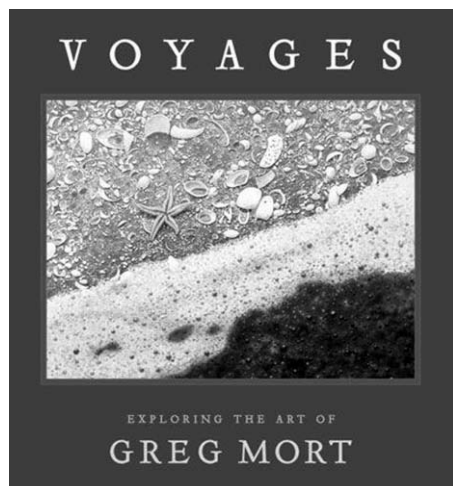


Book Reviews: Pathways Magazine, Winter 2008-09

## Gifts That Keep Giving

Reviews by Alyce Ortuzar



Artists as Stewards of Our Earth: **Voyages – Exploring the Art of Greg Mort**

ISBN: 978-0-9753246-7-7, HB, 2007, Sea Glass Publishing, 142 pages, \$39.95

The magical works of art in this book integrate Greg Mort's inherent and wonderful artistic talents, his affinity for astronomy, and his love of nature. Poignant narratives enhance the profound visions and emotions these one hundred and fifty paintings reflect and evoke. Note cards offer additional opportunities to share part of this inspiring collection and to promote The Art of Stewardship Project, which Greg and his wife Nadine have established.

Utilizing the ability of The Arts to transcend time, language, and culture, The Art of Stewardship Project calls upon artists everywhere "to raise awareness, inspire and celebrate our role as 'Stewards' of our tiny oasis in space" ([www.gregmort.com](http://www.gregmort.com)).

### **The Hand-Sculpted House: A Practical and Philosophical Guide to Building a Cob House**

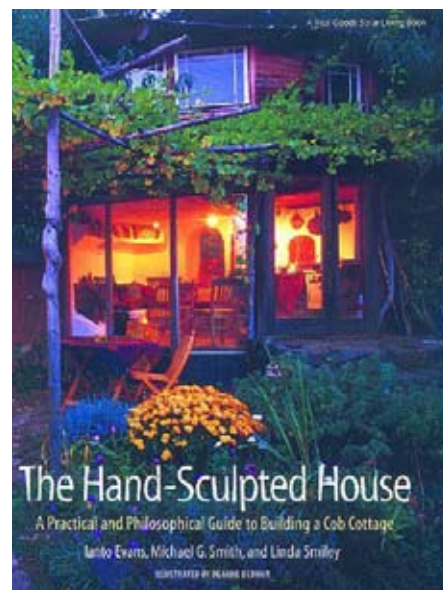
by Ianto Evans, Michael G. Smith, and Linda Smiley  
ISBN: 1-890132-34-9, PB, 2002, Chelsea Green Publishing, 346 pages, \$35.00

#### *A Bible for Radical Simplicity*

A cob house is "the ultimate expression of ecological design. Made of the oldest, most available materials imaginable—earth, clay, sand, straw, and water—cob houses are not only compatible with their surroundings, they ARE their surroundings, literally rising up from the earth. They are light, energy-efficient, and cozy with curved walls and built-in, whimsical touches." Some characterize these structures as Hansel and Gretel houses.

This is a truly inspirational book complete with pictures of these inherently spiritual abodes. The authors integrate the underlying philosophy and psychology these houses incorporate and reflect with the technical knowledge needed to utilize the abundant natural and elemental materials that are all around us. There is a separate chapter devoted to intuitive design and space: thoughts on the comfort, natural lighting, and warmth that comprise the nurturing spirits of these structures.

The authors are ecologists, landscape architects, environmental engineers, inventors, master cobblers, natural plasterers, and teachers. While it is



still pliable, cob is hand-sculpted into a building. It is the most common building material—the earth itself. Cob is a very old, well-tested material in use around the world: near the Arctic Circle in Norway; at the top of Chile; the polar end of New Zealand; the British Isles; and throughout Africa, the Middle East, China, and Europe. There are tall apartment buildings, lavish mansions, monasteries, bus stop shelters, and small cottages that cost less than \$5,000 to construct. Cob uses no chemicals or additives and does not require any machinery.

This how-to book explores why and where to build for individuals and families who want or need to build their own house, who want a house designed for their unique needs, who want to avoid long-term debts to institutions not in their control, and who are determined to reduce their ecological footprint (saving our forests and eliminating toxic chemicals). The process of building and living in your own

house is peaceful and spiritual. Economically, it is democracy at its best. The book provides in-depth, easy-to-understand technical discussions and illustrations. Topics include all that anyone needs to know or think about before building a natural home from materials that have not been industrially processed. The documented health benefits alone are enormous.

The book includes a glossary and seven pages of recommended resources (such as *The Cobbler's Companion* by Michael Smith). For experts in this region (including the Straw-Bale Eco-House Team and resources), contact [www.builderswithoutborders.org](http://www.builderswithoutborders.org). For additional local natural materials and workshops, contact the Amicus Green Building Center in Kensington (MD), [www.amicusgreen.com](http://www.amicusgreen.com). The authors can be reached at The Cob Cottage Company in Oregon ([www.deatech.com/cobcottage/](http://www.deatech.com/cobcottage/)).

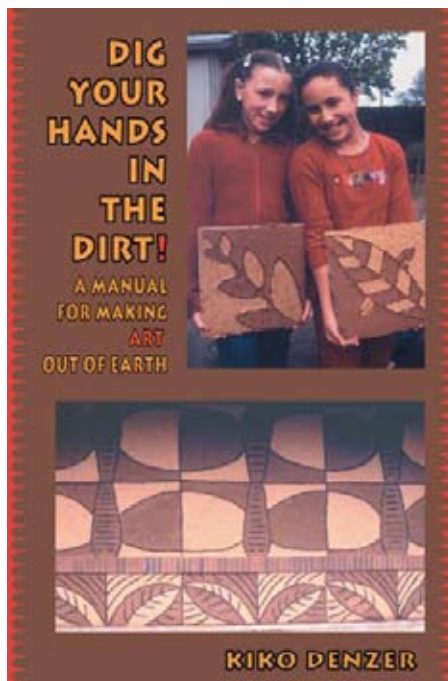
**Dig Your Hands in the Dirt:  
A Manual for Making Art Out  
of Earth**

edited by Kiko Denzer

ISBN: 978-0-9679846-6-7, Paperback, Chelsea Green, 128 pages, \$12.95

*"Art is that kind of experience by which humans learn. Art helps join us, harmoniously, to a whole."* Kiko Denzer

This is a delightful activities guide for all ages with detailed and illustrated instructions and fun photographs. The high school activities section "Art Made with Mud, Kids, and Communities" includes structures.



Elementary school activities highlight "Site-Specific Sculptor" and a visit to an environmental park in Mexico. Denzer's chapter on his "Learning equals Building equals Learning" paradigm displays a simple preschool play structure that is just the right height for its occupants, and truly unique bird houses, and other hands-on activities for our future generations of builders.

The "Design as Process and Pattern" chapter integrates group activities where the children search for patterns and inspiration everywhere, fit geometry to space, use mirror images to make patterns that move, draw for rhythm and design, make sundials that tell more than the time, and construct mud-dials. The discussions explain how these materials differ and how to make and use them.

Kiko Denzer is an artist, teacher, and sculptor in earth and natural media; artist-in-residence for the nationwide Arts-in-Education Program; and author of the oven and bread manual

Build Your Own Earth Oven. He points out that working with mud, sand, and straw teaches geology, engineering, physics, history, drawing, composition, and design in addition to social skills such as cooperation.

**The Findhorn Garden Story**

"Our work is to be gardeners of souls, wherever we are."

Eileen Caddy,  
Findhorn Community

ISBN: 978-1-84409-135-5, Paperback, 2008 (Fourth Edition), Findhorn Press, 195 pages, \$24.95

This enlightening and beautiful book on gardening guides the body, mind, and spirit on a path toward ecological spirituality. This book describes the Findhorn achievement of growing extraordinary plants, flowers, trees, and vegetables from sand and gravel that was initially held together by couch grass. The gorgeous photographs of their bounty are tributes to their hard work and their cooperation with the kingdom of nature, which is represented by the devas and the nature spirits. Devas are energy and life forces who see the garden as "moving lines of energy within which each plant is a whirlpool of activity."

The Community lived almost completely on their own produce for eight years, nurturing their bodies and their spirits as they feasted daily on more than twenty varieties of vegetables and herbs. And as their garden thrived, the gardeners themselves evolved into a vibrant spiritual community that anyone can replicate. That is the compelling message this engaging journey conveys.

Initially, the whole environment was out of balance from the toxic chemicals that had killed the birds that ate the insects. On windswept and barren sand dunes in the north of Scotland, these gardeners learned how to create the healthiest possible soil by treating it as a living entity. They followed basic organic gardening practices while developing a conscious communication with the plants and their inherent divinity.

The community learned to work with the spiritual aspects of nature—the metaphysical consciousness attuned to the center and oneness of all life. These gardeners detail how they worked with the devas and became part of the biosystem, the ecology, and the psychic energies of the natural world of Earth while participating in the metaphysical thoughts, intuition, and spirits that extend beyond this world.

This lovely book describes in detail the gardening practices they followed to achieve their remarkable results and their harmonious community. “To work in harmony with the intelligence of nature to create a changed world,” Dorothy Maclean wrote.

## The Astute and Ethical Consumer

### The Rough Guide to Shopping with a Conscience

by Duncan Clark and Ritchie Unterberger

ISBN: 978-184353-724-3, Paperback, 2007, Rough Guides, 352 pages, \$16.99

This comprehensive shopping guide clearly describes our choices as consumers and sorts out the most important

benchmarks and criteria. Where consumers choose to spend their money can have the most profound impacts on the type of products that are available, the production processes, worker compensation packages, and human and animal health and safety. These issues affect us all.

Discussions include comparisons of worker pay and benefits (the authors maintain that Target provides higher wages and better benefits than WalMart provides); choosing between products that contain toxic chemicals versus those that do not, and the impact these decisions have on our health (including the health of our animals) and the environment; and other hidden costs not reflected in what many consumers think is the lowest price for a product.

The authors also clarify buying local, buying green, and buying fair trade products. For example, the further food travels, the larger the carbon footprint. And local produce that is minimally processed and free of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers contains significantly more nutrients, as do local free-range animal products from animals living outside in pasture and sunlight, able to engage in their natural behaviors. The unsanitary and inhumane conditions in confined animal feeding operations have devastating environmental effects and raise serious questions about the safety of the food itself.

Research documents that local businesses contribute significantly more revenues to local and state economies and create more jobs that also pay better. Ecological family farms in particular return more in rev-

enues than they require for infrastructure; these farms also strengthen rural economies and communities. In addition, few reports in the mainstream media reveal the domestic and international economic impacts of our trade policies. In addition to the outsourcing of American jobs, effects include the destruction of local small family farm economies in Mexico. The ensuing poverty and despair continue to force Mexicans to flee to the United States.

This book also attempts to educate consumers about child labor; impoverished coffee farmers; adverse effects from genetically engineered (GE or GMO) seeds (characterized as solutions in search of a problem, GE seeds and products threaten biodiversity and species such as butterflies); and the relationships between the lowest prices, poor wages, and substandard health and safety conditions for workers. Consumers are encouraged to use their purchasing power to influence store policies, which then influence adverse economic conditions and product availability. One important message is that the factory is not the first step in the production of clothing, or the only part of the process with social and environmental problems.

Topics also include corporate political campaign contributions; jewelry; clean transportation options; renewable energy; the advantages of local hemp (see [votehemp.com](http://votehemp.com)); and sustainable travel (Sustainable Travel International [[sustainabletravelinternational.org](http://sustainabletravelinternational.org)] is an eco-certification program that enables consumers to search by categories of interests [arts, wildlife/birding, conservation],

region/country, and eco-certified organizations).

Additional recommended resources include:

*No Logo* by Naomi Klein; *A Field Guide to Buying Organic* by L. Perry; Co-op America's *Green Pages* and Retailer Scorecards (Coopamerica.org); Unionlabel.org.

GlobalExchange.org "reality tours" educate through experience and direct contact with local populations. Global Exchange is a human rights organization.

Usservas.org provides ethical tourism for those who may want to just travel with friends, family, or on their own. Founded in 1948, it fosters cross-cultural, global peace, and social conscience experiences in more than 135 countries. The group also encourages similar exchanges for international tourists traveling to the United States.

Ecotravel.com lists progressive tour operators, private guides, nonprofit organizations, and ancillary travel services for tourists who have completed an Eco-responsibility Survey that is posted with each listing.

**The Everything Green Living Book:  
Easy Ways to Conserve Energy, Protect Your Family's Health, and Help Save the Environment**

ISBN: 9781598694253, Paperback, 2007, Adams Media, 303 pages, \$14.95

"To everyone who wants to leave the world a better place."  
by Diane Gow McDilda



That there are so many sources for good information about our lifestyle choices—the importance of considering how and where items are made—should not confuse or deter people. Consumers should take heart that there are so many beneficial, wonderful, and relatively affordable choices, and so many people committed to a peaceful, harmonious, nonthreatening, and spiritual world. The hope is that more people will incorporate and share the information all of these authors have worked so hard to compile and disseminate.

The only areas of disagreement among some of these authors concerns meat versus vegetarian diets, fat content, and whether unfermented soy is safe to eat. For those topics, I recommend *Nourishing Traditions* by Sally Fallon, *The Real Soy Story* by Kaayla Daniel, and *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver [see the Summer, 2008 *Pathways*]. These books all attempt to circumvent the absence of honest and accurate information about our choices from the mainstream media, many public officials, and even from departments of public health and safety at all levels of government. The

excellent information in this particular green shopping guide is straightforward and easy to integrate.

This book promotes citizen participation, environmental protection, and human ecology. The breadth of topics includes: identifying with the whole world; global climate change; toxic chemicals in consumer products; the degradation of natural resources; defining sustainability; greening the grid and the impact of traditional energy; solar and wind power; biomass and methane; geothermal power; hydropower; building or buying a green house; green house furnishings (flooring alternatives such as cork and bamboo); green cities and states; conserving power and water; keeping a green home and yard (cleaning and lawn care product alternatives); the recycling market; eating and drinking green (genetically modified products and hidden effects and ingredients); the green office; contacting and influencing elected officials and public regulators; and raising a green family.

Consumers should be aware that flame retardants in bedding such as mattresses include polybromated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), which were approved by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. PBDEs persist in the environment; accumulate and bio-accumulate in fish, animals, and humans; and are suspected of causing liver and neurodevelopmental disorders. Discussions also include efficient toilets (cuwcc.org), double metering or living off the grid with hybrid systems (findsolar.com; nrel.gov), and sustainably harvested wood. The chapter on transportation

discusses scooters, motor-free alternatives, hybrids, biodiesel, improving mileage, and reducing emissions. The book also provides a glossary, an appendix of green resources, and safe home-care recipes such as the following examples:

Toilet Cleaner: 2 parts borax mixed with 1 part fresh organic lemon juice; especially effective for removing stains. Spraying with organic, grain-based white vinegar will also remove unwanted microbes.

Toilet Cleaner: 2 parts borax

mixed with 1 part fresh organic lemon juice; especially effective for removing stains. Spraying with organic, grain-based white vinegar will also remove unwanted microbes.

Unvarnished furniture: Polish with equal amounts of lemon juice and olive oil.

Varnished furniture: Polish with  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of warm water containing a few drops of lemon juice.

Ants: Follow the trail to determine where they are able

to get inside and sprinkle with chili pepper, dried peppermint, or borax to steer them in a different direction, and deter them from coming in.

*Alyce Ortuzar is a medical and social science researcher, writer, and editor; she runs the Well Mind Association of Greater Washington, a holistic medicine information clearinghouse that focuses on environmental and nutritional influences on our mental and physical well-being.*