

Thank you very much for your interest in the Framing with Roundwood class being offered this May. This letter is being sent to share a few more details of the project, provide expectations from/for students, structure the reservation process for holding your spot, and a few more basic points of clarification.

**The Class Specifics:**

May 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021. Class will run from 8:30-5:30 both days, although on the 1<sup>st</sup> (saturday), students are welcome to stay longer and socialize a bit in the evening. We can have a fire if the weather allows.

**The project:**

This 2021 building season, I will be building a home office for my wife, Ashe. We live in the City of Omaha where we are allowed to build a structure of up to 150 square feet without providing structural drawings to the City of our proposed project, a simple site plan will suffice to obtain a building permit (a basic 2-dimensional drawing of our property and where the proposed structure will be built). The ability to avoid providing structural drawings allows us to build with self-harvested lumber, the key component to the class being offered. If this were any larger of a build, in our municipality, we would need to hire a structural engineer as well as a lumber grader to identify the integrity of the wood. Although I know I'm not harvesting a rotten timber full of mushrooms and lacking structural integrity, the City won't trust my amateur eyes on this. Also, living in a region devoid of structural lumber graders (the closest one I've been able to find lives in GA and will cost several thousand dollars to bring onto a project). As a professional builder of alternative materials, I'm trying to work closely with code officials and planning departments to legitimize these techniques to make them more accessible to everyone, although there are many ways to build "off the radar" of such entities... In Oregon, one of my teachers built exclusively with living roofs to provide camouflage from areal surveillance property inspections. Okay, enough with the bureaucracy of it all, it can become quite tedious.

The frame will not be a traditional Round Wood Timber Frame by definition. This is why the class is titled Roundwood Framing. "Timber Framing" is the art form of avoiding any metal joinery to hold structural members together. In a true to the sense Timber Frame, posts, beams and joists all rely on male to female mortise and tenon joints and are held together with wooden pegs. In this course, we will cut one or two mortise and tenon joints during the class as demonstration, but I'm not qualified to teach a Timber Framing course without receiving more training myself. Instead, we will focus on more easily approachable techniques to fasten members together. We will focus on wood scribing using chalk lines and leveling techniques, compass scribe technique for saddling round rafters onto round beams with proper contact of surface area, and basic male/female cuts using Japanese style pull-saws and wood chisels. Our framing will require the use of structural metal lag bolts to ensure integrity... and although this lacks the grace of a well built Timber Frame structure, the expediency of such a build is not to be discounted.

In addition to the notching and joinery techniques, we will spend ample time focusing on preparation of lumber. Although we will not be felling trees as a class together (this would require a field trip to a more rural setting nearby, for which we will not have time), we will discuss basic felling techniques, harvesting basics, and lumber storage practices. We will have hands on preparation of raw lumber, delving into proper techniques for hand peeling bark with draw knives or spades (apparently pressure washers can be used for bark removal as well but I have no experience with this). I'm also hoping to use Japanese wood preservation techniques of "sho sugi ban" charring with fire for this project. This will give the lumber a darkened color but will add years to its longevity and provides a nice color contrast to the earthen walls that will eventually be plastered onto this frame.

In regards to the physical framing portion of the course, last Fall I broke ground on the structure. As it sits now, it is a 14" wide trench around the perimeter of the indoor footprint. I'm planning to fill this with gravel when the ground thaws to provide a French Drain footer for a stacked limestone stem wall which will serve as the foundation for this structure. I'm hoping the limestone stacking will be done by the start of the workshop (please contact me if you'd like to learn/volunteer any time on the foundation of this structure in March/April), but if it is not, I will at least have poured 6 concrete piers that will serve to elevate our round wood out of the earth and protect it from moisture/rot. The species of wood we are using, Eastern Red Cedar (ERC), is quite rot resistant, and I have several experiments that are several years in, including a yurt foundation and our fence around our yard that you will see during the workshop, that bury these ERC posts directly into the ground. I fill backfill the post holes with gravel rather than soil, but I expect this preserve the lumber for decades... especially if used in conjunction with Japanese charring techniques. For this project, I'm aiming for a 300 year structure in lifespan and am justifying using poured concrete piers for elevating the lumber out of the ground. During the class, we will set the 6 vertical posts of this design onto the piers and attach them with hardware (and a vapor barrier) to keep them firm and footed. From there, we will place 3 beams, two gable ends and a beautiful curved ERC I harvested for use as a ridge beam. The curve will give the roof a turtle shell appearance. From there, we will notch and set rafters, the most time consuming part of the process. We are overbuilding our timber sizes both for aesthetics but also in anticipation of the roof sheathing. The roof for this structure will be a living roof, equipped with soil and plants which makes a much heavier roof (especially during snow storms that drop a heavy live load onto the lumber).

These are the basics of the project. Participants are encouraged to bring their own tools, pencils, tape measures, Japanese style pull saws and Chisels as well as draw knives can be good to bring if you'd like to start getting acquainted with your own set of framing tools... please ask if you would like recommendations for brands. You will be required to bring PPE including safety glasses, hearing protection/ear plugs, gloves, and good work shoes/boots. While on this topic, we will also require K95 or N95 dust masks to be used through the duration on account of both sawdust generated as well as pandemic safety measures. We know masks have become an issue of debate, but they will be required this season on all of our workshop offerings. Other pandemic shake ups include meals. We have traditionally provided meals in the past for workshop participants, but with the Covid Pandemic we are requiring students to feed themselves. We live inside a city, and food delivery is an option as well as nearby grocery stores and restaurants. We can also provide hot water and a small gas stovetop that can be used for heating/preparing basics. We apologize for this inconvenience. We can provide snacks such as granola bars and fruit to help supplement but no buffet style meals this time around as has been standard in the past.

In regards to lodging for those traveling from out of town. Our friends who own property a 5 minute walk from our home have offered up the land as a place for participants to pitch tents should they wish. We live on the North Side of Omaha in the Florence Neighborhood. This makes Hitchcock Nature Center (20 minute drive) the closest car camping alternative... they also have back country camp sites and cheap minimalist cabins available for rent. Of course Air bnb and hotels are always options as well. There may be room to park a camper as well on our friends near by lot, please discuss this with us first to work out logistics.

On a note of class tuition and payment. A sliding scale has been set for this course on the range of \$250-\$450. We know the high end of this scale may sound steep for a 2-day class but we value the course at a cost of \$350. The small class size means prices have been hiked a small amount from where they would have stood otherwise, mostly done as a safety protocol during a pandemic, but this also offers participants a more intimate setting to ask questions and do more hands on activity. The

reason the price is offered on a sliding scale is to subsidize folks who may have less money but are interested in attending. Historically, we have had a good mix of folks paying on the high end and low end which balances things out. In addition, we seek to offer scholarships and sometimes free tuition to a student or two who has interest in attending but is limited in their financial ability to do so. Your paying on the high end of the scale allows us to do this. That said, the scale is offered for a reason, and it is not designed to shame you into paying a higher amount if you find yourself not financially able to. Please provide what you can and if you are in a more desperate financial situation, please contact me directly to speak about possible work exchange or financial scholarship. In order to reserve your space, we are asking for a \$150 down payment, although you may pay in full at the time of enrollment if you'd like to. This down payment will be refundable up until April 17<sup>th</sup>, two weeks before the workshop begins, at which point you will sacrifice the down payment if you drop out... obviously exceptions can be made for emergency situations but we do this to ensure a serious group of participants as well as provide us room to fill your space from a waiting list should you decide you are unable to attend more than 2-weeks prior to the start date of May 1<sup>st</sup>. Payments can be made via paypal or check. Paypal can be sent to [jimschalles@yahoo.com](mailto:jimschalles@yahoo.com) Checks may be sent to Tallgrass Hearth and Home, Care of Jim Schalles, 3117 Craig Ave, Omaha, NE 68112.

At the time of registration, we are asking participants return this questionnaire. The receipt of answers to these questions as well as down payment guarantees your spot will be reserved. Any further questions can be sent to [tallgrassvernacular@gmail.com](mailto:tallgrassvernacular@gmail.com) or contact me by phone/text at 402-981-1554. Thanks for your interest! Looking forward to this class!

### **Questionnaire:**

How did you hear about this course?

What experience, if any, do you have with construction?

What are you hoping to gain from this course?

Do you have any physical limitations that we should be aware of?

Thank you so much for your interest! Get in touch soon, this class with its small size of 5 looks to fill up in short order.

-Jim