

Making Ripples

Earthbag Building Worldwide

by Amanda Bancroft

Ever have a doppelganger? Ripples has those, too. We'll be innocently shopping for groceries or browsing Facebook when there they are – like-minded groups who build with earthbags, looking almost exactly like us! Truth is, while it's exciting to receive surprised responses from people who are new to earthbag building, there's nothing new about it.

Earthbag building happens all over the country and the world, on a scale from dilapidated structures that don't meet building codes to internationally recognized zero-carbon public facilities. They have been built for refugees in Haiti, Native Americans in California, and wealthy families in the Midwest. There will be an earthbag building course in Malaga, Spain on November 9th, and just this past May there was a one-week intensive retreat in earth architecture in Picklescott, Shropshire, England. In Melbourne, Victoria, Australia they are creating an earthbag educational center with teaching and consulting services. On October 22 – 29th in Turkey, you could learn to build a round house from straw bale and clay. If you're in Thailand next February 10-18th, attend an earthbag dome workshop! Paulina Wojciechowska, a Poland-based earthbag architect, learned from people in Afghanistan and India, then continued helping others build in Sierra Leone, Hungary, South Dakota USA and Mexico. Even the Bahamas has at least one earthbag home, so this style of building is able to be adapted for many different climates and still remain sustainable, with no huge electricity bills in winter or summer.

According to Dr. Owen Geiger, Director of the Geiger Research Institute of Sustainable Building, nobody knows exactly how many earthbag homes there are worldwide (possibly because many people don't or can't announce their location and construction plans online, such as refugees or those wishing for greater privacy in a remote location). “My best estimate is somewhere between 1,000 and 1,500,” Dr. Geiger says.

Right here in Arkansas, there are several earthbag structures including Major's Way in Rogers and Arco Iris near Ponca. As far as we know, and it's exciting to bet that I'm wrong, Ripples' educational center will be the 3rd earthbag building in Northwest Arkansas. So while many people think of our earthbag building plans as novel, we're about 100 years too late to be called “pioneers” of this movement. We're honored to follow in the footsteps of, and improve upon, methods developed by architects and engineers worldwide.

Having international momentum while maintaining local applicability creates a diversity of experience and support outside our insulated bubbles. We know that even though the neighbors don't have earthbag homes, we can get support from experts on almost every continent who have tested the building against everything from earthquakes to tsunamis. If we only look in the

neighborhood, we might feel isolated, but a global perspective seems to say “Everybody’s doing it!” This is one time when it’s good to have some doppelgangers around.

Ripples is a 100% solar-hosted website that includes a blog, newspaper column, resources and services for individuals and non-profit organizations. Read more on this topic and others at www.RipplesBlog.org