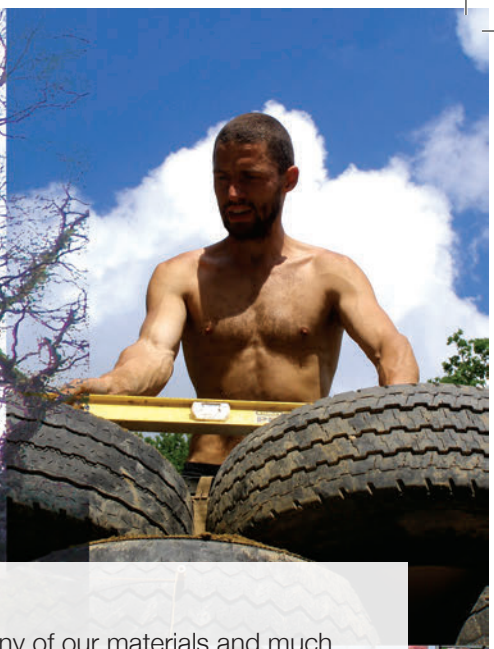
Foreword by Kevin McCloud

Good food and good architecture are considered the marks of a civilised society. Homes and Gardens are places where both we and our food production can flourish. But food and architecture go back a long way together; their stories are intertwined. For a start, both need land. The growing of food on any scale requires forest and scrub to be cleared, open spaces drained and the soil improved and managed. Boundaries need to be made stockproof to keep animals in and animals out. It doesn't matter if it's a field, a farm or a garden; for 50,000 years we have been making marks on this planet to give us food and this way, the landscape has been utterly changed into an environment shaped by man. And so it is with our built environment. As hunter-gatherers cleared land and made it their own, so their settlements became more permanent and shelters evolved into buildings. Then buildings morphed, as they began to provide the basics of comfort and delight, into architecture. You can even argue that sophisticated food production created architecture.

It's certainly not difficult to see the connection between buildings and the earth beneath us. Below the warm, fertile soil, the rocks, ores and clays of our planet have provided us with a spectacular array of materials and products and yet building materials remain, on the whole, relatively unsophisticated: bricks, slates, glass, even concrete, rockwool and plasterboard are relatively unprocessed materials that put any builder in touch with the earthy rawness of the stuff he handles – just in case he can't get enough mud and rain.



But we're all mindful that many of our materials and much of our food production and transport require a liquid mineral resource from the earth that is both depleting and damaging. Modern agriculture and construction would stop in their tracks were in not for fossil fuels. Daren and Adi's Groundhouse was a project which passionately reflected their reluctance to over-depend on petrol, oil and plastics or products which required a lot of fossil fuel energy to produce. The house itself is a capturer and generator of energy; it processes its own waste and, through providing the wherewithal to live modestly and independently, it reduces waste in the first place.

For a building that relies on the heavy thermal inertia of the ground, that is ecologically sensitive and which treads lightly on the planet, it's shocking, however, to think that it is built with steel reinforcement, vulcanised processed rubber (with a heavy silicone content that can't easily be recycled) and unspeakably large quantities of embodied energy in its walls. That's because they're built from old tyres. The house is even constructed from waste. Tyres are among the most problematic and energy intensive products we consume. And consume we do: every year in the UK we throw away 486,000 tons of them of which a tiny fraction are recycled or reused. So to use them in construction to help build super-strong earth walls is a compelling idea, so compelling that I couldn't resist making a film about the construction of the Groundhouse for Grand Designs.

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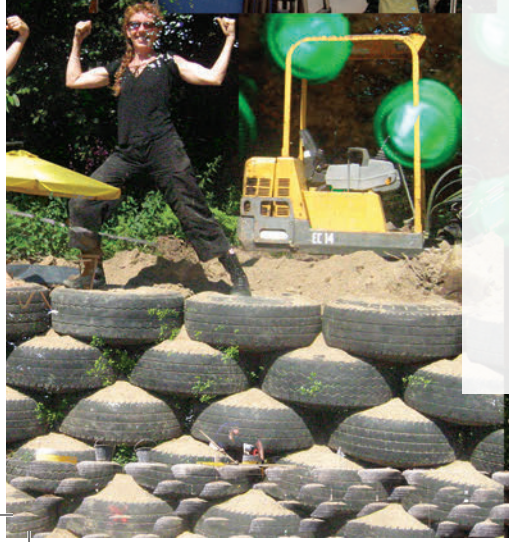

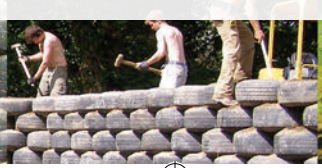

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If you've ever built a wall or grown a vegetable, you will know the sweat, the worry and the pride that doing these things produces. You may even be lucky enough to have made a more profound emotional contact with the earth from which both buildings and plants grow, a contact which Adi and Daren are lucky enough to enjoy every day in their home and garden. You might therefore have glimpsed the energy that is embodied in buildings and places: I don't mean fossil fuels or embodied calorific energy; I don't mean the loopy ley-line energy of the earth's hippy magnetic field; I mean human energy. The magical, most powerful force in our lives which comes from within us and our collective ability to organise, invent, create and transform inhospitable corners of the universe into places that lift the soul. The Groundhouse and its garden is one such corner.

And out of the difficulty and sweat of making a place beautiful, habitable and comfortable – and for that matter keeping it that way – can emerge another link between people, place, architecture and food: the pleasures of staying in one place and exploring your dependency on it, by tending it, growing food, chopping fuel and exploiting the energy that the sun can provide for free. I'm very pleased to report that Daren and Adi are experts at all this and well acquainted with both the tribulations and the pleasures that making a place brings.

This book is a much-needed synthesis of home and lifestyle, of house and garden and a reminder of how we all could be living with a reduced dependency on the systems around us that feed us, heat us and shelter us. Sophisticated food, drink and comforts do not exclusively result from the intensive use of resources and fossil fuels. In fact, just the opposite. The highest pleasures of living turn out to be the most timeless and simple: good fresh food, a warm hearth, light, space and a view of greenery, craftsmanship around us and, of course, good company. All to be found right in the middle of Brittany.

Kevin McCloud