

MAGIC CLAY AND LIVINGSCAPES

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New understandings about natural building materials have extended the range of suitable application, resulting in a great potential to use natural materials in a wide variety of ways in integrated design systems where the results are little short of magical. The suite of three New Zealand Earth Building Standards that have cited in the New Zealand Building Code for 8 years have proved robust and have enabled many earth walled buildings held together with natural clay to be realised.

However, we need to look beyond suitable materials such as earth, straw and lime, or buildings alone, and put them in a wider context.

The approach I call “livingscapes” is based on permaculture and embraces the productive nature of the land we occupy and use.

Buildings are an integral part of the landscape, the landscape we live in, or “livingscape”.

The structures we erect are part of a dynamic biological system, and therefore are a part of the ecosystem process and should contribute to the system in a positive way.

Designs are then based on a consideration of all resources with regard to their effect and impact on the environment as a whole.

This leads to plants and buildings working together to benefit one another in achieving the most comfortable, productive, and aesthetic design.

Regarding our buildings as an integral part of a wider living system requires us to consider both the source of our resources and the health of our systems.

Both physical and biological elements are used for environmental control, energy conservation and conversion, creation of microclimates, structures for food production, water collection and re-use, waste treatment, shelter from wind and sun, security of home and food resources, and many other functions that help us to decrease our reliance on resources beyond our immediate control and/or bio-region.

This is real magic, and our survival depends on it.

Key Words: earth building; natural building; livingscapes; clay; strawbale; permaculture.