Striking a match

Rico Zook
www.i-permaculture.org

roof terrace home, pondicherry, night, 14-1-05

i have noticed since my arrival that indians strike their matches differently than how most americans do. it's done like this: grasping the small box on its's broad side one of the two striking surfaces is offered up. the match is held between the thumb and second finger with the index set snuggly against its tiny base. the match is generally at a slightly less than right angle with the thumb, which is somewhat aligned with the forearm. the motion is quick, hitting the boxes' surface briefly. with a new box this is done at the far end in the direction the match is following. the angle of strike is less than forty-five degrees. i am still working out a more precise figure for this. as this area becomes used the match contacts the surface a little further back and an expressive gesture may be added as it rises away from the surface. the box is flipped and rotated as it empties of matches. the quick motion is finished with the matched cupped in one or two hands depending on what it is being used for. when well executed, as it invariably is, it is a precise and beautiful gesture. it is both functional and styled. it has a very definite practicality. this is what i have come to understand, the difference between how americans and indians strike matches is a layer of economy and societal expectations. in the u.s. we drag the match across much of the striking surface. we expect supersized portions. our country grew up on expansion into a perceived limitless land. we want bigger and better. it's what we pay for. here in india they already knew limitations of area and resources when matches came to be. i would believe that at that time their population was as large, if not larger, than our's is now. indias' land is smaller and its' civilisation vastly older than the united states. it has had much time and necessity to understand and apply the many meanings of the word economy. when i arrived i dragged my matches like all good americans do. what i found out was that this used up the striking surface faster than the matches. significantly. at first i was frustrated and vexed with indias apparent stenuous. it was only after continually watching indian men lighting matches that the genius and directness that can be a part of india became visible. it is said that communication(which preceeds understanding) is only five percent verbal. this true individually, societally, and culturally. it is important for all of us to remember this. it is by observing and considering all of what our senses are giving us do we
begin to understand what the environment and culture are trying to tell us. only in this way will we not run-out of surfaces to strike our matches on.