



# The Natural Builder Volume 3: Earth and Mineral Plasters

*Steve Berlant*

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As referenced in The Natural House, D. Chiras and Mother Earth News, Issue 203A. Featured on Do It Yourself Network, "Talk2DIY" (2002).

Organic materials need to breathe or they will begin to rot in the presence of moisture. Adobe, light clay and straw walls need to breathe in order to keep the moisture content of the wall under 20% for straw and 4-12% for adobe depending on their plasticity index. Molds and fungi will form on straw at moisture levels above 20% and earthen walls will become unstable if they become saturated much beyond a 12% moisture content. Plastering straw bales also makes them more fire resistant and keeps insects and other animals out of the straw.

Cement stucco limits the breathability of a wall and has been shown to be harmful to the structural integrity of different types of adobe buildings. However, cement stucco provides a durable finish for cement block or framed buildings. Fortunately, there are alternatives to cement stucco finishes for natural buildings. The alternative includes earthen, lime and gypsum plasters.

This book can also be helpful to an owner/builder in dealing with their local building department. The information contained within this book will allow a building permit applicant to clearly express why they want to build with natural materials and how they intend to build with them.

Through extensive footnoting, this book can show officials and the reader exactly where the information has been referenced, thereby increasing the applicant's credibility. This book can help educate both the owner/builder and the building official charged with overseeing the project.

This book is intended to be a reference guide or research compendium. Publications regarding earthen construction have been read, digested, annotated, organized and each annotation has been marked with footnotes so that the reader can find the original citation and any further information and illustrations concerning the topic of interest. Duplicate information from various sources has been weeded out to provide the reader with a brief, easy to read, detailed profile of various aspects of building with natural material.

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