



■ The straw bale house being built on the grounds of Waldorf School, Constantia by school children, teachers and parents.

Mud and straw 'house' built by Constantia pupils

THE weird and wonderful wooden structure being built on the grounds of Waldorf School, will eventually be a "straw bale" greenhouse in which seeds and cuttings will be propagated.

Gail Pullen, a teacher at the school, became inspired with the idea after she had completed a permaculture course. She involved her pupils by asking them to make clay scale models for the greenhouse.

The school children tackled the project with great enthusiasm, and some exciting plans evolved. When it came to clearing the site, the pupils were so fired-up they arrived on site at 6am to work on the project.

The parents at the school also pitched in to help, and offered time, effort and materials for the house. Architect Etienne Brouwer drew up plans for the structure.

"But in truth the structure, like jelly, has evolved organically, grown and changed size and shape," said Brenda Fairhead, one of the parents.

Gail is the main project director. She and a dedicated band of parents started work on the house in November last year.

They began by stripping bark off the support poles.

"The children became quite expert,

and one chap managed to peel a whole pole in one piece," said Gail.

The straw bale house was inspired by a film shown at an alternative film festival about a small group of people in Hermanus who had built their own mud and clay houses. Cheap to build, these structures are hand-built and designed as the owner goes along. All that's needed is the land, some straw bales, and plenty of muddy clay. In the film, pictures of pretty homes incorporating stain glass, car windows and other curious items, were shown in which people were living very happily.

Mud and straw (cob) houses originated in Wales and can withstand anything El Nino has to offer.

The Waldorf structure has cost about R5 000 so far, but much of the materials used have been donated by parents.

The next stage of the building involves packing the straw bales between the wooden poles, then comes the messy part, smoothing on the clay, in which the whole school will take part.

If you are looking for somewhere cheap to live – take a look at the Waldorf structure.