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**HOUSE OF STRAW:** The Sandia Mountains provide the backdrop for this straw-bale house being built by Paja Construction. The firm is one of several organizations and businesses that offer courses for people who want to learn to build their own homes.

# Classes teach how to do what Jack did

Learn how to build your very own house

By Sandra D. Lynn  
For the Journal

Maybe the do-it-yourself desire is especially strong. Or maybe it's the need, or determination, to save anywhere from 20 to 50 percent or more of the cost of building (or remodeling) a home.

Whatever the reasons, some present and potential homeowners decide they want to be their own builders. But when they face the facts, they know they don't possess the required knowledge and skills.

Several organizations and companies in Albuquerque and Santa Fe solve that problem. They provide short workshops and longer courses to equip owner builders/remodelers with skills they can put to use in their own homes. Some teach basic construction management and processes, while others emphasize specialized building techniques and materials.

## The New Mexico Owner Builder Center

The Owner Builder Center in Albuquerque has been in business since August 1996. Four times a year it offers a homebuilding

## For more information

### The New Mexico Owner Builder Center

For information on courses and services, call 242-0606

### Earth Architecture Center International Ltd.

For information on adobe construction, check out its Web page.  
<http://www.unm.edu/~eaci>  
You can click on seminars and

coming events to find out when the next workshop is scheduled. Or call 898-0911.

### Paja Construction Inc.

For more information about straw-bale construction workshops, call 345-4843.

### Homebuilding Trades Program, Santa Fe Community College

Call 438-1712 in Santa Fe.

course that meets for six hours a week (Tuesday and Thursday evenings) for seven weeks.

Both courses also deal with what the owner/builder needs to know in order to work with subcontractors, architects, inspectors, lenders and others involved in the building of a house. Free introductory seminars give prospective participants a chance to find out about the courses and other services available.

Center owner Joe Fortin, a builder and contractor, says owner/builders can save a minimum of 20 percent of the cost of building a home.

"We also have a bidding service that allows people building their own homes to join together as a group to get better prices from subcontractors, comparable to what a contractor building 20 homes a year might get," he says.

## Earth Architecture Center International Ltd.

If it's an adobe you want and you hope to make it affordable by doing much of the work yourself, you need to get acquainted with architect Paul Graham "Buzz" McHenry and his sons, Bruce and James.

Buzz McHenry started teaching people how to build with adobe almost 30 years ago and wrote a book based on his class notes and his students' questions, "Adobe Build It Yourself" (1972), considered an outstanding textbook for the adobe builder.

He later wrote a second book, "Adobe and Rammed Earth Buildings, Design and Construction" (1984), and teaches a credit course in earthen building at the University of New Mexico School of Architecture. It may be the only one in the nation, he says.

He and his sons have formed an organization devoted to earthen building, Earth Architecture Center International. One of its functions is offering one-week workshops, usually two or three a year.

## Paja Construction Inc.

Paja means "straw" in Spanish. Straw bales plastered with a cement-based stucco form another building material that is novice-friendly. Cadmon Whitty, founder of Paja Construction in Albuquerque and builder of more than 70 straw-bale homes and walls, offers three-day workshops periodically. They begin on a Friday evening with the theory of straw-bale construction and continue over the weekend with hands-on

work on a house under construction.

"Straw-bale construction has become much more popular and is now part of the building code," Whitty says. "It costs only slightly less than a conventional house if you don't build it yourself. But since 60 to 70 percent of the cost of a home is in labor, you could realize up to that amount in savings if you provide all the labor."

## Homebuilding Trades Program, Santa Fe Community College

A brand-new component of the community college's Homebuilding Trades Program is scheduled to begin later this spring, probably in May. It will provide a fundamental education in construction for Santa Fe public housing residents and the public.

Program director Charles Cambron says participants will learn by doing, working on a simple wood-frame structure. The class will meet twice a week in the evening for 6½ weeks.

The Homebuilding Trades Program focuses on training construction professionals, but Cambron has gotten inquiries regularly from people "who don't want to become carpenters. They just want to know enough to build their own house."