

Rammed earth on the rise

Of more than twenty different types of earth construction techniques, rammed earth has been lauded for its durability, sophisticated environmental performance and striking earthen beauty.

By Mary Anne Constable ^{14 Apr 2016}



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Rammed earth construction in South Africa has generally been stigmatised as a substandard and primitive building construction method reserved ‘for the poor’. Yet it is now gaining popularity for community social projects, as well as among wealthier clients. Although a building standard is yet to be formalised in South Africa, the rammed earth industry is established in many African countries, Europe, United States and Australia. This means plenty of expertise and established international building standards already exist and this construction method is now far removed from its primitive roots.

By nature of the material (earth comprising mainly sand, gravel, silt, and clay), the rammed earth construction process is simple while also being labour intensive, which facilitates job creation for disadvantaged communities. Upper market residential and higher profile projects are also revealing the striking beauty and creative possibilities of this building material. As demand for environmentally sustainable alternative building technologies increases, the intrinsic environmental qualities of rammed earth walls – such as high thermal mass, compressive strength and earthen material’s ability to modify humidity naturally – creates healthy living environments. It therefore presents an attractive alternative to carbon-heavy concrete and brick.

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