

# Rancho Mastatal Updates

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## RM Program News

### **: 2005 Natural Building Workshop Dates Set**

Rancho Mastatal and Yestermorrow Design/Build School, a non-profit organization headquartered in Warren, VT, announce the offering of this incredible course for the third straight year. The class will run from January 21 through January 31 and will provide students with a unique opportunity to explore the design/build process using cob (mix of sand, straw, clay and sometimes cow manure), stone, site-milled wood, bamboo, and recycled/reused materials. The class will work on a group project at Rancho Mastatal and students will have the opportunity to collaborate on a variety of design opportunities. The class will survey and discuss different building techniques and work hands-on and in-depth with a featured number of them. A field trip to investigate local vernacular architecture is one highlight of the course.

This workshop is designed for anyone with an interest in natural architecture, design, and building, and is ideal for architecture, environmental studies, and building technology students and professionals; and natural building enthusiasts. The lessons and techniques will be covered and discussed in a way that makes them relevant to most any environment, while their execution will be specifically applied to the context of the environment where we will be working.

We strongly encourage students to plan an extra few days either before or after the course to fully explore this wonderful part of the world. While at Rancho Mastatal, students may participate in a number of other educational and recreational activities. All students are required to obtain traveler's insurance. The class will be in English.

The cost for the workshop is \$975 and includes food, lodging and full access to Rancho Mastatal's facilities.

For more information regarding registration, please contact Yestermorrow:

Yestermorrow Design/Build School 189 VT Route 100 Warren, VT 05674 Phone: (802) 496-5545  
North America Toll Free: (888) 496-5541 Fax: (802) 496-5540 [designbuild@yestermorrow.org](mailto:designbuild@yestermorrow.org)

Thanks for helping us get the word out!

### **Conservation Update: Biological Corridor Committee Created**

The Ministry of the Environment and Mines (MINAE) recently helped to create a new committee to promote the realization of a biological corridor that on paper will one day stretch from southern Mexico all the way into Panama. Mastatal is situated in the heart of the proposed corridor, and therefore elected officials and local and regional environmentalists are taking steps to help promote this worthwhile idea. In a recent meeting, local residents elected a committee made up of community members from Zapatón, San Miguel, and Mastatal, and members of MINAE. The

group will meet monthly to discuss what our respective communities can be doing to facilitate the process of making the corridor a reality. This is by all means a long-term project that will undoubtedly take decades to realize, if ever. Rancho Mastatal will be doing its part to help make this dream become a reality. The stakes are high, and the challenge a formidable one. The general idea of the biological corridor is to create a natural passageway whereby animals are able to migrate freely, without human obstruction or risk of "unnatural" casualty. Due to pressures caused by growing human populations, increased agriculture, deforestation and more, animals are being squeezed into ever shrinking habitats causing a reduction in their populations and the increased likelihood of human interaction that often times results in death.

### **Building Report: Quick Hooch Update**

Now that the ribbon cutting for the bamboo shower and bus stop is behind us, it is time to concentrate our building talent and energy to "hooch it up". After a monster day digging a hole for the hooch's foundation, we hauled materials to the site in preparation for "The Pour". We poured the foundation on a beautiful Monday morning, wrapping up in the early afternoon during a huge downpour, green season style. The anchor bolts were set in place in wait for the "pilón" sill and bamboo posts that will rest on top in the coming weeks. The "pilón", "sangre de toro" or "bull's blood" tree was recently milled from a dead tree in Jeanne's forest by our friend William from Salitrales. The bamboo is getting cleaned and readied, as Hilberth builds a temporary structure that will house the saws and other large tools closer to the building site. We're hoping to bring out Martín Coto, a bamboo construction expert with whom we have worked in the past, during the month of July to help us advance the project and to instruct us on some of the finer points of building with bamboo. This hooch is the first in a series of new structures that will be going up over at Jeanne's over the next year or two. Once these are completed, Robin and I are contemplating a small new house of our own. Viva la Revolución de Bambú!!!

### **Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Sarah's Story**

Last Sunday I hiked around in La Cangreja National Park with my Rancho Mastatal home stay family. We started the hike knee deep in water, wading our way up the local creek and into the forest where we would take the family's personal foot trail into the protected area of the national park. The foot trail itself was small and overgrown – we basically had to beat it all over again just to get through, with the father walking in the lead with his machete and the rest of us trailing behind to tamp down the weeds as much as we could as we passed. It was hot and steamy back in the jungle, and the air was full of biting insects who took full advantage of our slow progress through their terrain.

We took our time going through the forest, though, and despite a shared fear of possible snake encounters, we enjoyed the day. Every few minutes, we would stop as a family to admire some strange flower or fruit or mushroom or animal track; the family had an incredible knowledge of local plants and what they could be used for. My Spanish is a bit shaky, and there was so much to learn; I couldn't keep track of even a tenth of what they taught me. I finally just gave up on remembering every word – it was so wonderful simply to be there, and to realize that this family had so much knowledge all their own, and that already the parents were in the process of passing it on to their children.

My own memories will have to be less factual; they seem to already be crystallizing more around

the impressions formed during the various typical-to-them-but-fascinating-to-me experiences that the family has shared with me. Plucking chickens, for example, or milking cows, or cooking "picadillos", or playing cards and giggling with the young son. Another great memory will be wandering outside in the early nighttime with the mother and daughter and neighboring family, just to stare up at the night sky and marvel at the sheer number and brightness of the visible stars on a cloudless night. There is just so much that this family has shared with me that I hope to remember for the rest of my life, so many things to think about the next time I'm sitting on a bus, watching houses slide past and wondering what's going on inside. I feel so lucky that, for the first time in my life, I actually have some first hand experiences that will allow me to feel qualified to imagine.

### **Community Facts/Stories: Mastatal Spanish School**

We are thrilled to announce the opening of Mastatal's first Spanish school! Due to an increasing demand by visiting foreigners for intensive Spanish classes, Marcos Alonso García, a young adult in the community who has been giving informal classes during the last year, has decided to launch his own Spanish school right here in town. Marcos is confident that his new endeavor will allow him to earn a living without having to leave Mastatal. Over the past many months, Marcos has been developing his own curriculum and refining his teaching techniques as he continues to hone his English skills by way of formal advanced classes in San José. He's an incredibly approachable person, intelligent, and extremely capable. Marcos can custom design your classes based on your individual needs, budget, language level and available time. All programs offered are full-immersion. Students eat and sleep with local families during their stay in Mastatal, allowing time for practice in both a formal classroom and informal home setting. The listed prices include food and lodging with Mastatal families from Sunday night through the following Sunday night (Monday morning), laundry service, and one 3 hour intensive class per day from Monday through Friday. Weekend classes can be arranged with Marcos for an additional cost. Classes are conducted entirely in Spanish to encourage complete engagement, and are offered year round. Maximum class size is 2 to assure personalized attention. Classes can be combined with guided hikes in the La Cangreja National Park and the Rancho Mastatal Private Wildlife Refuge.

Length Price One Week: \$175 Two Weeks: \$325 Three Weeks: \$450 Four Weeks: \$550

The Instructor: Marcos Alonso García, a young adult born and raised in Mastatal, works on his family's "finca", guides visitors in the La Cangreja National Park and the surrounding forests, and offers Spanish instruction to non-Spanish speakers visiting the region.

Marcos received his high school diploma in 2003. He is a community leader, a member of the local government, the goalie on the local soccer team, and an active element in many other organizations in Mastatal.

For more information or to book a place with Marcos, please send emails to [info@r...](mailto:info@r...) and please help Marcos and us get the word out!

### **Comida Corner: Baja Baked Black Beans**

As many of you know, beans are a staple here at the ranch. We are always trying new ways to cook them up to have variety of flavors in our diet. These are simple and fabulous! They again come from The Rebar Modern Food Cookbook. They go well with cornbread, green rice and oven baked squash. Serves 8-10

· 4 cups black beans, soaked overnight · ½ bunch cilantro, coarsely chopped · 1 Tbsp cumin seed · 2 Tbsp pure chile powder · 1 Tbsp dried oregano · 6 garlic cloves, peeled and chopped · 1 yellow onion, chopped · 1 Tbsp salt · 2 Tbsp chipotle puree (or powder or chopped up chipotle) · ½ cup brown sugar, firmly packed (we use "tapa dulce" or honey) · 1-5 ½ oz. can tomato paste (we cut up a few fresh tomatoes and cook them down in our cast iron skillet with a bit of olive oil, salt, pepper and a bay leaf) · 1/3 cup red wine vinegar

In a large pot, place the soaked beans, cilantro, cumin, chile powder, dried oregano, garlic, and onion (we use a pressure cooker and don't soak the beans). Cover with cold water by one inch. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer until beans are tender (about one hour or longer). Add more water to keep beans covered if necessary. Add 2 tsp salt in the final 15 minutes of cooking.

Next, pre-heat the oven to 350 degrees F. Stir the remaining ingredients into the pot. Taste the sauce and season if necessary. Carefully ladle the beans into a large glass baking dish or Dutch oven. Place on a large baking tray (to catch spills), cover with foil and bake. After one hour, remove the foil and check the liquid content. If the beans are still very runny, leave them baking in the oven, and check them every 15 minutes until they reach desired consistency. Let the beans rest for 10 minutes before serving, or refrigerate and reheat as needed.

Helpful hint: Add salt to simmering beans only in the final few minutes of cooking. Salt prevents beans from absorbing water, so if you add it too soon they'll take longer to cook and may be unevenly done. (We use a pressure cooker so we don't soak the beans over night and they cook quicker).

Buen Provecho and eat your beans!!

### **Inspirational Impressions: Bamboo**

Bamboo is both road and map  
Where use and beauty overlap  
With learning in a roomless school  
For the wisest or the fool for ancients creeping back to earth  
Or infants dripping fresh with birth

Bridges, baskets, paper, flutes  
In summer, shade, at dinner, shoots- all from groves whose rhizomes  
will mantle an eroded hill. Count its uses? Count instead  
Fingers of the thankful dead.

Lots of building happening and tons of help in the garden needed. Hope to see you down here soon.  
Until next time.

Abrazos,

Tim and Robin