

Despite entrenched lobbies, 'Green building is on the rise'

3/23/2015

HT INTERVIEW: MONIKA BRUMMER

Designer & Builder/Cannabric – Spain



Monika Brümmer is an architect specialising in hemp building, ecological and bioclimatic buildings, historic restoration and rehabilitation of traditional cave dwellings. She is the inventor of Cannabric, hemp-based building blocks which have been manufactured at her facility in Granada since 1999. She is also a globally recognised consultant in hemp and other eco construction.

HempToday: Cannabric offers a wide range of hemp building materials. Which are the most popular products (bricks, panels, insulation, etc) among those in your product line?

MB: *In Spain where my company is located and where I started producing hemp building materials in 1999, there was a long period during which new construction was dominating over refits and restorations. Hemp can be applied in the whole “envelope” of the building. In new construction all kind of hemp building materials, from bricks for load-bearing walls and internal divisions to insulation mortars for slabs and plasters and flexible insulators based on hemp wool for roof insulation are applied. This way I’m able to place 100 kg of hemp per constructed square meter. Since the start of economic crisis in Spain people came back to do refits, where insulating mortars find wide application to improve thermal and acoustic performance. Regarding new construction, the pre fabricated products I developed are intended for cost-saving housing in developing countries and for application in large scale buildings.*

HT: How would you describe the demand for these products in recent years? Is there an upward trend?

MB: *The building industry is in hands of lobbies that push non-natural materials which use high energy to produce and are expensive to maintain and recycle in the future. But generally green-building is on the rise to meet the global need for energy-saving buildings and healthy living in general.*

HT: How do you see standards developing for certification of hemp building materials in Europe? Are there enough laboratories/researchers carrying out this work? How long does it take to get a product certified, and what are the key considerations that go into certification evaluation?

MB: *Standards are acceptable when there are no economic interests behind and as long they don’t create new restrictions. The laboratories are not so much prepared to test hemp building materials because the standards for testing are based on conventional building materials and not always compatible. Testing a product according to basic building standards is not such a large process, but is never enough for large scale building. Also, certification is not viable for the small scale producer, so it means a big handicap in the start-up phase.*

HT: How do you see the trend for hemp use in historical preservation? Is that part of the industry growing in Europe?

MB: *I’m not aware this is a trend, but hemp has very interesting possibilities in historical preservations. The use of hemp plasters and hemp slabs is the best solution in this context . It is not only technically compatible with historic preservation in terms of material but also offers thermal advantages when applied to the inside of a building when the facade of the building is protected. Hemp is light weight, so it doesn’t damage the existing structure and doesn’t add loads.*

HT: To what do you attribute the lack of knowledge/use of hemp as a building material among more mainstream builders? What are the keys to stronger business relationships among hemp building product producers and, for example, commercial construction firms?

MB: *It’s mainly a lack of information. But it’s also because architects and builders have enough opportunities in conventional building. I try to make an effort to promote hemp by doing conferences and workshops.*

HT: What exciting hemp projects are you currently working on?

MB: *I have a few small scale hemp projects running in Spain, some of them very interesting, like a copula building for musical events. But with the general lack of worthy opportunities in Spain in recent years, I’m working on some international calls. For example, I practice with several European universities based on my investigation into hemp building materials. Apart from this I do product development and knowhow transfer on an international and intercontinental level, doing all I can to accelerate hemp building projects on a global scale. The most difficult, thus exciting, project where I’m involved since end of 2013 is the architectural and environmental development of an area in North Africa where illicit hemp has been grown since the 7th century.*