

A Greenhouse to die for

During a Native American retreat with the Lokota in the Black Hills in 2015, we were won over by a very innovative project: to build a self-sufficient, year-round greenhouse. The builders, Kim and Frank, are Native Americans who live on a plot of land in the middle of beautiful rolling hills in Vermont. Kim with Jen Leonard (my hostess, fellow enthusiast and kind friend) and I met last year at the retreat and it was then that Kim told me of their dream to build the green greenhouse. It seemed a great idea to encourage people to grow their own food, even in very harsh conditions.



Frank inside



Kim in Entrance

And so we set the ball rolling and the 9.7 by 4.3 meters greenhouse took off. Most greenhouses prolong the growing season but can't make it through freezing winter conditions and so the various heating systems envisaged by Frank are essential. In addition to wind and solar producing heat and electricity, there are rocket stoves. And in-house fertilization with irrigation from the water of large basins for breeding fish – which can be also eaten.



As I realized that the greenhouse was near to Montreal (my birthplace), just a 1½ hour drive, it seemed sensible to go there and then visit Kim and Frank. – along with Jen and her daughters, Kaiya and Aiyana.

We all followed the ups and the downs of building (bad cold weather, lack of help, supply of materials, ill health and so on) and worried that maybe it was too much for Kim and Frank: could they manage and would it ever be finished? But we had faith in Frank's architectural talent.

The visit was planned well in advance and so with the trusty help of Jen who drove and cooked and filled the car with efficient and comfortable camping gear (I had my own tent) and Kaiya and Aiyana who were continual supports, we made it. Just before setting out, I rang Kim and she told me that it was nearly finished and that we would be amazed – and we WERE: the greenhouse is truly beautiful.



The Beautiful Greenhouse

The walls are mostly logs (for insulation and ventilation) set in adobe. There are also wooden walls protected with slates. Windows are on the south side (of course) and the heating pipes from the rocket stoves pass under the growing trays (see Frank's picture above.) There will be a detailed booklet for any one interested.... Just let me know.

We are all waiting to hear about the yield....