1. Owner-Builder on a Budget

Building our own earth friendly home is a dream realized in “The Barn at Sunstroke.” When we started this project in 2000, we had more enthusiasm than building experience. We began building a structure intended to be used as a barn/workshop/studio and before completion converted this same structure to our residence. By building our home ourselves, we were able to incorporate fun, unique projects into it: bas relief work in the earthen plaster, a hand-painted tile backsplash in the kitchen, and stained glass windows in various nooks and crannies. We were able to use much reclaimed material in this simple structure suited to meet our personal needs. It was (and still is) truly a “labor of love.”

2. Froggy Hollow

Our home is a post and beam straw bale infill single story structure with a small second story loft. Rice straw bales are plastered on the interior and exterior with earth and clay. The earth plasters are made from the soil excavated for the foundation. Exterior finishes were chosen for fire safety. Oriented toward the south for passive solar gain, the house includes a solar hot water system and a PV system. The roof and loft structure are built with SIPs (Structurally Insulated Panels). Heating is provided by a radiant floor system in the stained concrete floor. Come and visit!
3. Lost Hill Farm

Lost Hill Farm Straw Bale Cottage is a second unit to an 1850's farmhouse. Providing accessible living space all on one level in about 800 square feet, it is designed to suit either a couple in retirement or caregivers. In summer, deep overhangs shade south-facing walls while allowing sun penetration to the rear walls in winter. Rice straw bales are lime plastered both inside and out. That dense plaster thermal mass makes heating the house easy: a woodstove and a single hydronic baseboard heater keep it snug in winter. In summer, cross breezes from lots of operable windows and doors create comfortable cooling. Lost Hill Cottage features many recycled, repurposed materials and appliances. It was primarily contractor-built with the help of a couple of CASBA workshops, and was finished in 2017.

4. Silver Crest

Completed in 2014, our single level, 1886 square foot home includes 2 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms, and was designed for welcoming comfort and safety. It features post and beam construction, 18 inches of densely baled rice straw (about R 30) in the walls, with 1.5 inches of natural hydraulic lime plaster on each side of exterior walls (fire rated for 2 hours). The roof consists of 12" SIP panels with steel roofing. Oriented to take advantage of solar gain during winter, and overhangs and western shade during the summer, the house does its best to minimize energy needs and lure us outside. We hope you come visit!
5. Fogle Nest

The Fogle house outside Nevada City, was signed off by the county in 2016. It is a post and beam construction with three string, rice bale infill. Lime plaster protects the straw inside and out. The concrete that makes the ground floor has been stained with ferrous sulfate, an easily acquired fertilizer. Locally harvested cedar posts hold up the wrap-around porch, protecting the east, west and north sides from rain, but allowing the south side to take advantage of the winter sun. The house is completely off grid, heated by wood and powered by the sun.

6. The Stone Ranch

The Stone Ranch house was designed to be extremely resource and energy efficient, while maintaining a look that contractors could see as fitting the aesthetic desires of their clients. Passive cooling is provided through use of a high amount of thermal mass (2.25” of concrete above R-20 raised floor) paired with operable 2nd story skylights. Radiant floors were installed throughout the first floor, but heating for most of the house is accomplished with a wood-burning fireplace at over 80% efficiency. The owners did much of the work themselves, but had many work parties during the bale stacking and plastering. While this four bedroom/four bath home is just under 3000 square feet, the interior is equivalent to a stick-frame home of about 2500 square feet.