

## Andrew Morrison's Advanced Straw Bale Strategies - Day 5

### Baling Without Running Bond



Time and time again, the importance of laying the bales in running bond is reiterated. If the bales are not run in this fashion, i.e. so that the joint created by two bales next to each other is spanned by a solid bale above and below (like bricks), the wall will be weak and unstable. There are, however, situations where running bond is not a viable option and the wall must be stacked one bale directly on top of another. A perfect example of this situation is when two windows are placed close enough to each other in a home that there is only enough room for one width of bale in between them. Stacking seven or eight bales on top of each other is not very strong, especially if they are not

full length bales. In a situation such as this, you must anchor the bales to the frame to increase their stability. Additional blocking may be required within the frame to make this possible. Install the blocking after several courses of bales so you don't create additional notching requirements. The blocking, installed after a bale, can also help secure the wall by squeezing the bale into place.

Another place where a continued running bond can be interrupted is when you need to switch from baling on the flat (strings on top and bottom), to baling on edge (strings on the sides). This is sometimes required if a section of wall needs to be thinner than the section next to it. Rather than running the bales through a band saw or ripping them with a chainsaw, they can be laid on edge. The problem with this, of course, is that they are no longer the same size as the bales on the flat so the running bond cannot continue. Again, the bales at the transition of these two techniques need to be anchored to the frame with additional detailing.



Running bond construction is not possible if the bales are interrupted by something over the entire height of the wall, no matter what it is. To that end, windows that extend to the floor and ceiling, doors, bookcases, and all other interruptions may require extra attention for the bales. In these areas, it may be possible to rely on the strength of the mesh to anchor the bales to the frame; however, if the wall feels weak, it probably is and additional anchoring will be necessary. The bales can be anchored to the frame in a number of ways including twine, strapping, mesh, or additional framing. I have found the simplest method is to use

strapping provided through a company called Cordstrap®. As shown in the picture, it is a series of woven polyester threads incased in polymer webbing. It is very strong and easy to install. The strapping and the ratchet that installs it pulls the bales tight to the frame with little physical effort. Tight bales are essential for a quality plastering job as loose bales make a weak wall and force the plaster to act as a structural bridge in loosely baled areas.

Happy Baling,

Andrew Morrison  
Professional Straw Bale Contractor

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