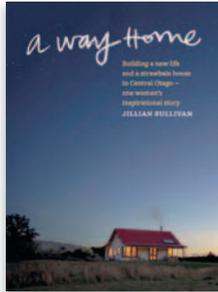




Reviews...

See publisher Potton and Burton's website for an extract from this book.



A Way Home: Building a new life and a straw bale house in Central Otago – one woman's inspirational story

Jillian Sullivan

RRP NZ\$39.99. ISBN 9780947503260
Published by Potton and Burton (2016)
www.pottonandburton.co.nz

REVIEW BY GRAEME NORTH

This book has a particular resonance with me as the setting for the story is Oturehua, a small village in the Ida Valley in Central Otago. I lived near this town in 1980, in the old mud brick Ida Valley Railway (de-licensed) Hotel, so I know the setting for this book very well. It is a beautiful landscape with a harsh climate that is taken lightly at your peril. The siren lure of this landscape is strong to those who hear it, and it called to the writer after her marriage had ended and her five children had left home. These days Oturehua is on a major rail trail, so is socially transformed, but some of the old characters, the landscape being one of them – shine through this beautifully written book. 'If loss means a life taken back to bedrock then I was here at bedrock: nothing between me and the soil between my feet in boots braced on the earth and the only sky above me'.

I have read – and also mentored and recorded – many accounts of owner builders and their travails, but this one really captures the grit and determination, the disasters and the love required to pull off such a feat. It tells of the life changing transformations that come with owner building, let alone the involvement of community at all sorts of levels, and in so many varied ways.

This account reminded me of the extraordinary plucky tale of Charlotte Preston Larkin, another woman on her own who built an adobe cottage in the 1940's in the Bay of Islands, and I was

delighted to see that Jillian references this story and resonates with similarities, of 'all the questions, the doubts, the lack of knowledge and resources, and the hard work ahead'.

Builder and son-in-law, Sam, with Jillian as his apprentice, arrive on the site. 'Do you want to be treated like a grandmother or a builder?' 'I want to be treated like a builder' 'Good, because that way you'll do far more than you think is possible'.

This is not a technical reference book – it is about all the other things that happen and have to happen in order to build for yourself. There is the strength and the passion to achieve a house for yourself, imbued with yourself, and others. Jillian recalls the deep understanding that comes of owner built natural building.

'There were handprints still showing in the first coat from those who helped build the house. I knew then what was different. In this house the walls are made from the very materials of the earth. Mud

walls surround me, and as the firelight and candle flames flickered over them, creating small shadows and gleams of light, I had the distinct feeling of being inside a living, breathing, structure. There was no sense of being cut off from the earth but of being held by the earth, taken care of by the earth. The house was quiet, still, warm, and has been every night since.' ♦

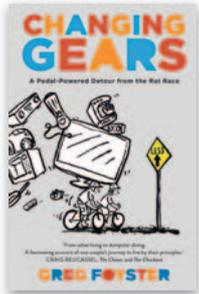
'It may be that when we no longer know what to do, we have come to our real work and when we no longer know which way to go, we have begun our real journey.'

– Wendell Berry, Standing By Words, 1983

'The day we packed up our vehicles with the first load of building materials and tools, it was mid-November, the sky a wide blue vault above us. My son-in-law Sam Deavoll had left his building job and taken on the task of helping me build my straw bale house. We had a summer to get the frame up, ready for the straw. I had no idea of what was ahead of us.'

'I was unfit, unskilled and fifty-five years old.'

Graeme North is an architect from Warkworth, New Zealand, well known for using many forms of earth, straw bale and other natural materials. He designed his first earth building in 1971 and was inaugural chair of the Earth Building Association of New Zealand. www.ecodesign.co.nz



Changing Gears: A Pedal-Powered Detour from the Rat Race

Greg Foyster

RRP \$24.95. ISBN 9781922213136

Published by Affirm Press (2013)

www.affirmpress.com.au

Distributed by United Book Distributors

REVIEW BY LYNDA WILSON

What on earth does cycling 6500 kilometres from Melbourne to Far North Queensland have to do with owner building? What could you possibly learn?

While this book has very little to do with physically building a house, the concepts of simple living explored in it may have an impact on your decision making process. In their 'quest to live with less,' Greg Foyster and Sophie Chishkovsky visit and interview a number of people who are living simply – some of whom have appeared in the pages of *The Owner Builder* magazine: Peter Cowman, David Holmgren, Moora Moora Co-operative Community, John Barlow and Liz Worth.

Becoming an owner builder is often part of adopting a simpler lifestyle. What materials you decide to build with, the design decisions you make, the furnishings you decide to fill it with and the way that you continue to live in this lovingly created home can all be reconsidered with a view to living a less complex and wasteful life.

Written in a light-hearted manner, the topic is nevertheless complex; you may well be left with more questions than when you started reading. And this is a good thing, as then the aim of making us all wonder about the impact of our day-to-day lives on the rest of the planet may have been achieved.

You are bound to learn something. Above all, it is a damn good yarn! ♦

'It's a story about local food and community gardens, downshifting and DIY building, sustainability and self-sufficiency. But mostly it's about people. We hope you enjoy meeting them as much as we did.'
www.simplelives.com.au

'Sophie and I were talking about going travelling, but we didn't want to fly. When she suggested cycling up Australia, I thought it was a crazy idea. 'That's impossible!' I said. Then we met people who'd performed similar feats, including a genuinely loopy Scotsman who'd ridden from Darwin to Adelaide in the heat of summer. Our little excursion up the east coast no longer seemed completely nuts.'



Wilderness Life DIY: A City Family Bumbles Towards Self-Sufficiency

Blythe Tait with Peter Robey

Self-published digital edition (2016)

www.thehousethatworkedout.com

REVIEW BY LYNDA WILSON

'Peter and I are not country folk. We are city-folk, born and bred. We are not builders. We'd had limited success with food gardening, no understanding of any kind of electricity systems, and had never done any plumbing tasks beyond changing a washer in the shower. We were an average couple raising two young children in the suburbs, and we had no skills which could be considered useful for carving out a new life on a bush property that had no access, no existing dwellings, and no services.'

Yet here we are, living in a beautiful, eco-friendly, two-storey, passive-solar-designed house which we built ourselves – without taking out a mortgage.'

Can a clueless city couple learn to build a house in the wilderness completely by themselves? What is life like on 525 watts of power? When is the right time to change a toilet bucket? The answers to these questions and more are in 'Wilderness Life DIY', the tale of a city family who leaves a comfortable city existence to make a home in the Australian Tasmanian wilderness.

The building of Blythe and Peter's cordwood home in Tasmania was featured in *TOB 193 February/March 2016*. While that covered the overall build, it was never going to be capable of including all the details that are involved in the process of creating your own home over years. The resulting 103-page e-book allows Blythe to indulge fully, sharing everything from the initial preparation – purchasing every one of Rob Roy's cordwood building books in a single order – to finally moving in.

This is a truly first hand experience, including all the bad moments along with the good. Every little detail, as well as numerous hints and tips, is included. Whether you are building with cordwood, any other natural material or even conventional materials, you will gain a good insight into the myriad processes and tasks that are required on your own project. ♦

Blythe and Peter continue to share their day to day adventures of living a sustainable life on their website and blog.

www.thehousethatworkedout.com > [More Good Stuff](#) > [Blog](#)