



A Snowboarder Goes Straw Bale

The do Remmelink's energy-efficient Elk River home feels just right



Story By Gena Fischer

Photography By Corey Kopischke



THERE IS SOMETHING TO BE SAID for those who build a home that blends into its environment, such as a log cabin in a forest or an adobe in the desert. Its minimal visual impact shows respect for the ground on which it is built, and most importantly, for the neighbors down the road. Such is the house of Thedo Rummelink, whose stucco home with its straw bale construction and arched metal roofs blends perfectly into the rolling grass hills of the lower Elk River Valley.

An Olympic snowboarder transplant from Holland, Thedo had always been interested in straw bale homes, which are known for their energy efficiency and eco-friendly material. After much research, Thedo chose local architect Todd Young, who designed the house with Steamboat Engineering & Architectural Design Inc., and builder John Randolph, both of whom live in straw bale homes. "It felt right with these two guys," Thedo says. "They both had an interest in straw bale homes, as well as experience designing, building and living in them."

Construction of the 2,400 square-foot home took 15 months and went smoothly, with Thedo able to move in during September 2006. Post-and-beam construction, concrete floors and thick stucco walls stuffed with 15-inch straw bales give the home a warm feeling, and large windows throughout provide plenty of light. "This place just feels good," Thedo says. "You can see from Mount Werner to the Flat Tops. In the winter, elk hang out in the meadow, and in the summer the sandhill cranes come."

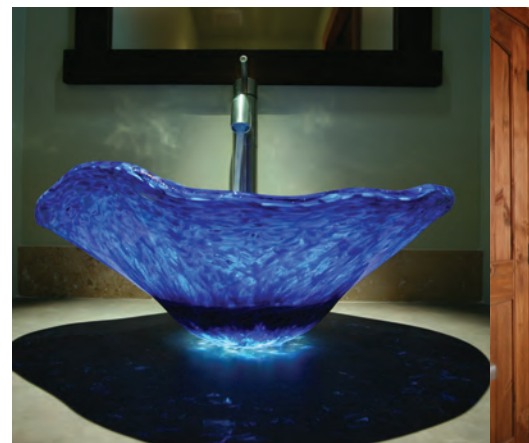
Warm Welcome: The home's stucco "central heating structure" houses an adobe-style gas fireplace on the kitchen side, wood-burning fireplace on the living room side, shelves and storage in the middle, and a circular staircase with steel railing on the backside. **Insets: Roses and Robes:** Thedo Rummelink posing outside his adobe home. The house's well-insulated straw bale walls trap heat in the winter and offer cooling properties in the summer.



Large windows offer views from Mount Werner to the Flat Tops.



Concrete floors and countertops add rustic elegance to the kitchen.



Even the sink in the home's bathroom has an aesthetic touch.



Rail Jam: *A log table and chairs complement post-and-beam construction, leading Thedo to say, "This place just feels good."*

The home is centered around what architect Todd calls the "central heating structure," a stucco creation that sits in the middle of the home and houses an adobe-style gas fireplace on the kitchen side, a wood-burning fireplace on the living room side, shelves and storage in the middle, and a circular staircase with a sleek steel railing – handcrafted by a neighbor – on the backside. A vintage snowboard hangs in the center and greets guests when they walk in.

"Todd came up with this idea," Thedo says. "It's become the centerpiece of the house. And with these two heat sources and the straw bales' well-insulated walls, we don't have to turn on the heat until late November." Back-up heat sources include radiant heat on the main level and electric baseboard on the upper floor, which Thedo says is rarely used. Todd adds that while straw bale homes can provide great heat insulation (as well as cooling properties in the summer), it's the home's construction that determines its success. "There is definitely a technique in building these type of homes," Todd says. "It must be done right, just like in any other way of building."

Located behind the staircase is the master bedroom, a U-shaped room with a rounded ceiling, log trusses and stucco walls that give the feel of a cozy cottage. Adding to its allure is the master bath with concrete floors, a double raised-sink vanity, Jacuzzi tub and walk-in shower with stone tile. Heading upstairs you'll find an office, guest bedroom and a bath. The ceiling for the entire upper level is dome shaped with curved laminate beams, adding more



The master bathroom employs the liberal use of glass.

character. "Todd designed the rounded roofs to match the rolling hills surrounding us," says Thedo.

John Randolph Construction has built three straw bale homes, including Thedo's. John's experience is evident throughout, from the hand-built thick concrete counter-top in the kitchen to keen attention to detail. "People build straw bale homes because they're energy-efficient, but also because they love the look and feel. Thedo was great to work with because of his enthusiasm; his home speaks for itself," John says.

Working on Thedo's home, as well as his other straw bale projects, has inspired John to create an off-shoot of his construction company, a straw bale home-building business called Silly Pig Productions, named after the pig in the Three Little Pigs children's rhyme that built the house of straw.

Thedo says he feels lucky to be where he is today. After traveling the world in the 1990s as an Olympic snowboarder (he represented Holland in the 1998 Games in Nagano, Japan, placing 10th), and then coaching for the Slovenian team on the World Cup circuit, he ended up in Steamboat in 2002 when the Winter Sports Club offered him a coaching position, which he still has today.

"I was looking for a place to settle down, and after a year or so I knew that Steamboat was right - it's a great community," he says. "And I love living in the Elk River Valley. Building this house was a great experience, plus I have the greatest neighbors in the world. I can't really ask for much more." ~

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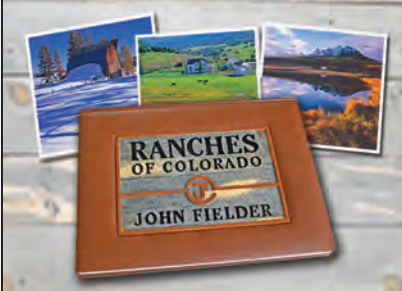


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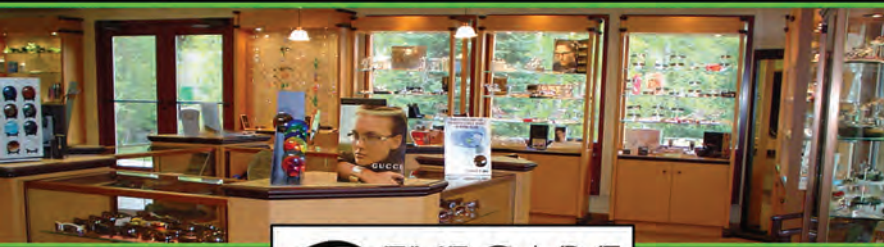
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