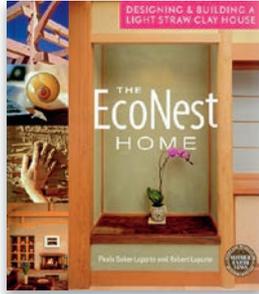




# Reviews...

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## The EcoNest Home

Paula Baker-Laporte and Robert Laporte  
RRP \$72.99. ISBN 9780865717770  
Published by New Society Publishers (2015)  
Distributed by NewSouth Books.  
Paperback, 320pp

### REVIEW BY KRISTEN O'BRIEN

The more I learn about building sciences and philosophies, the more this whole study feels like enlightenment. It's like finding answers you knew you had in you all along. At least I'd like to think that we humans are born with some instinct as far as providing ourselves with appropriate shelter to survive, and more than that, that we know how to do this in a way that not only supports our own lives, but all life on this planet in general. Unfortunately, for those of us born into the age of comfort, convenience, and conventional construction, this natural instinct doesn't generally kick in until we are forced to face it due to social, political, environmental, or ethical reasons.

In terms of enlightenment, Paula Baker-Laporte and Robert Laporte's new book, *The EcoNest Home* takes you there straight away in the first section 'The Econest Philosophy.' This section lays out the 25 principles of Building Biology, a building science and philosophy that originated in Germany in the early 1960s when building related health problems were growing out of the mass-produced industrialised housing that went up post WWII. Building Biology, or Baubiologie as the Germans call it, helps us understand how to build longevity, and therefore sustainability, into our buildings, as well as into the lives of the humans who occupy them by using natural materials. In fact, according to the founders of Building Biology, environments that are deeply nurturing to human health, by their very nature excel in ecological performance as well. If that statement there isn't enlightenment, I don't know what is.

While the first section of the book provides us with an overview of the Econest Philosophy, the majority of the book is devoted to the second section, titled 'How to Build an Econest,' where Paula and Robert paint a detailed picture of how they have translated each of the 25 principles of Building Biology into concrete building details that all fit together to form a complete biological building system, known as The EcoNest Home.

EcoNests have a very specific recipe of materials which require attention to detail as they interface. For this reason, Paula and Robert provide sections with diagrams and detailed instructions on everything from Econest footings and matrix framing, to incorporating mechanical and electrical systems, all steps of light straw clay wall production, designing and building the roof, interior and exterior finishes, and flooring systems. They also have provided a section with beautiful colour photos of several EcoNest case study homes for inspiration, and an excerpt from the 2015 International Residential Code, with the IRC Appendix R: Light Straw-Clay Construction for reference.

In addition to technical drawings and instructions, Paula and Robert do a great job of providing their own personal insight throughout the book with endless tips, tricks and advice from their mounting experience building light straw clay homes for the last 25 years. This, perhaps, is the part that I am most grateful for. There is no replacing 25 years of hands on experience when it comes to learning a technique, but the light they do shine sure directs my thinking in a way that only the enlightened could. ♦



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