



# Desert Creek House

A place / a search for the meaning of life

[www.desertcreekhouse.com.au](http://www.desertcreekhouse.com.au)  
(click on “Building a community house”)

## BUILDING A HOUSE AS A COMMON PROJECT FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY

### 1) Why building?

**In order to offer accommodation for longer stay and deeper experience, a process of listening for what arises naturally:**

At Desert Creek House (DCH), we have regularly retreats. It allows people to come together and to experience community. But it is only accessible to people who are living near Bega, because there is nowadays no possibility for accommodation, except for maximum 1 or 2 persons. This lack of overnight possibility prevents people from staying longer, although longer retreats would allow participants to go deeper into silence and experience. We notice how people who stay at DCH for a longer period of time are transformed by the peace of the place. Our aim is therefore to offer a possibility for a longer stay with accommodation for a few people (around 10).

The intention consists in creating a space which can be used in any way which will seem suitable, without any preconceived idea today. We have ideas about what it could be (personal retreats, practice of silent prayer, seminars on several topics, workshops) and we could have an input in it but we do not intend to be the only animators of this new space. It is like opening a space where life can take place. It is a little bit like the ark of Noah; it seems at the beginning without purpose or even out of place, but we believe that the meaning will arise very clearly when the space will exist. It will become what we will make of it. Listening to God is not a precise plan, it is a walk which will lead us where it has to. The focus is here on the process (building community) and not so much on the result (getting a new building). Community is not something which can be consumed as a good. It is something which we make and which happens in the present.

## **2) Description of the project**

**A community house where 10-12 people can meet, pray and share meals:**

We intend to build a main house which is big enough to welcome a group of 10 to 12 people, with the corresponding facilities for meals and meeting rooms: kitchen, eating room, lounge, seminar room and prayer room. It will be also the place where we, Ursula and Yves, will live. When the new house will be in use, the two existent buildings (our present home Shantivanam and the present meeting room in Patmos) will be subdivided in a flexible and light way to allow the accommodation of people in private spaces (kind of rooms separated one from another by light walls or screens). The meetings will happen in the main house while people who want to spend some more silent time can stay in their room or walk on the land. Prayer will happen mainly in the prayer room in the main house.

The building process has started; the retaining wall under the building has been built and the concrete slab for the ground floor has to be poured soon.

## **3) A solar and bioclimatic building**

**An experimental solar house which illustrates the many ways of solar architecture in another understanding of our relationship with nature:**

Being an architect, it is a valuable opportunity for us to build an experimental solar and bioclimatic house. Solar architecture is not only about windows on the north side; it is also about catching the heat, storing it, giving it back by distribution into the different spaces, regulating, cooling, protecting, etc. The building materials will be renewable ones, as much as possible, and the construction will use simple techniques (craft techniques). Ecology is not only about alternative technology, it is mainly about another relationship between man and nature, or man and matter. It is why the choice for gentle techniques is important. They involve more work and lesser means.

## **4) Building community**

**A way of community life which is inspired by the example of the first Christian communities in order to empower ourselves to implement deeper practices of justice and love:**

We would never build this house if it were only for ourselves, Ursula and Yves, because we have now a home which is big enough for us and which answers our needs. The meaning of this process of building consists in building together a space for our local community. This community is understood in a larger sense; it is the local community, beyond our differences of faith. It must be a space which remains open to all, in the sense that nobody should be excluded and in the limits of what is acceptable for us as inhabitants. By building it, we get involved in building our relationships in the community and in sharing our lives in the way and at the degree we feel is right. We are inspired by the first Christian communities where people shared everything they had. At DCH this prospect of sharing everything can seem very extreme because we are not ready to do so; we believe that everybody must remain free to offer what they want without being under social pressure of giving more. Gift has a meaning only if it is possible not to give. The purpose of community life consists in empowering ourselves for a better way of life according to Christian values: how can we make our local community more alive and more just. It is a spiritual search for a right practice.

## **5) A training for young people**

### **An opportunity to train young people for the practice of alternative techniques, trades and energies:**

The building of an ecological and solar house means the implementation of gentle techniques and the use of renewable energy. It means also another form of architecture and another way to produce it. Therefore it is the opportunity to train young people to use these new techniques. We will look at the design of a solar house: how do we catch the heat, or can we store it or distribute it? how do we use the different spaces in a flexible way, according to the season or to the kind of atmosphere requested for the meeting? how do we build with rammed earth? how do we build a wooden structure where the mastery of physical forces becomes understandable? how do we insulate properly a roof and let it breath and remain cool? How do we implement simple means to transport heat, to use a wall as a heater, to cool a room without consuming any energy? We are certainly not entitled to give official professional certificates but we can provide knowledge and experience; and these knowledge and experience can be, for any young person, the opportunity to start to practice a new trade. In this purpose, we could work with TAFE, with the Uni or with the WWOOFers (Willing Worker on organic Farms) or simply with local people who are interested to take part in the process. The use of a very basic technology allows each of us to master it, to see clearly the impact of it and to remain in harmony with our environment which we learn to respect with its natural laws. This

way of doing values the work and gives pride in regard to a visible result. This is the opposite of the mechanised abstraction of our society, where man is only means for an economic end: profit. The training of young people in a process driven by other values is certainly a necessary answer to the lack of professional opportunities for young people in the Bega Valley.

## **6) Another practice for local economy**

### **Local knowledge, local practices, local sharing for the diversity of our community:**

Ecology means using simple means and keeping good control over them. The best way to do so is to keep it local. Each dollar I pay to a local actor remains in our community and will participate in its further development, while each dollar I pay to any big company finishes in Sydney or in China. It happens the same with our knowledge and the energy we invest in our creative work: will it open new doors for our neighbours and youth, and favour local community, or will it only serve our individual need for comfort and distraction? By developing some local know-how (solar architecture, renewable energy, rammed earth, carpentry) we participate in the diversity of our local community and make it more alive. We give hope to young people because we provide an orientation: life is not only about surviving economically (earning), it is also about creating conditions for a good and human quality of life for ourselves, our neighbours, our children and about searching for means to practice truth. The more we buy local, the more we give opportunities to local people, the more we are empowered to choose together our common future, the more we practice also a sustainable way of life.

## **7) Money**

### **Sharing what we have in order to make it happen:**

We, Ursula and Yves, have a maximum budget of AU\$ 160'000.- to be invested in this building. It is probably the half of what is necessary. We intend to work hard in order to save what we can save financially. We can achieve our aim only if people participate in this process. Something must be clear: it is not for us a way to have people involved in the building of our own house. It is a way to improve the quality of life of our community and to practice a better way of sharing which is not based on money but on common love. The clear understanding of this purpose is a condition to participate

in the experience. It will require from us, Ursula and Yves, a very big effort in providing what needs to be given into this experience: our only capital, a part of our land, the organisation of the whole process, our skills we are ready to share, our hospitality, etc.

## **8) Here and now**

### **Building is a process (here and now) and not a result:**

It is certainly good to build a structure which will allow us to improve the quality of the retreats at DCH. But life is here and now. This quality of sharing of a proper common prayer life has already to be a practice for today without waiting for the result of the building process. How can we be able to concentrate on this principal aspect of the present, while sharing an important effort in building? this form of sharing is in fact the main root of everything we do. It is the core. It is important not to be side tracked, even for good purpose, i.e. even for a good project for future improvements.

## **9) Questions**

### **Ask and answer; help us in saying exactly what you think of this proposal, even if it is negative:**

Everybody is different and everybody has skills they can contribute with. Many people cannot work physically. We understand that very well. But each of us can be involved in a way or another, in a way they choose freely. It is also an important aspect of freedom to have the possibility not to participate.

- Who is interested to take part in it? Who will do what?
- As it is a common process: what do you propose?

We remain of course open to any proposition. We need support to discuss issues; we need any contribution of your experience; we need also some more funds to finish the whole building; we need before all the help of simple Indians who do the work; we need you to tell us what you sincerely think of all that, in negative as well as in positive ways.