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**South County couple makes their house out of straw: Huffing and puffing won't blow this house down**

BY LAUREEN DIEPHOF 10/26/05



Mike Nova and Kellie Morgantini's finished straw bale house is located on Metz Road east of Greenfield.

Mike Nova stands in front of the "truth window" in one of the rooms. The window reveals the straw that the house is made of.

A walkway runs along the front of the straw bale house.

Once upon a time, not too long ago, a man named Mike and a woman named Kellie met each other while both worked as planners for the villages and hillsides of beautiful Monterey County. Soon, the two fell in love. Not long after, they decided to build a house on the top of a hill in the lovely Salinas Valley near the village of Greenfield on Metz Road.



Both of them being very creative and skillful, they decided they wanted a house with thick walls, not only for its beauty but because thick walls would keep the cold winter and hot summer utility wolf away from the door.



So they looked around, did some research, and read some books and decided to build their house of straw bale. After they made that decision, they needed someone who could help them build their dream house. So Mike and Kellie put their heads together and decided that The Three Little Pig Construction Company, from the neighboring village of Paso Robles, had lots of experience building strong houses out of straw, and none of the houses have been blown away by a big bad wolf - or big bad anything - so they gave them a call.

The Three Little Pigs were filled with happiness. "Yes, we will help you," they squealed. Then Mike and Kellie hired an architect who sat down and, with a pen in his hand, drew the most beautiful plans for the house using all of Mike and Kellie's ideas. The foundation was poured; the beams erected and now the straw, all of it, including the last straw, was put in place. (Not one camel's back was broken).

Mike and Kellie had about 50 close friends come over to help put the walls of straw in place. It was quite a party. While they were there, the friends painted little scenes on tiles that were put in place with stucco on the walls so

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they would always remember the friends who helped them. The house is finished and another party is planned to show it off.

At the party friends will see thick, smooth walls, solar panels and two truth windows. The truth window, an old tradition, shows straw through a glass, so no one can doubt the little pigs used straw.

The party folks will find a shower room with a river pebble floor and a pebble windowsill, both in a wavy design and sunflower tile chip collages on the walls. The shower could hold a party of five.

What they will not see is a huge pot of water to burn up the big bad wolf. There is no wolf in this neck of the woods.

The only huffing and puffing over this house will be done when people walk up the long road to the top of the hill to reach the house.

Mike and Kellie will live happily ever after in the house made of straw. And that's the truth.

See the side story for construction details.

In the 1990s a bill was passed in California that adopted the building code making it legal to use straw bale for house construction and at that time minimum standards were established, according to Mike Nova.

Mike Nova and Kellie Morgantini's straw bale house was built using the stubble of rice straw. This is the leftover product from the straw harvest. It is plentiful, Nova said. A retaining wall of post and beams was built and the straw bales were placed into the wall space to which chicken wire covered the bales followed by stucco. Nova said it was a simple operation which took only 10 minutes of instructions before the bale raising took place. The party of bale raisers took 10 hours the first day with about 50 people. They finished up the next day with 25 people. This was one year ago, Nova said.

Nova said this type of construction is gaining in popularity and much of the building can be done by yourself.

The insulation from the straw, the solar panels and design of the house keeps it warm in the winter and cool in the summer.

Mike and Kellie received much of their information about straw bale houses from books published by A Real Goods Independent Living Book, Ukiah, Calif.

Mike and Kellie have a Web site, [www.moosebale.net](http://www.moosebale.net).

There are many links to important information for building a straw bale house within this Web site, including the link to The Three Little Pigs Construction Company.

Nova is currently a planner for the Monterey County and Kellie is an attorney. She was raised on a farm in Greenfield, and Nova comes from the Bay Area. They met while both worked in the Monterey County Planning Department.

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