

Architect building straw-bale home in Borrego Springs

Straw-bale buildings are especially popular in the Southwest, but people all over the world — from New Zealand to Mongolia — are building them. Big draws include the inexpensive, environmentally friendly building materials, insulation properties and a return to hands-on construction techniques.

Last month, San Diego County issued its first building permit for a straw-bale building. Now going up in Borrego Springs is a 500-square-foot guest house designed by architect Drew Hubbell of Hubbell & Hubbell Architects and Artists. (Unpermitted straw-bale structures have been built in remote parts of the county.)

"It's an easy, inexpensive technology," said Hubbell, a member of the California Straw Bale Association and son and partner of James Hubbell, the well-known Santa Ysabel-based artist and designer.

Straw-bale construction goes quickly, once the concrete footings are in place. Two-foot-thick straw bales, just like those used for animal bedding, are stacked and reinforced with steel rods. The bales are sealed in 1-inch-thick plaster, a fire retardant.

Hubbell sited the one-bedroom guest house to face north and "bring in the desert."



**ANN
JARMUSCH**

SURROUNDINGS



Estimated cost: A modest \$65 per square foot, compared with San Diego's average of \$100 per square foot for a new stucco-over-wood-frame house.