



**Earthworks:** Standing in the Ruperts' rammed earth house near Peel Forest are, from left, Shane Edwards, Jimmy Cotter and Martin Rupert.  
Photo: JOHN BISSET/FAIRFAX NZ

# Building a new home is dirty work

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What may be South Canterbury's first new earthen house in more than a century is being built at Peel Forest near Geraldine.

Deer farmers Martin and Rikie Rupert have watched their new rammed earth house rise from its concrete foundations over the past fortnight.

Builder Jimmy Cotter said the three-bedroom, earth-walled house was his first in South Canterbury, although he had built 60 others around the South Island.

Cotter used a mechanical rammer to compress 120 cubic metres of soil inside wooden frames.

"It's a very physical process."  
Soil was trucked in from Cardrona because it had proven itself strong and erosion resistant, and because of its "lovely colour".

The rammed earth walls were 450 millimetres thick and cost about 5 per cent more than weatherboard-clad walls.

Clients also had to be sure to plan for sufficient electrical, telephone and internet outlets before the ramming process began.

"You've got to be really

## COB HOUSES

Almost 598 cob houses, which used similar construction methods and materials to rammed earth houses, had been built in South Canterbury by 1878. South Canterbury Museum curator of documentary history Tony Ripplin said the clay and tussock-walled buildings were favoured due to their cheapness and speedy construction, but had faded in popularity by the early 20th century. Examples could still be seen in Pleasant Point and on Timaru's Avenue Road.

organised because you can't put it in after."

Rikie Rupert said she and her husband had been "looking at alternatives" such as straw-bale construction for some time.

"I was looking for something strong."

The couple liked the even temperature rammed earth homes provided, and looked forward to moving in early 2015.