

Registered master builder on a mission to help out overseas

Auckland registered master builder Marty van der Burg is on a mission — to Ethiopia of all places!

It all came about when Ethiopian political refugee friends who have been living in New Zealand for 10 years went back to their homeland for the first time.

Marty takes up the story: “We sponsored them and at the same time thought we would never get a better chance than this to travel there with them and experience the way of life over there with a family,” he says.

“I also wanted to see what the housing was like there and what we could do from a New Zealand point of view to help in some way.”

Marty’s main point of contact was through the Habitat for Humanity organisation, with whom he has worked before building houses in New Zealand and Fiji.

He met with the national director of Habitat for Humanity Ethiopia Kebede Abebe and was shown to a district town called Shashemene in the south of the country where they had built 160 houses. Most of them were funded from either the United States or Europe, and the teams that built them came mainly from the States and Britain.

“I wanted to look at what the building was like over there, particularly with Habitat because it’s a well established organisation and they really are making a difference to people’s lives in places such as Ethiopia.

The method of construction is nothing to what might be seen here!

Marty says they use pretty much anything they can lay their hands on, but that eucalyptus — because it grows so well there — is the main framing material that is used. Then layers of a mud preparation are applied directly to the framing — first on the inside and, following a cure time of three weeks, on the outside. An iron roof goes on top and that’s pretty much it.

Mud preparation

“The mud preparation is made with a soil that lends itself to that form of construction. They mix in water and straw with it, and it has to have a cure time but when it hardens it’s almost like a solid plaster house here. It’s solid as anything, really strong.

“They will render the mud work as well and, if you are really wealthy, you get to finish and paint it.”

Marty says Habitat for Humanity is unable to undertake fundraising locally because there are no corporations in the country big enough to donate.

\$2500 to house a family!

“It is such a poor country so they are totally reliant on funding from overseas. I found out that it costs only NZ\$2500 (not including labour) to put a family in a house.

“It’s not a big home but it will normally house a family of at least four and up to perhaps eight. It’s a mud construction, 23 sq m house comprising two rooms along with 200 sq m of land on which to grow vegetables and become as self-sufficient as possible.”

While they were there, Marty and his wife lived with their sponsored family and others — all 11 of them — in a 40 sq m house.

After experiencing first hand the poverty and struggle of daily life in Ethiopia, he has decided that, if it’s possible to put a family in a home for \$2500, for every building contract that he gets here, he’s going to

donate that amount to build one house in Ethiopia to make a difference over there.

“I was stunned to think that for such a small amount you could put a family in a home. We can easily go without \$2500 and, at the end of the day, you’re putting a family — not just a person — in a home.

He points out that the scheme is aimed at low income families who are earning around 300 to 400 birr (NZ\$50 to \$60) a month.

However, Marty isn’t stopping there.

“What I would like is to not only do some fundraising here, but to send a team, probably around September or October next year, to do some building there because they rely totally on outside labour.”

Habitat sends out what is called global village teams that provide volunteer labour to build the houses. Marty estimates that it would cost NZ\$15 million to build the 1.4 million houses required for the homeless in Ethiopia.

“When you are there, you have to rethink what you are

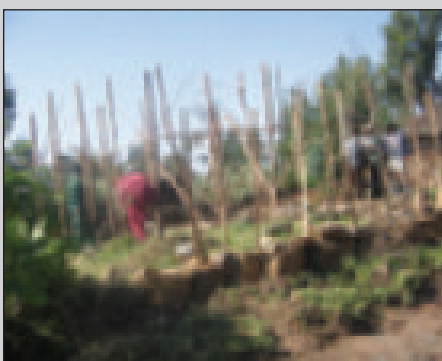
House construction — Ethiopian style



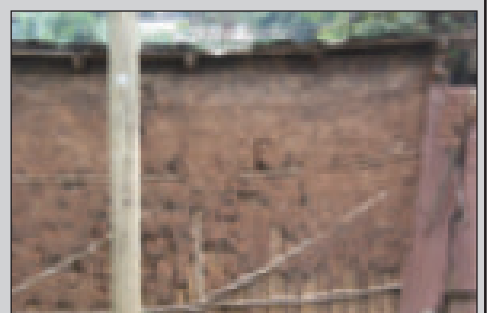
Above: Preparing and transporting the mud mixture to apply to the eucalyptus framing (below).



Above: The eucalyptus “timber yard”.



Below: Curing of the applied mud takes place.





Above: The poverty of many Ethiopians and the squalor of their dwellings is evident.
 Below: The mud construction houses are a big improvement, and can be built by Habitat for Humanity at very little cost.



Auckland registered master builder Marty van der Burg with a group of local orphans about to indulge in one of his (and their) great passions — football. Pity about the Arsenal shirt Marty!

doing here. It puts a lot of things into perspective. You come back and you are thinking about what you can do to help.

“You can’t solve the whole problem, but just imagine if you can put one family in a house. You build a flash house here and out of that profit you can put a family in a house there. You’ve actually just helped one family. You’ve given them a complete start. I think like that all the time.”

Marty is planning to return in January to find out more about the logistics of sending a team to Ethiopia for a couple of weeks.

“What I understand from the local Habitat director is that they like to have houses at three different stages so the team gets to have a go at preparing the foundations, putting up the eucalyptus framing and applying the mud.

“When they build it’s 10 or 20 at a time. So you would be involved in maybe six or seven different houses all at different stages.”

Marty says he is planning to secure corporate sponsorship to help finance the undertaking.

“I tend to fork out of my own pocket, and I will continue to do that, but sending a team over there is a huge cost, and I would like to get local sponsorship for that to happen.”

Marty also plans to organise further local fundraising for an orphanage there which is supported by Ethiopians in New Zealand.

“It was started by a woman with three kids of her own who took five kids off the streets. The orphanage now has 90 children in 14 different locations.

“She relies purely on outside support but that doesn’t stop her from doing the work. She’s taking kids off the street and making a huge difference. There’s 80,000 orphans out of a population of 4.5 million in the capital city Addis Ababa alone.”

• If you’re interested in sponsoring Marty van der Burg and his team, in being on the team itself, or helping in any other way, please call him on 021 670 721 or 09 579 5516.

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