

Building a Cordwood House

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^ One intrepid lady reader is wanting to build a Cordwood house.^ She approached us with the following question - and we're really hoping she goes ahead and documents her building adventure on our website.^ A while ago I read a brilliant book from cover to cover about building methods and I wrote an article about it - you can read the article here and get an idea of what cordwood building looks like. Super! Our reader writes:- I'm planning to build a cordwood house, and would like to know about other houses built this way to get a take on building permission. I'd be grateful if you could point me in the right direction.

Les advised our reader as follows:-

As you probably realize, building a Cordwood house is a little off the regular track but a very effective method for insulating a house and for making it look a bit alternative. There is no difficulty with getting any building which uses any materials or building method which is not covered by the National Building Regulations approved but there are certain steps that you will have to take.

Firstly, your architect will have to be certified to do rational design in terms of the new SANS 10400XA and SANS 204 (Energy Efficiency in Buildings) regulations and your structural engineer will have to produce a rational design for the building as a whole. The calculations of both architect and engineer will form part of your application to the municipality for approval as well as to the NHBRC. This is likely to be a bit of a lengthy process so do make allowance for it in your planning.

In this case, it is unlikely that there will be many NHBRC registered builders capable of constructing a cordwood house and, if you are planning to build it yourselves, then you would need to apply to the NHBRC for registration as an "Owner Builder" and thereby sidestep the need to enroll your house under their warrantee scheme. In doing that you will have to show that you are competent yourselves. Not enrolling your house just means that you will only be able to sell the house to a cash buyer within the next 5 years. (Banks do not finance alternative building construction anyway.) I hope that this answers your question. Please feel free to chat if you have any further queries.^

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