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April 2007

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Playing it cool with
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rewrites the laws
of the workplace



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Interior designer Laura Birns brings her green know-how to four projects without sacrificing style.

By Thomas Shess

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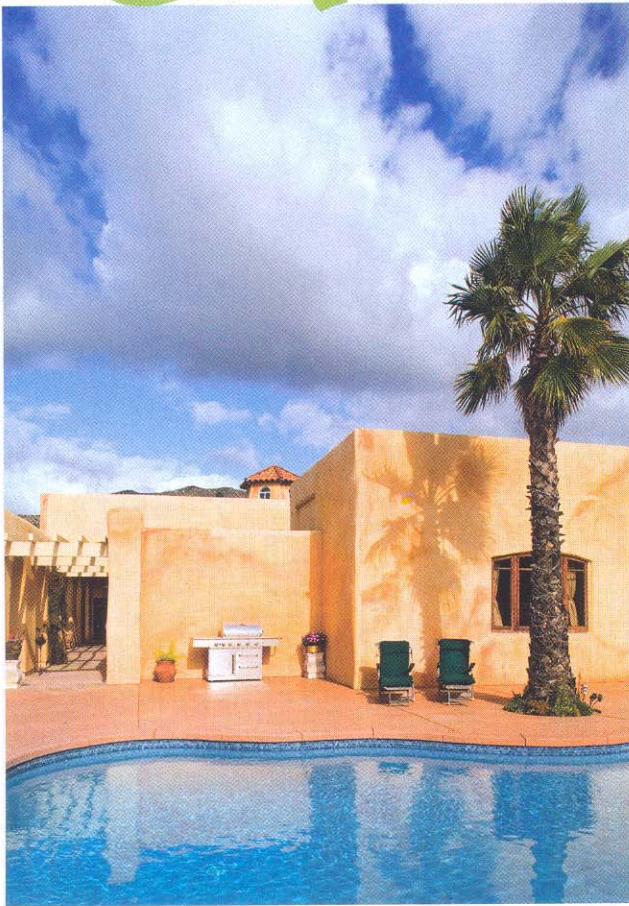
With his inexpensive and energy-efficient straw-bale building techniques, architect Drew Hubbell of Hubbell and Hubbell Architects and Artists makes the world greener, one sustainable house at a time.

By Thomas Shess

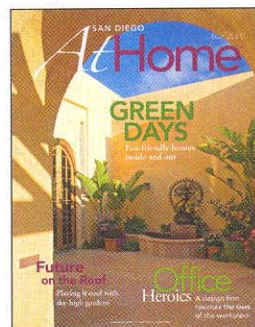
44 Gardens in the Sky

San Diego lags behind other major cities in seizing the promise of green roofs, but Rosalind Haselbeck and Rich Alianelli are working to change that.

By Deirdre O'Shea



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ON THE COVER

This environmentally friendly Jamul residence, designed by architect Drew Hubbell, uses straw bales to insulate within its thick walls, giving it an Old World feel. Page 38.

Photograph by Gary Payne.

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SECOND NATURE

Straw-bale building techniques fit perfectly into a brave—and green—new world

BY THOMAS SHESS PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY PAYNE

As designers and architects seek more environmentally friendly construction materials, one San Diego architect continues to improve on his signature, straw-bale construction—an efficient, economical and trendy way to build human habitats worldwide. Drew Hubbell, the younger generation in the father-son team of San Diego's Hubbell & Hubbell Architects & Artists, has been incorporating relatively cheap straw bales (the cost for one 80-pound straw bale averages \$3.50) in homes he's designed since the mid-'90s.

According to the Worldwatch Institute (worldwatch.org)—a leading source of information about environmental, social and economic trends affecting our transition to an environmentally sustainable world—buildings on the planet account for one-fourth of the world's wood harvest, two-fifths of its material and energy usage and one-sixth of its fresh-water usage. These demands will be exacerbated by population growth over the next generation.

"Mankind clearly must find a way to provide safe and decent shelter for all without ravishing the global ecosystem," declares Worldwatch.

Drew Hubbell passionately believes that building with straw bales is one positive step in that direction. The importance of constructing with sustainable materials that use less of the world's natural resources and energy is becoming more and more evident, he says.

"Once you have experienced building with straw bales, you'll say, 'This makes sense,'" Hubbell says. "It is a quickly renewable 'green' building product, and its super-insulating properties lead to lower energy costs associated with heating and cooling."

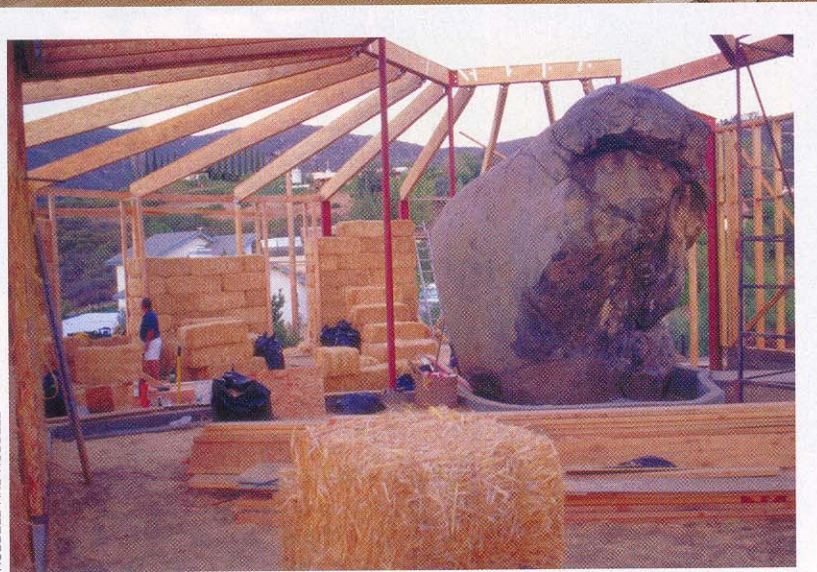
Artist and architect James Hubbell leads the Hubbell team. He has developed projects all over the world for more than 40 years. Drew's professional relationship with his father began in 1994.

"I began building with him at the age of 4, mixing cement and laying adobe blocks," Drew remembers. "We collaborated on a few projects while I was in architecture school in the mid-'80s, and now we have a very strong staff of artists and architects who help make projects become reality."

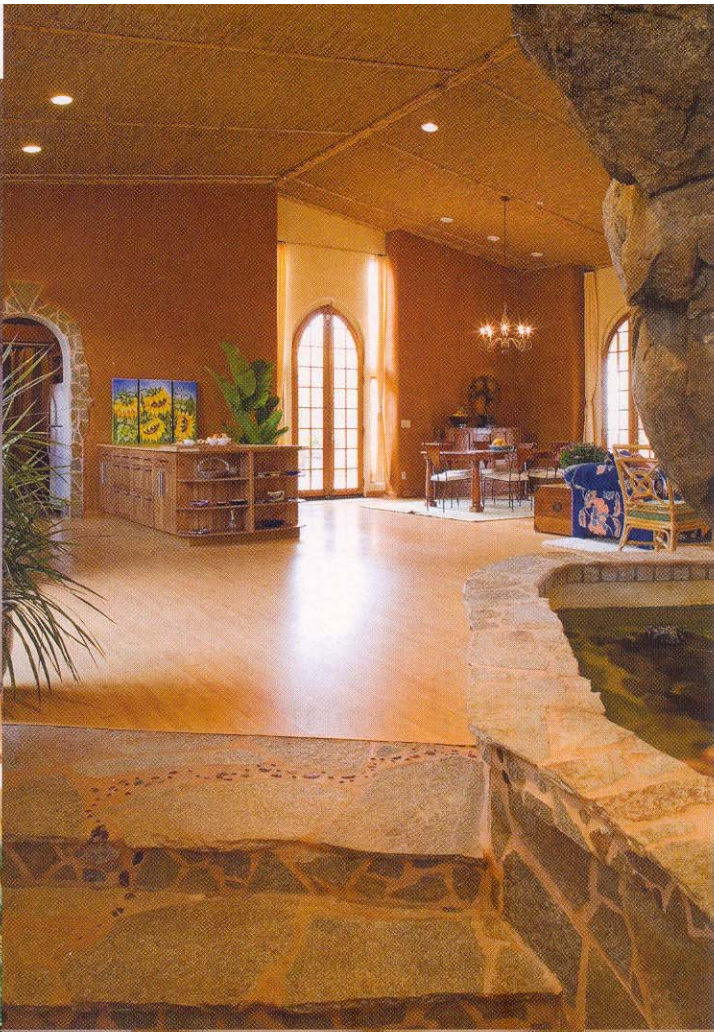
The team's first bale building went up in 1996 in Bor-



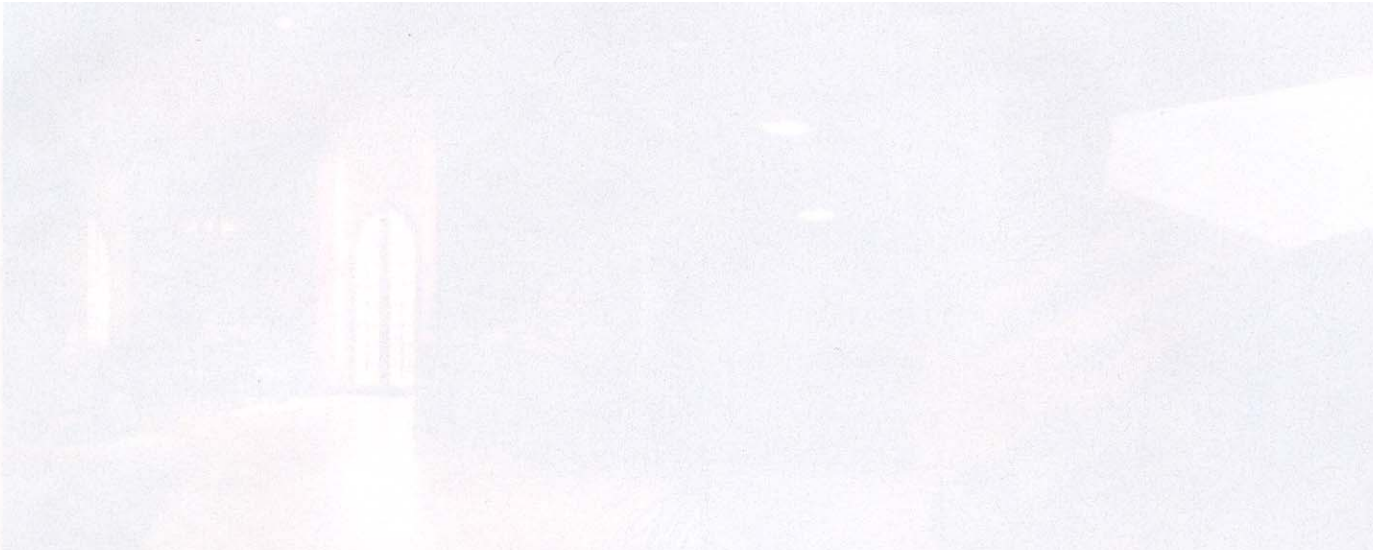
Ruieta DeSilva enjoys the view from the west-facing colonnade of her Jamul residence with its architect, Drew Hubbell. Beneath the gold-colored stucco of the colonnade and the house's exterior walls are straw bales for structural support.



Left: Straw bales were used in the home's construction. By allowing the boulder to sit where it has for thousands of years, architect Drew Hubbell creates a work of contemporary art.



Above: The great room shows the spaciousness of this 3,200-square-foot home. All of its rooms radiate from an 11-foot-by-11-foot granite boulder. The ceiling is made of reed panels with bamboo trim. The flooring is re-engineered planking. Between the boulder and surrounding granite ledge is a water-filled moat used as a koi pond. In the foreground is a maple butcher-block kitchen element. **Top right:** In a well-lit far corner is a dining room. The kitchen is to the left. Close up are the granite stairs and koi pond ledge. **Right:** The master bedroom shows the smooth side of the big rock. All rooms, including the bedroom, share a natural-light tower that allows airflow through a set of windows. A fan assists with circulation.



"What is the point of having a good house if you don't have a decent planet to put it on?" —Henry David Thoreau

rego Springs. It was a 700-square-foot guesthouse designed in a half-circle, with passive solar features and metal roofing recycled from an old barn.

"It turned out wonderfully, and the owners love to show it off," Drew says. "People even paid to attend the bale-raising workshop in 118-degree heat."

A decade later, Hubbell & Hubbell is responsible for about two dozen projects in San Diego County utilizing straw bales as wall material. Bale projects account for around 20 percent of their work, while "green" building projects account for more than 80 percent of client commissions.

A more recent Hubbell bale home is the 3,400-square-foot East County residence shown on these pages. The original owners turned to Hubbell & Hubbell not only for their straw-bale experience but also because they wanted a design that captured the spirit of their land in Jamul. About 400 bales were trucked in from the San Joaquin Valley to finish the job.

Using bales in a post-and-beam framework is unique enough by local standards, but another surprise in the project was the incorporation of a huge East County boulder in the blueprints. "The homeowners had a great attraction to

the granite boulder and wanted a home built around it to celebrate it," Drew says.

Besides being cheap, clean and lightweight, straw also provides such advantages as energy efficiency and resistance to seismic stresses. Drew Hubbell has greatly simplified the method of anchoring the bales to the post-and-beam substructure, reducing the amount of materials and labor required.

"All of our bale buildings have a solidness and connection to the earth that is difficult to achieve with other building materials," he says. "The thick and deep-set windows lend an Old World feel. The look is very Colonial Spanish adobe but with much stronger seismic realities."

Bale-building technology fits perfectly in the new global consciousness to build structures with more ecological savings—savings that Drew Hubbell has been urging anyone who will listen to put in the bank. ❖

For design details, see page 50.

Opposite page:

The southern exposure captures the drama of mellow East County light and warms a large in-ground swimming pool. The tower in the background is situated over the interior boulder shown on previous pages. With fans and windows at the top, the tower acts as a cooling chimney in the summer and a solar collector in winter months. The tower's red-tile roof and the faux-finished stucco add Spanish Mission and Mediterranean influences to the post-and-beam architecture.



DETAILS

Pages 30-37: All interiors featured were designed by Laura Birns, Laura Birns Design, P.O. Box 812, Del Mar, 760-438-0731; lbdesign.net. For all homes, Birns used the following products or vendors: Paint by Sherwin-Williams. Paint contractor: Erik Braegger, 760-419-1556. Granite from San Diego Granite, 13026 Stowe Drive, Suite C, Poway, 858-486-2040; sdginc.net. Concrete flooring by Artflor, 1702 North Magnolia Avenue, Suite 101, El Cajon, 800-773-9363; artflor.net. Wall coverings by Carnegie, 1765 Selby Avenue, Suite 4, Los Angeles; carnegiefabrics.com. Custom cabinetry was designed by Laura Birns Design.

Pages 38-43: Lead architect: Drew Hubbell, Hubbell and Hubbell Architects, 1970 Sixth Avenue, San Diego, 619-231-0446; hubbellandhubbell.com. Project architect: Juergen Zierler, Hubbell and Hubbell Architects. Contractor: Vladic Construction, Ramona, 760-789-2562. Xeriscape landscape designer: Dean Du Vander, Hubbell and Hubbell Architects. Active solar system: 1.5-kilowatt grid-connected photovoltaic system. The home also has a solar water heater. The roof is unfinished metal.

Page 64: Architect: Robert Quisenberry, Studio Q Creative, Chula Vista, 619-370-1395. A full profile can be found on the AIA San Diego Architect Finder at aiasandiego.org (search for Studio Q). Project suppliers: Armstrong Garden Centers, 1350 West Morena Boulevard, San Diego, 619-276-9970; Lowe's of EastLake, 2225 Otay Lakes Road, Chula Vista, 619-739-9060; and Home Depot EastLake, 1320 Eastlake Parkway, Chula Vista, 619-421-0639. Inspiration, ideas and resources: Water Conservation Garden, 12122 Cuyamaca College Drive West, El Cajon, 619-660-0614; thegarden.org.

ECO-FRIENDLY SOURCES

ABC Carpet & Home
212-473-3000
abchome.com

Adorn
619-794-2729
adornsandiego.com

Bedrock Industries
206-283-7625
bedrockindustries.com

bluehouse
877-276-1180
bluehouselife.com

Branch
415-341-1824
branchhome.com

Design Within Reach
619-744-9900
dwr.com

Dirt Candles
866-436-3865
dirtcandles.com

EcoChoices
626-969-3707
ecochoices.com

EcoDesignz
310-538-3051
ecodesignz.com

Eco-terric
406-582-7643
eco-terric.com

Everett Stunz
858-459-3305
everettstunz.com

Green Culture
877-204-7336
eco-furniture.com

Green Design Furniture
800-853-4234
greendesigns.com

GreenSage
415-453-7915
greensage.com

k studio
616-363-4993
kstudiohome.com

La Luz Candles
626-334-7764
laluzcandles.com

MIO
215-925-9359
mioculture.com

Q Collection
212-529-1400
qcollection.com

Seabags
888-210-4244
seabags.com

The S.P.I.R.A.L. Foundation
310-459-6671
spiralfoundation.org

Stranger Furniture
626-405-0927
strangerfurniture.com

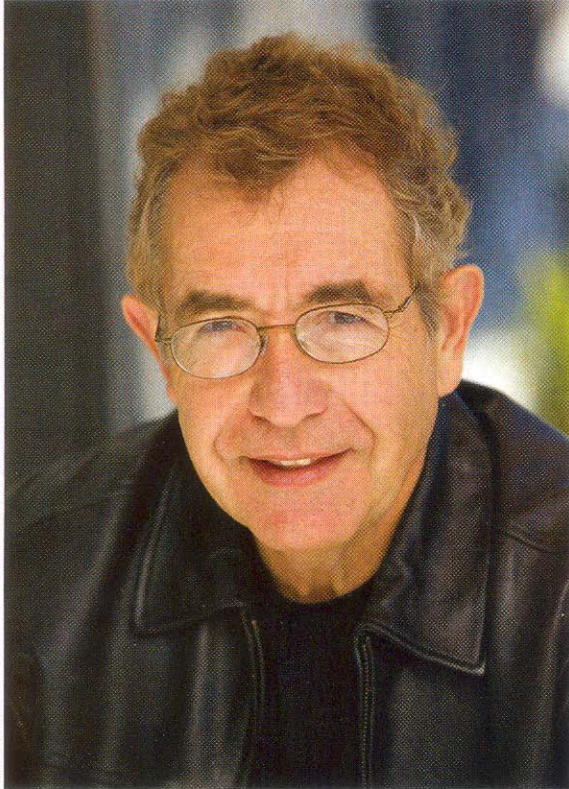
SURevolution
646-724-8203
surevolution.com

2KH
866-458-1017
2kh.com

Vivavi
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vivavi.com

Whit McLeod
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whitmcLeod.com

**Woodson & Rummerfield's
House of Design**
310-659-3010
wandrlust.com



GARY PAYNE

GOING GREEN

As we make our way on this planet—building, creating, traveling and living—we’re using up the Earth’s natural resources. As consumers, we’ve gotten the message: We’re vulnerable to the negative consequences of pollution and climate change. In the new century, we’re all seeking eco-friendly ways to conduct our lives.

By finding ways to preserve resources, whether recycling or changing our patterns of consumption, we’re practicing sustainability. When we choose a woodworker who uses veneer to remodel our cabinets instead of solid Brazilian mahogany, we’re making an eco-friendly choice.

This month, as spring arrives with tidings of renewal, *San Diego At Home* features two San Diegans who have been thinking green for years: interior designer Laura Birns and architect Drew Hubbell. Birns has worked vigorously to adapt green methods to home design. She’s a regular contributor to *Icon* magazine, where her columns outline how to use nontoxic paints, managed forest woods and energy-saving natural lighting.

Hubbell and his father, James, and their firm, Hubbell & Hubbell Architects, have championed sustainable architecture throughout their careers, using natural lighting, site sustainability and straw bales as a building material.

As the market for green technology matures, businesses are being launched to meet the needs of the eco-conscious. In this issue, new partners Rosalind Haselbeck and Rich Alianelli debut their green-roof business, with its promise of restoring urban habitat and purifying storm-water runoff. And we visit a demonstration house in the Del Sur planned community with the latest in energy and environmentally efficient innovations. We also give ideas for planting with California natives and showcase eco-friendly furniture and accessories.

For the green movement to succeed, we need to practice what we preach at home. It’s time to learn how to mold our behavior so we see results now—and protect biodiversity and ecosystems for future generations. It’s their planet, too.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas Shess', written in a cursive style.

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