

Introduction: How Stoneview — and this Book — Came About

Spring, 2004: My book *Timber Framing for the Rest of Us* had just been published, and described timber framing using commonly available metal fasteners. I wrote the book with a view towards using it as a textbook for workshops of the same name.

Jaki and I had been teaching workshops in cordwood masonry and earth-sheltered housing for 25 years, but added a timber framing workshop in May of 2004, to see how it would fly. We needed a project of the right size for a three-day workshop. And we *always* need hands-on projects for our cordwood masonry workshops.

At the same time, I was troubled by the fact that a lot of cordwood builders seemed to gravitate towards octagonal and other polygon shapes of buildings, without paying sufficient attention to how the cordwood was going to marry up with the oddly angled corners. In fact, I'd written a chapter on the problem for *Cordwood Building: The State of the Art*. The article was theoretical, and I welcomed the chance to put theory into practice. I decided to test four different methods of doing octagon corners, all in one building. The methods would be appropriate for different people having access to different kinds of wooden members.

The next question was: What would be the purpose of the building? If we're going to spend \$5,000 for a structure, we'd better have some justifiable use for it. There were two possibilities: First, we owned a 20-acre woodlot on

our dirt road not far from our Earthwood Building School, a woodlot we wanted to sell. A line of thought was to build the little cabin on the property, so that the buyers would have a structure that they could begin to use immediately upon purchasing the land. They might use it as a vacation home, or as a place to live while they built a more substantial home for themselves nearby. In either case, the octagon would be a useful outbuilding (office, guesthouse, workshop, etc.) in the future.

The second possibility was to build another guesthouse at Earthwood for students and family friends to stay in. We already had two guesthouses, but they were small (100 and 125 usable square feet respectively), which limited their use to an individual or a couple, and only in the summer.

To decide which property to build on, we created lists of pros and cons for each site, which included: need, cost, convenience of building, logistical suitability as a workshop, and, oddly, some of the considerations in building in two separate townships, each having a different approach to building permits and with disparate assessment values for similar properties. Finally, we wondered if building something on the 20 acres, which we wanted to sell, would add to the value of the property and make it easier to sell, or whether we would be second-guessing the unknown buyer by putting money into something that might not be what they want. Long story short, we decided on another guesthouse at Earthwood. This turned out to be fortuitous for us and for the young couple who bought our 20 acres soon after we had made the decision. I think the added cost of the property with the guesthouse on it might have made it difficult for them to afford the place. Now, as I write two years later, I am happy to report that they are living in a charming owner-built cordwood home. And we helped them get started on their cordwood with a cordwood workshop at their place, so all came out well in the end.

There was still the question of siting the new building on our six acres at Earthwood, and this is discussed in Chapter 2. But, so that I can begin to refer to the building by its name as early as possible, I will tell you that it overlooks the largest outlier stone of our megalithic stone circle, and the new Earthwood trilithon, a work-in-progress as I write. You will see pictures of

these features later in the book, and then it will become clear why we call the new guesthouse “Stoneview.”

This book will be specific to building Stoneview as it is. We think it is the prettiest building we have created in the last 30 years, and visitors seem to be taken with it as well. Although we use it as a guesthouse, it would also suit as a workshop, a storage building, a garden shed or even a vacation cabin. I advocate the “temporary shelter” (TS) strategy, which I discussed in detail in *Mortgage Free!: Radical Strategies for Home Ownership* (Chelsea Green, 1994). The use of a small building like Stoneview gives the owners of the property: (1) a mortgage-free place to live while they build their dream home, (2) a project upon which to practise their building skills, (3) a useful outbuilding later on and (4) intimate familiarity with their property, a great plus in siting their home, septic system, well, access routes and outbuildings. Stoneview in particular could be a luxurious master bedroom wing (with bath) attached to the main house. My strong advice when using the TS strategy is to build the TS with mostly the same techniques and materials that you want with the dream home. Otherwise, advantage (2) above is lost. Better to make a \$500 mistake on the TS than a \$5,000 mistake later on the dream home.

And the book? It came about because a high percentage of people who have seen Stoneview want to know if I have plans or a book that tells how to build it. A lady neighbor of mine, when given a tour, said: “I want one of these!” So, I figured I’d better make the detailed information available.

This book is different from my others in that it is totally devoted to the construction of a specific building, with all of the various techniques described thoroughly enough so that the reader can replicate the project. My other books are subject-specific: timber framing, cordwood masonry, earth sheltering, sauna, stone circles, mortgage freedom, etc. *All the information you need to build Stoneview is in these pages.* There are simple plans herein (with measurements) and a detailed materials list. For a different design using cordwood masonry, timber-framing or earth roofs, please see my last three books from New Society on these subjects, listed in the Bibliography. They go into a lot more detail to help you to make design and construction decisions for larger or differently shaped projects.

If you build a “Stoneview” of your own, even if it doesn’t overlook any stones, please send a picture or two to me at Earthwood Building School, 366 Murtagh Hill Road, West Chazy, NY 12992. If you do it in cordwood, I’ll send you our Master Mortar Stuffer’s certificate.