



TALKING WATER NATURE RETREAT · CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE

Cordwood Construction Workshops at Talking Water

Build Your Own Sustainable Retreat!

FROM OUR ARCHIVE

Originally published February 27, 2025. These workshops have already taken place. The details below are preserved as they were first published.

Are you ready to dive into the world of natural building and create something beautiful, energy-efficient, and truly your own? Join us at Talking Water Nature Retreat for our Cordwood Construction Workshops — hands-on, practical experiences designed to empower you with the skills to build your own sustainable haven.

WORKSHOP DATES	September 13–14, 2025 (Saturday & Sunday) September 20–21, 2025 (Saturday & Sunday)
LOCATION	Talking Water Nature Retreat Suck Creek Mountain, Chattanooga, TN
INSTRUCTORS	Bobbie Such & the Talking Water team
CLASS SIZE	Space is limited to 12 participants per workshop.

What You'll Learn

Our workshops are a deep dive into cordwood construction, offering both classroom instruction and hands-on practice. Here's what we'll cover:

1. Principles of Cordwood Construction

- Fundamentals of building with cordwood: wood, glass, and mortar walls designed for beauty, insulation, and sustainability.
- Energy-efficient design principles to ensure your build stays cool in summer and warm in winter.
- Handbuilt construction techniques that allow for creativity and customization.
- Recommended resources to support your cordwood journey long after the workshop ends.

2. Design & Planning

- Creating a realistic timeline and order of operations for your build.
- Design approaches: random/impulsive creativity versus predictable/planned precision.
- Sourcing unique elements like windows, doors, and decorative bottle logs.
- Timber framing essentials, propane torching techniques, and using grab screws, rebar, and wood keys.

- Roof considerations: direction, overhangs, gutters, and meeting insulation code requirements.
- Laying strong foundations—concrete vs. stone—and the importance of moisture control.
- Exterior trenching, French drains, and preparing your foundation to resist water, mold, and leaks.
- Choosing whether to use cement and how to create a barrier layer between stone and wood.
- Navigating permitting and planning for utilities.
- Seasonal considerations: How to work with (or around) cold weather.

3. Log Selection & Preparation

- Choosing the right species of wood for your climate and design.
- Sourcing logs, making straight cuts, and monitoring moisture content.
- Kiln vs. air drying techniques and how to properly store logs.
- Dealing with insects and deciding whether to treat logs.
- Sanding and treating finished logs for durability and aesthetics.

4. Mortar Selection & Application

- Understanding different mortar types and recipes.
- Preparing lime and achieving the right moisture levels when mixing.
- Tuck-pointing techniques to ensure stability and beauty.
- Covering walls daily and re-wetting layers between workdays to maintain integrity.

5. Site Preparation

- Recommended tools and safety gear.
- How to properly store materials to maintain quality.

6. Maintenance

- Annual maintenance tips to preserve your structure.
- Addressing cracks and sealing wood-timber joints to prevent water intrusion.

7. Caveats & Lessons Learned

- Exploring different styles and personal preferences.
- Experimenting with proven techniques and developing your own methods.
- Honest reflections: our mistakes, other people's mistakes, and what we've learned from them.
- When to hire help versus going full DIY.

Why Attend?

- **Hands-On Learning:** Gain practical skills with expert guidance from Bobbie Such and the Talking Water team.
- **Tour a Completed Cordwood Cabin:** See the process in action and discuss creative design possibilities.
- **Community Connection:** Meet like-minded builders passionate about sustainable living.

