

# McWilliams Home

*Where Hobbits & Earth Advantage Live Happily Ever After*

Owner Julie McWilliams' 2400 square foot, passive solar straw bale home in Bend was completed just in time for the Central Oregon Home Tour sponsored by the Central Oregon Builders Association (COBA). It was the first time a straw bale home had ever been included on this tour designed to showcase homes built by building industry professionals. Her builder Jacob Johansen was determined to show that there is a lot more going on in Central Oregon home construction than conspicuous consumption. McWilliams home was a breath of fresh air amidst the field of many frankly stale clichés. The house received a great deal of attention by the media and was a big hit with tour goers. It was a moment of real satisfaction for both McWilliams and Johansen.

Julie's journey to this moment began years ago when she and her husband, both educators in the out backs of Alaska started spending vacation time in Central Oregon. Eventually, they purchased land and spent summers here living in a yurt with their growing family. When they began considering moving to Central Oregon permanently, they decided to look in Bend where they would be closer to education jobs. They found the Higher Ground Community, fell in love with it, bought a lot there and began spending as much time as their Alaskan commitments would permit.

With architect Cheryl Heinrichs, they began developing plans for their new home, one that would go easy on the environment and be spiritually supportive. Their Alaska experience had steeped them in an ethic of self-reliance and as educators they didn't miss the fact that there was an opportunity to demonstrate how homes could be built sustainably. Their passive solar straw bale home began to take shape.

Then tragedy struck – Julie's husband passed away. For the past several years she has been working on keeping life together for herself and her three children and trying to decide what to do about the joyfully shared straw bale home dream. Ultimately, she decided she needed to make the dream come true.

Last year she began working with

Johansen, a master carpenter and experienced straw bale home builder, to turn the plans into reality. The result is a warm inviting stucco and timber cottage that enchants you into thinking a hobbit just might appear at the door when you ring the bell. The door, by the way, is reached by a bridge which connects the walk to the entry porch creating an even greater sense of whimsy and other-worldly-ness. Entering through an arched door you pass through the thick sheltering hand-plastered walls to a large vaulted sun-filled great room with cushiony cork floors. Just off the great room pine doors lead to a quiet den. A full length deck runs along the south side of the house and a winding sculptured staircase leads you up to a loft where a window seat begs you to linger to take in the view or read a good book. The lower level houses all the bedrooms including the hobbit-inspired children's rooms – all have southern exposures.

In addition to the passive solar design and super-energy-efficient building shell, solar water heating panels supply much of the hot water and passive solar heating is augmented by radiant floor heating. The appliances are all Energy Star and the lighting is compact fluorescent. As you might expect in a home so

## FEATURES/SPECS

- Passive Solar Design
- Non-toxic materials and finishes
- Recycles timbers
- Straw bale Wall Construction
- Solar Hot Water Heating System
- Natural Cork and Concrete Flooring
- Cellulose Ceiling Insulation
- Formaldehyde-free cabinets
- Energy-efficient appliances
- Concrete countertops
- Wood windows and doors
- Designed by Cheryl Heinrichs Architects
- Building by Jacob Johansen Carpenter/Builder
- Solar Water Heating System by AquaEnergy

thoughtfully planned to nurture children, all the finishes are non-toxic including the formaldehyde-free cabinets. Ceilings are tongue and groove pine and the countertops are a lustrously polished concrete. All doors and windows are energy-efficient wood. In fact the home is so environmentally friendly it qualified for PGE's "Earth Advantage" certification.

Although McWilliams and her children are currently still living and working fulltime in Alaska, they are looking forward to moving into their beloved new home and neighborhood permanently, something that will likely have to wait until Oregon's school funding problems improve.

