

'A light so radiant
it could make
you feel sad'

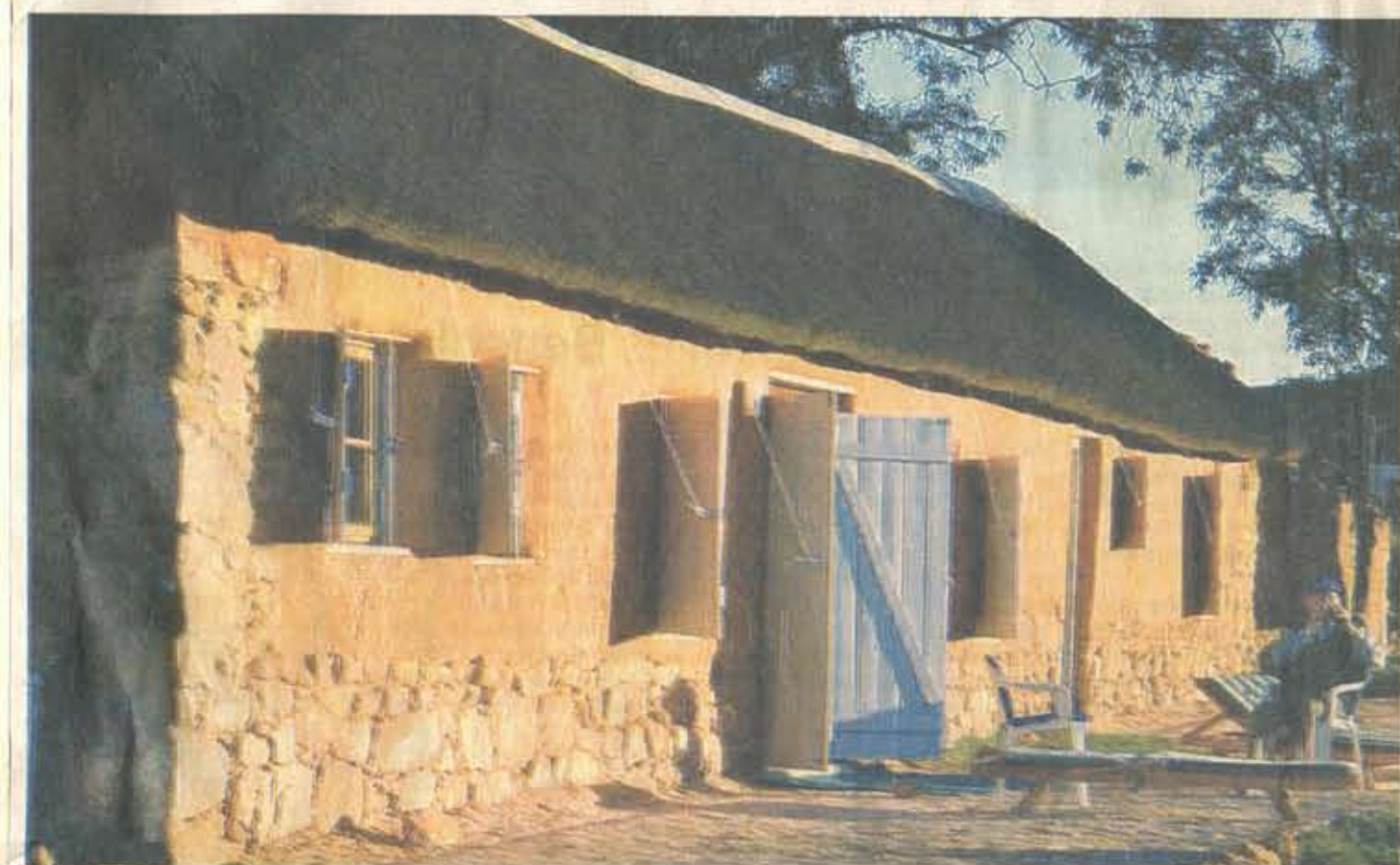
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Recycled: many of the doors and window frames were sourced from old ruins in the area.

Green house: the traditional Cape style "longhuis" was built along environmentally friendly principles. This picture was taken before it was plastered.

Environment comes first at Sandra's West Coast hideaway

It's a true 'green' home built from natural materials, writes **Helen Bamford**



Household name: actress Sandra Prinsloo.

SANDRA Prinsloo may be a household name in South Africa but what few people know is that she is as passionately green at heart.

"The veteran actress has a discreet getaway on the West Coast to which he escapes whenever her gruelling schedule allows.

It was built in the traditional Cape "longhuis" style using only natural materials – recycled where possible – and non-toxic finishes.

"It's my tranquil retreat," Prinsloo says. "I de-stress within a few hours of getting here."

The house, which was built on top of existing ruins, is on a farm in a nature reserve and vlei so Prinsloo wanted it to fit in with the surrounding environment.

"I have such a horror of some of the gross architectural styles you get sometimes."

Prinsloo says she got excited about the possibilities after meeting Cape Town "green" architect Etienne Brüwer.

"I was convinced I could build an aesthetically pleasing house in an environmentally friendly way."

She managed to find builders who were familiar with "cob" building which is a mixture of clay and straw built layer upon layer and architect Andy Horn of Eco Design drew up the plans.

"It's a 'long-house'," Prinsloo jokes.

"The bigger the family becomes the longer the house gets."

The house is open plan with a thatch ceiling and best of all, an outdoor shower.

"I got a guy to fix a bamboo reed screen onto the side of the house. It's

fabulous to be able to shower under the stars."

Prinsloo said the house was built using straw bales which gave excellent insulation, making it warm in winter and cool in summer.

"I kept the windows quite small but put in a large front door. And most of the doors and window frames were either part of the old house or found on other ruins."

Horn said straw bale buildings had been around for over a hundred years but had really taken off only in the past decade.

He said they were fast and cheap to build and the walls were surprisingly fire proof because the bales possessed insufficient oxygen to permit combustion.

Horn said mud bricks, salvaged from the ruins were re-used for some of the walls or broken down and used in the plastering.

A dry, composting toilet helped save water and recycled sewage into garden compost.

Prinsloo said she felt almost as if she were living in a womb when inside the house.

"Nothing ecologically harmful was used so it's like a living organism. I feel like the place breathes and is alive."

And the view too is magnificent. "I look over a huge stretch of water with an array of bird life. The peace and quiet is incredible."

● People can find out more about green architecture at the Cape Town Earth Festival. It takes place at the V&A Waterfront until November 23 but there will also be a number of mini-festivals. Call Cape Town Tourism at 021 426 4260 for details.



ANDY HORN

Interior: stone columns support the thatch roof.



ANDY HORN

From scratch: the house was built from an old ruin.



ANDY HORN

House of straw: the thick walls made of straw bales provide excellent insulation.