

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME

In 2001 we undertook the project to build a Cheng Hsin Center in a horse field on a little ranch in the middle of nowhere — in the “hill country” of Texas. The acreage and house were a complete mess. From nothing I started to build the “dojo,” later joined by Kevin Magee, and later Tom Welborn, with some overlap in the middle.

This is a presentation of pictures chronicling the story of the construction, and the immense amount of work it took to get it done. If you’re like me, you have a certain fascination with watching something rise out of nothing.

I started alone in August, 2001. After having decided on what to build and how to build it (out of various different possibilities), I began to clear the land and prepare for the foundation. We had already scheduled the first month-long Retreat for April 2002 and so had only seven months to create a place for it to happen! It was an adventure, and I never really doubted I’d get it done, but we did start at daybreak and often worked into the night with the aid of flood lights strapped to scaffolding.

Enjoy the history!

Peter Ralston



August, 2001, in 110 degree temperatures digging a very long ditch from the well house (up the hill beyond the trees) to the site. It was very rocky, and hard work. This was to lay electric and water lines. Below built boxes for foundation, and brought tank for well.





Water line laid.
Electric waiting on the right side, That much thick electric cable is very heavy. Had to use truck to pull it up the hill.

Stringing layout for foundation.



Laying framing for concrete in exact locations with the center in line and precisely 8 feet a part. With fixed steel brackets to hold 4X6 beams to be sunk into the wet concrete, having to be in a precise line and precisely 8 foot on center. And all has to be put in before the concrete dries!



Kevin arrives! He was in the air over the Atlantic on 9/11/2001, when the towers were attacked with airplanes, so his flight was rerouted to Canada. Took him 5 days to bus his way down here, but finally arrived.

We set up the frames getting ready to pour the foundation.





Concrete truck arrives. We pour and put in brackets.





Tom arrives as we are starting to put up the pillars to begin the basic framing.





Frame continues to grow. Top goes on, all has to be level and lined up.

Then the floor framed, now there was a lot of work! When I ordered the wood just for the floor frame the salesperson commented that I must be building a large structure; I told him this was just for the floor!





Frame goes up, gets filled in
and braced up.





Septic hole is dug, look at the rocks we pulled out of the ground! No kidding. We formed a wall around that side of the field to back fill soil for the leach lines.

Septic tank put in.

Frame looking good.





Tar paper goes up over frame; then siding cut in.

Semi truck brings the factory manufactured trusses to span 44 feet so we wouldn't need pillars in the dojo space.





Trusses
go up.
Must take
care
since
each one
weighs
225
pounds!



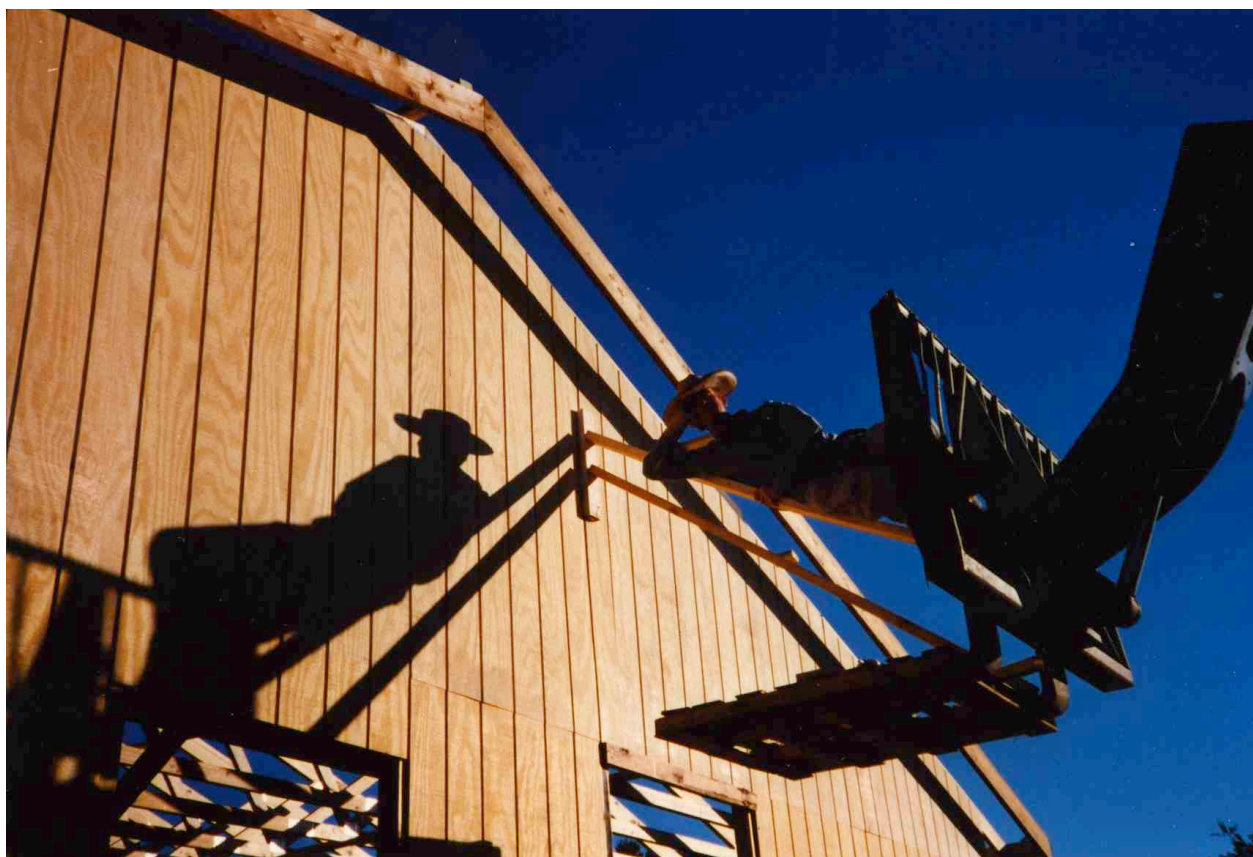


Upper siding going up; machine was helpful.



One place needed to be glued, so Kevin sits on a board to keep pressure on it until it dries.





Took awhile.

Good work if you can get it.

Quite a bit of framing, huh?





Metal siding goes up.

Over 40,000 screws
just to secure it.

But it got done!





Put in the floor panels, framing up the back wall for showers, toilets, and sinks. Doors waiting to go up.

Tom under the floor working on pipes.

Backs of shower stalls.





Shower stalls going in.

This was all done in the winter, no heat, and it was freezing!

Indoor siding going up to create a wall. Working into the night as usual.





Inside getting done.

Hole cut for fan vent.

Tom sticking head out. My foot is on fan.





Building almost done.

Fire: we burned whole forests worth of trees and branches cleared around the ranch. At times we were actually throwing wood up above the head to get onto the pile.

Tom putting in tiles in back room.





Front of house originally.
Tom putting in stone
walkways.



Cutting stones precisely to fit like a puzzle.
Working on a drain and step.



We put in a large metal rectangle at act as a bridge over the drain; Tom muds and stones the top.

An new walkway is laid and pipes laid for drainage.





Kevin and I put in a set of double doors to divide the kitchen from the dining area, which we used for the very first Contemplation Intensive in the fall before the dojo was finished.

This was the first group to come to the center.





Ranch and
dojo from
the air.

Frank at the
local feed
store was a
pilot in
Vietnam
War, and
has his own
plane; so
took Jon up
for a ride.





Front of the house today, painted with walkways done (2013).



Dojo today, with trees.

(All but the last photos courtesy of Laura Ralston.)