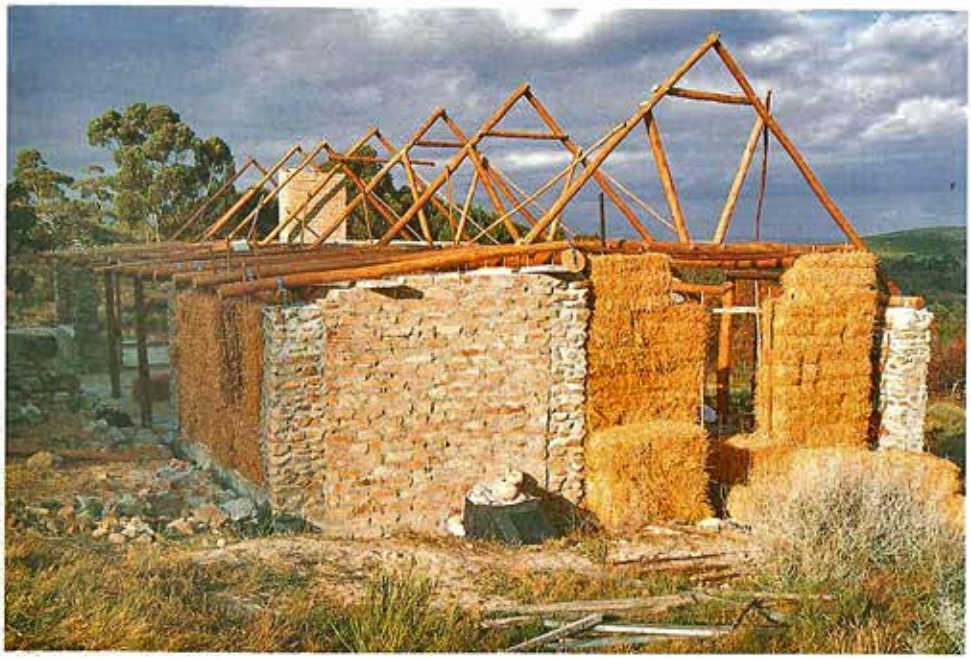
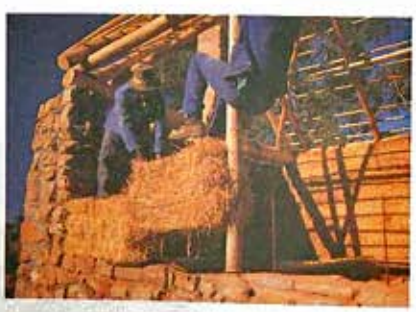


House of GOOD HOPE

"Green architecture is not a style, trend or a vernacular," says architect Andy Horn, echoing a general understanding that sustainable design is more a philosophy of building than a prescriptive building style. And he adds; "Neither is it new."

A good example is the straw bale house. Straw, grass and reed throughout the ages served as reliable and easily obtainable construction materials. Quite logical, then, that with the development of the baling machine at the turn of the last century, people saw in the straw bale a useful building material - a natural brick.

The oldest documented bale building was a one-roomed school in Nebraska, built in 1886. The Burke Homestead, built in 1903, still stands defiantly, as does a two-storey mansion in Huntsville Alabama, built in 1938. The most significant benefit of straw bale building lies in the fact that it uses an under-utilised, renewable resource. Furthermore, the embodied energy of a straw bale - being the energy it takes to make and transport a straw bale to site - is considerably less than a brick.



Straw bale walls offer other notable benefits. They are easily and speedily constructed; are structurally sound; are durable and fireproof; and they provide superb insulation. Despite the fact that many South African examples are only evidenced in rural areas, Andy Horn argues that the technique may have some potential for South Africa's low-cost urban housing projects. It is just a case of vision. **SEAN O'TOOLE**

Andy Horn, *author of A Manifesto for Green Architecture,* **has built numerous straw bale houses in the Western Cape. A founding partner of Eco Design, he has lectured extensively on sustainable construction and design.**