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## Sweet & Soulful

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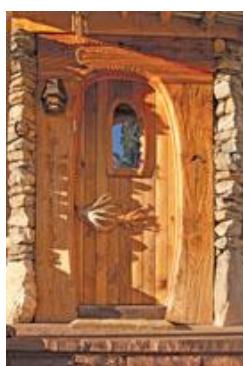
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*Built entirely by hand with salvaged materials, this unique home embodies creativity and sustainability.*



*Reclaimed solar roof panels provide radiant-floor heat for this unusual home, built with mostly recycled and reclaimed materials. The garage roof on the far right sports a living green roof.*  
*Photo by WeinrauchPhotography.com*

By Lisa Marshall



*Rick made the front door from reclaimed wood and found an antler on the property that he turned into a functional handle that slides open. Photo by WeinrauchPhotography.com*

At the base of a rocky hillside in Left Hand Canyon sits a house decorated with sunlit stained glass, hand-polished woods, snappy colors, and swirls and hearts etched in its exterior.

The brainchild of an organizing and feng-shui consultant named Naomi and a carefree woodworker named Rick, the house embodies their goal of creating beauty for beauty's sake. But what's more unusual than the house itself is the fact that Naomi and Rick, with the help of friends and volunteers, built it by hand with scavenged, salvaged and recycled materials over the course of a decade.

Unconstrained by resale value, construction loans or time crunches, the house represents something its intensely proud owners say is far too scarce in today's debt-ridden, profit-focused real estate world: a sustainable home with soul.

"At times, I had the feeling while building this house that I was working on a temple—something that would long outlive us, that would serve generations to come with the heart and soul of the creative spirit," says Naomi Maddux of the 1,500-square-foot work of art she and husband Rick Maddux built using little outside labor, aside from friends and other volunteers.



*Hand-plastered walls surround a barn door that stood on the property years ago. Naomi gave the door new life by creating stained-glass windows for it. The light fixture to the right cost \$5 at the ReSource yard. Terry Coleman, an artisan friend and volunteer who helped the couple plaster the house, created porcelain sconces for it. Photo by WeinrauchPhotography.com*

Rick first set eyes on the fertile, south-facing slice of mountain land in the late '80s, while searching for a place to crash as he transitioned from an unsatisfying cartography career to pursue his love of woodworking. He talked the owners into letting him build a primitive cabin on the property, and agreed to pay them \$200 a month in rent. Eventually, he moved away for years but the land pulled him back.

"It's magical," he says, stating the obvious while pointing out the property's lush wonderland of native plants, towering evergreens, a flowing creek and comforting birdsong.

Rick first met Naomi in 1998, when she attended one of his regular full-moon bonfires. Soon the kindred spirits began adding onto his tiny, two-room cabin. They later deconstructed it and

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moved into another structure on the property—a ramshackle A-frame they gutted and reconstructed while planning their next move.

“We’ve been building and deconstructing things together ever since,” Rick says.

In 2000, when the landowners prepared to sell the 160-acre property to Boulder County Parks and Open Space, the duo petitioned the county to let them buy 3 acres of it, not just so they could keep it for their own, but also to protect the wildlife corridor from the potential disturbance of human recreation.

After a year of pleading their case at public meetings, the pair won and soon embarked on their mission: to create a work of art that complemented the nature surrounding it. “To do that when you have little money, you have to have lots of time,” says Rick, whose tanned, weathered face and warm smile reflect a life spent working outdoors.



*Rick and Naomi recessed an old farmhouse hutch into the wall and painted it lively colors just for fun. All wood in the photo was either harvested from the property (the pine posts came from dead-standing ponderosa pine; the stair rails and banister came from aspen and red river birch), or came from the ReSource yard (the cedar ceiling’s 3-by-4-inch tongue and groove). The north-facing window is embellished with plaster overlay on the rounded, straw-bale wall. Photo by WeinrauchPhotography.com*

In what they refer to as “slow building”—an allusion to the “slow food” movement’s reverence for thoughtful meals prepared with ingredients that nourish the body, mind, spirit and environment—the two would spend the next 10 years tag teaming, with one pounding nails while the other took outside work to pay the bills.



*The stair wood was reclaimed from an old horse barn on the property. The first stained-glass piece Naomi crafted for the house, “Guardian of the East,” illuminates the wall. Photo by WeinrauchPhotography.com*

For the home's design, the pair chose a simple straw-bale, post-and-beam construction, with earthen plaster walls and adobe floors. Instead of borrowing money to pay strangers to build it for them, they hosted free workshops (with the help of Ryan Chivers of Artesano Plaster in Boulder), where dozens would trade their labor for a chance to learn about eco-friendly construction.

"It felt like this house opened its arms to everyone who helped," Naomi says, recalling the spontaneous cookouts that often occurred after long workdays. "It sort of created its own orbit."

For materials, Rick and Naomi checked alleys and Dumpsters, frequented the ReSource yard, and kept a vigilant eye on area remodels, often pulling up on job sites to haul off materials that would otherwise go to the landfill.

### A Story Per Square Foot

Every square foot reveals a story in the whimsical, solar-powered, two-bedroom house. The wooden steps leading to the front door were salvaged from the A-frame the couple shared many years ago. The handrail is constructed from the lone cedar they had to fell to dig the foundation. The front door handle was crafted from an elk antler discovered on the property. And the two hearts molded into the exterior plaster were left as mementos by a friend who attended a workshop.



*The cabinets are birdseye maple washed with bright aniline dyes. The hand-carved shelves were made from local cedar, and the reclaimed glass blocks at the top of the photo came from the ReSource yard. They were installed to let light into the laundry room. Marmoleum covers the walls for a colorful, washable surface. Photo by WeinrauchPhotography.com*

The property also boasts a sizeable vegetable and permaculture demonstration garden.

Inside, the straw-bale walls seem to breathe with life, framed by twisted beams of blue-tinted beetle-kill pine the pair harvested and peeled themselves, and filled in with earth-toned plaster they hand-mixed using natural pigments and local sand for color. “If you look close, you can even see the little flecks of mica in it,” says Naomi, who bought the mica from Building for Health Materials.

Rick and Naomi road-tripped to North Dakota to bring back his great-grandmother’s circa 1904 Home Comfort wood stove, which they converted to gas. It now sits below a ceiling made from Rick’s sister’s deconstructed redwood deck. The room’s siding was reclaimed from Double Dig, a legendary hangout for Boulder musicians like Tony Furtado and members of Leftover Salmon.

Naomi’s delicate stained-glass creations grace the windowpanes of beautifully weathered doors the couple made from salvaged tongue and groove. From the ceiling hang lotus-shaped lights Rick crafted from discarded copper pipe. And in the quiet, still spaces in between something intangible resonates, as if the house remembers its coming of age.

“Creating is what we did, and still do, best,” says Naomi, noting that she and Rick continue to create glass art and custom furniture for others. “But our time together doing this for ourselves is over.”



*The master bath's sink cabinet is made from reclaimed redwood, copper and scrap glass. The walls are reclaimed tongue-and-groove pine and cedar. The \$5 light fixture came from the ReSource yard. Photo by WeinrauchPhotography.com*

Ultimately, the creation born out of their love would outlast their union. With their project finally complete, Rick and Naomi recently realized it was time to part. “We recognized where we are great together and where we are not great together, and the most loving thing we can do now is to let each other go,” says Naomi, adding that Rick will stay in the home. “There is no animosity between us. No need to deconstruct anything this time.”

As they separate, they stress their story is not a sad one, but rather a remarkable one: Along the way, the two became accomplished artists and craftsmen. She learned to trust her vision and speak her mind. He learned to be a better listener. And the 100-plus friends and volunteers who helped create the house will be forever touched by the experience.

“This house represents what is possible completely outside the economic model we are all tied to as a culture—that a layperson with minimal skills, a skilled person with no funds, and a strong community can come together to create something beautiful and lasting,” says Naomi, her composure breaking for an instant as she prepares to leave.

“It has had a tremendous effect on everyone who has come here.”