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Title:

Assessing Adobe in California: Barriers and Opportunities

Abstract:

In 1982, in his *Adobe Codes from Around the Southwest*, Joe Tibbets opined optimistically about the future of adobe construction in California. The state was home to Hans Sumpf Co., one of the largest and most technologically advanced adobe brick manufacturers in the world; an energetic population of contractors and professionals was advancing earth-building technology, San Diego County had adopted its own adobe-specific code, and adobe construction was so firmly engrained in local culture that adobe brick making was a mandatory part of public school curriculum.

Less than thirty years from the publication of Tibbets' book, it is construction technologies such as rammed earth and straw bale construction that enjoy increasingly regulatory recognition and public acceptance, and adobe is almost entirely absent. California's only commercial adobe yard has withdrawn from production; professional activity in the medium is almost entirely limited to historic preservation, and no new adobe structure has been permitted since 2008. It seems increasingly likely that the material that participated in much of California's past may be poised to become history itself.

This paper will assess the current state of adobe construction in California, barriers its use, and opportunities for broader adoption. Topics will include supply issues, professional and contractor capabilities, and market demand. Owing to California's role in the development of national codes, particular emphasis placed on the impact of newly adopted 2010 California Codes including the state's first obligatory green building code (CalGreen), the California Building Code (CBC) and the inaugural IRC-based California Residential Code (CRC).