

Satisfaction

The principal lesson I have learned, among a great many other practical lessons in mud building, using various materials lying about the farm, and collecting discarded rubbish to incorporate into my efforts, is to actually get started. The plans matter little, by comparison with the effort of actually doing something, be it a wall, a small shed or a barbecue. The satisfaction of knowing that it can be done, and done by you, and seeing a result, provides incentive to continue and to expand one's ambitions to much bigger things, even though the time may seem to stretch to the end of one's life.

Providing that you are not building for absolute necessity, such as a place to live in, it is the journey, not the destination, which is more important. Once a start has been made, there will generally be an acceleration in activity and in the rate of progress, if my own experience is a guide.

After years of idle dreaming, good intentions, a good grasp of theory without any experience in the physical realities of building, I have managed to overcome the worst of the inertia, gained confidence in constructing things which will stand up, and had the intense satisfaction of achieving something made with my own labour. The expense in materials has been very modest to date, mainly in the purchase of ready-mixed concrete for footings, trench mesh and cement. At no time have I been committed to a vast project which could turn into an 'incomplete project' (that financial disaster of the car restoration business comes to mind) and the confidence building exercise of real activity has been more important than the construction itself.

To all fellow sufferers of inertia, I urge you to just get started, dirty your hands, sweat a little (actually, quite a lot), and be prepared for some minor setbacks in the glorious experience of owner building at least some of your dreams. You will find some of the brilliant ideas of your own, and others, will not work for you; that practice leads to more and better ideas and that the financial and moral risk is much less than you feared. ♦

Editor's note: How have you managed to get over your own project difficulties? Perhaps we could all learn from your progress – we'd love to hear your stories.

Book review...

Mud Brick Techniques

Ron Edwards

RRP \$16. ISBN 9780909901981

Published by The Rams Skull Press

(8th Edition 2007)

Distributed by The Rams Skull Press

48 pages, A4, black and white illustrations



The following review appeared in TOB 39 Jun/Jul 1990 on the release of the 1st edition (1990), and is still relevant today.

◀◀ Ron Edwards is a master at producing how to do it books. Good common sense text is always supported by his own pen and ink sketches which in themselves are very descriptive.

Ron's latest book is no exception. It's a book about working with mud bricks. Consisting of just forty eight pages Mud Brick Techniques contains more useful information than most books of twice the size and three times the price.

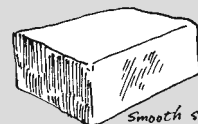
After an introduction which explains some characteristics of various types of earth construction the book moves into the business of selecting suitable soils, making test bricks and organising work sites to minimise handling. Ron has a relaxed turn of phrase as in describing the hole he requested a backhoe driver to dig... 'as deep as a country dunny' when stock piling brick making soil.

The book goes on to describe various techniques for making and laying bricks. There is an interesting approach to laying curved walls which involves marking the shape on the ground or floor and then suspending weighted string lines vertically from above. It is obviously impossible to use the usual horizontal string line on a curved wall. With Ron's method, the original curve is maintained by ensuring that the wall continues to rise vertically by using the drop lines as a guide. Various types of wall finishes are also described.

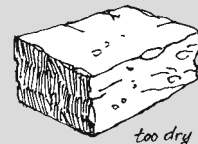
The book ends with the down to earth final thought:



too wet



Smooth sides and good shape



too dry

'Although earth building can be hard work, take comfort as you stand there sweating that a good part of the exertion has been caused by your own stupidity in not planning the job through properly. In any case you sleep all the better after a hard day's work. And there is no nicer room to sleep in than one made of earth, and one that you have created yourself.' >>

Subsequent editions have included a few updates and improvements, but in essence the latest 8th Edition (2007) is little changed from the original. Still 48 pages, it is now A4 sized, which allows the diagrams to be printed on a larger scale and the text to be a little more easily readable.

After an introduction to mud which includes information on earthquakes, soil and brick testing, Ron gets down and dirty on preparing the mud, making and filling moulds, drying bricks, footings, laying bricks, plastering and bagging.

It is an immensely sensible, back to basics type of book, devoid of all temptation to use Bobcats for mixing or buying in pre-made bricks. Ron's forte has been his love of the old-fashioned techniques and his belief that they are still the best. ♦

Mud Brick Techniques is available through TOB Bookshop (see p.64).

Editor's note: Ron Edwards passed away in 2008, aged 77. His passion still lives on in the numerous books he authored and illustrated over the years.

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