



A strawbale octagon proves different and fun

...as well as a green alternative to conventional construction

By Victoria Stoppiello

The first two times her brother asked, “Why are you doing this?” Diane Gibson responded, “Because it’s reusing a waste product, uses less framing and is excellent insulation, it’s a healthy non-toxic material” — all the usual “green” reasons for building a strawbale house. The third time he asked, she simply said, “It’s different and fun,” and he stopped asking.

Her house is different, because it has eight sides; it’s fun, because a host of friends, family, builders and artisans worked together to create the house; serene and quiet because, even though Diane’s home is literally a stone’s throw from Highway 101 on Manzanita’s outskirts, strawbale has excellent sound-deadening properties.

Diane’s guiding values included low maintenance (therefore wood/vinyl clad windows, stucco, and some cedar siding) and using renewable or recycled content materials. For example, kitchen cabinets were made from an Oregon walnut “danger” tree felled years earlier by the cabinetmaker, who’d waited for a use.

Strawbale construction became Diane’s first choice after she subscribed to *The Last Straw*, a journal of strawbale building. She chose Anthony Stoppiello, who’s designed solar and green buildings for over 30 years, the last 20 on the coast, as her architect. Anthony’s buildings don’t run to a type; they all look different because their styles respond to the owners’ aesthetic preferences. However, the same principle underlies each project: Maximizing solar potential for natural light and space and water heating, starting with a building site evaluation that orients living spaces in response to sun, wind, and views.

Anthony’s motives for working with strawbale construction were big-picture: “Because straw is a

waste product that’s typically burned, we’re sequestering CO2 when we use strawbales in buildings; we’re helping deal with the global warming/climate change problem.” Early on, he asked Diane, “If strawbale doesn’t cost less than conventional construction, would you still want to do it? Take your time to decide.” She decided yes, and hasn’t regretted it. Choosing a contractor was more difficult. “Tevis and Terry (the general contractors who went into partnership to do the project) were the only contractors available or courageous enough,” Diane remembers. Five years later she says, “I still pinch myself that I get to live here.”

In those five years, hundreds of people have toured the house, making the Gibson residence an excellent opportunity for people to touch and experience first-hand environmentally preferable products including bamboo, cork and linoleum flooring, natural plasters and cement stucco plus take a peek in the “honesty window” that proves there really is straw under that plaster. Sheet rock in some parts of the house is covered with Design-R-Wall, a cotton material the consistency of oatmeal when rolled on like paint, but when dry provides a soft yet tough finish.

Deer and drought resistant landscaping designed and installed by Maia Holliday continues the theme of low maintenance. Volunteers such as foxglove, creeping honeysuckle, and montbrecia have joined lavender, yarrow, jasmine and other plants Maia installed. Rock roses and knick-knick transition from native forest to the more formal flower garden contained between walkways on the north side of the house, a slope enjoying good southern exposure. Hardy geraniums border a path following the mortar-less stone retaining wall laid by Pat Costello. Diane is encouraging wild strawberries to fill in the



Homeowner Diane Gibson with architect Anthony Stoppiello. Photos by Dave Fisher

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