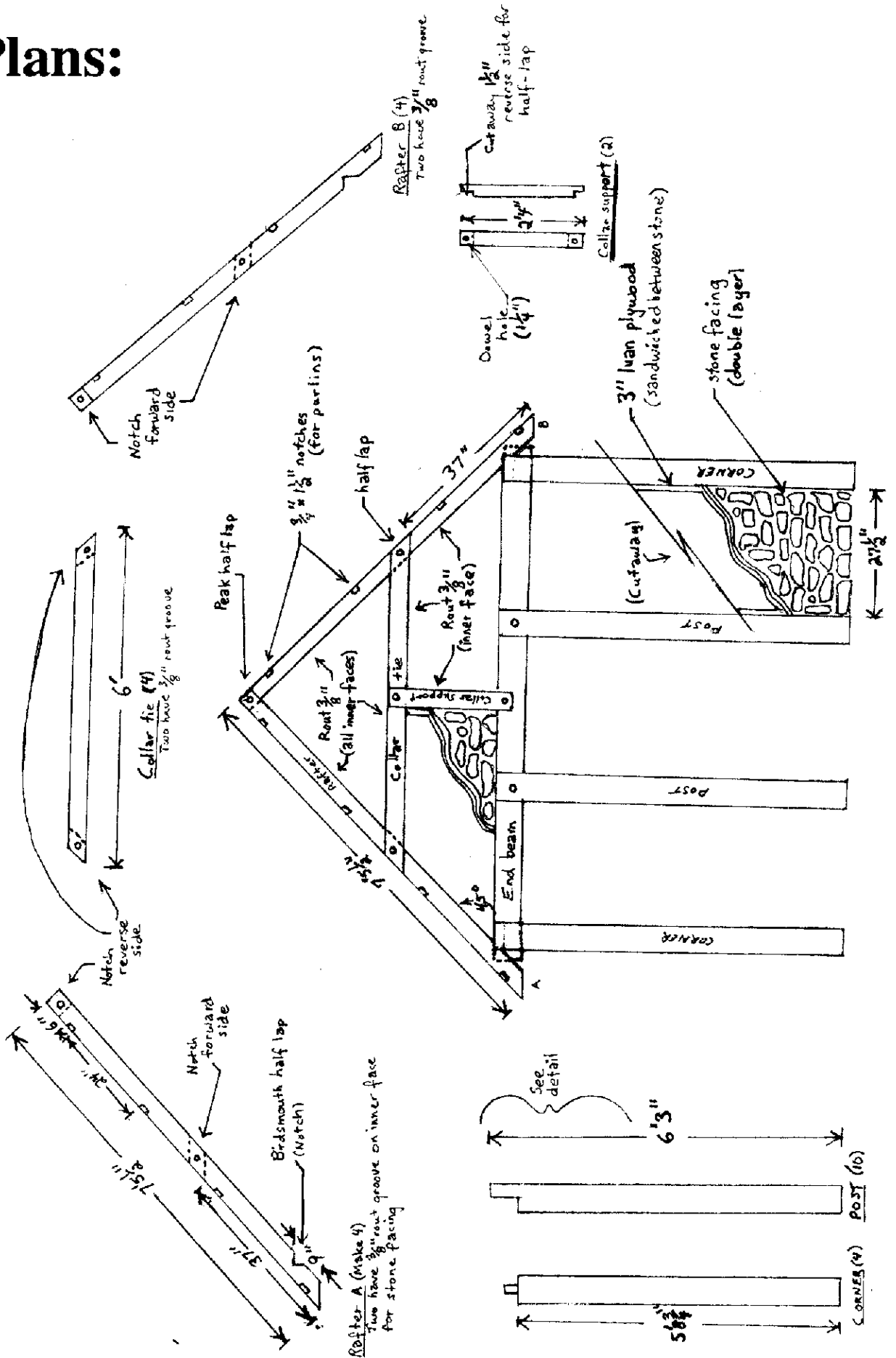


# Plans:



## Portable house (cont.)

of post and beam structures were often rebuilt using the most easily accessible local materials--in our case stone. But our primary motivation was the weight factor. Real wattle and daub walls would be much too heavy to lug around on a trailer.

Styrofoam weighs almost nothing, but requires twice as many pieces, because the stone walls must be double faced--unless you want the inside to look like a playhouse. I suggest that you experiment with various forms of wall panel material. You can scrape together saplings to form the wattle by calling your local telephone company. Find out where they will be clearing for lines, and ask if you can take some of the branches. A friend suggested that a synthetic substance called "Drivit" might work as a wall covering. Mix powdered stain with it if necessary--and maybe some straw or hair. I would appreciate any suggestions.

If you're stuck on stone, look through some books on scene design. You might make the walls out of papier mache and coat them with a waterproof resin. As I mentioned, you will need both a front and back piece for every stone panel, of at least 1" thickness. Use latex liquid nails to glue the panels back to back, and run a 3" wide strip of 1/4" lauan plywood down the edge of each panel. The strip should protrude about 1/2" from the styrofoam.

As a last resort, if you must use styrofoam, carve it with a small hand rasp, not a heat source.

Research the stone laying technique for your period. We were disappointed with the stone work on our cottage. The rubble masonry should have been much smaller and more closely packed. The edges of the stones should NOT disappear into the beams. Also note how the stones should lie around a window frame.

Once you have carved or molded the stones, apply a coat of gray base paint. Add shading and highlights as appropriate to the type of stone. Speckle on black, white, green--whatever, until they look right. As a final touch, stuff some moss into the mortar gaps--preferably on the shaded side of the house.

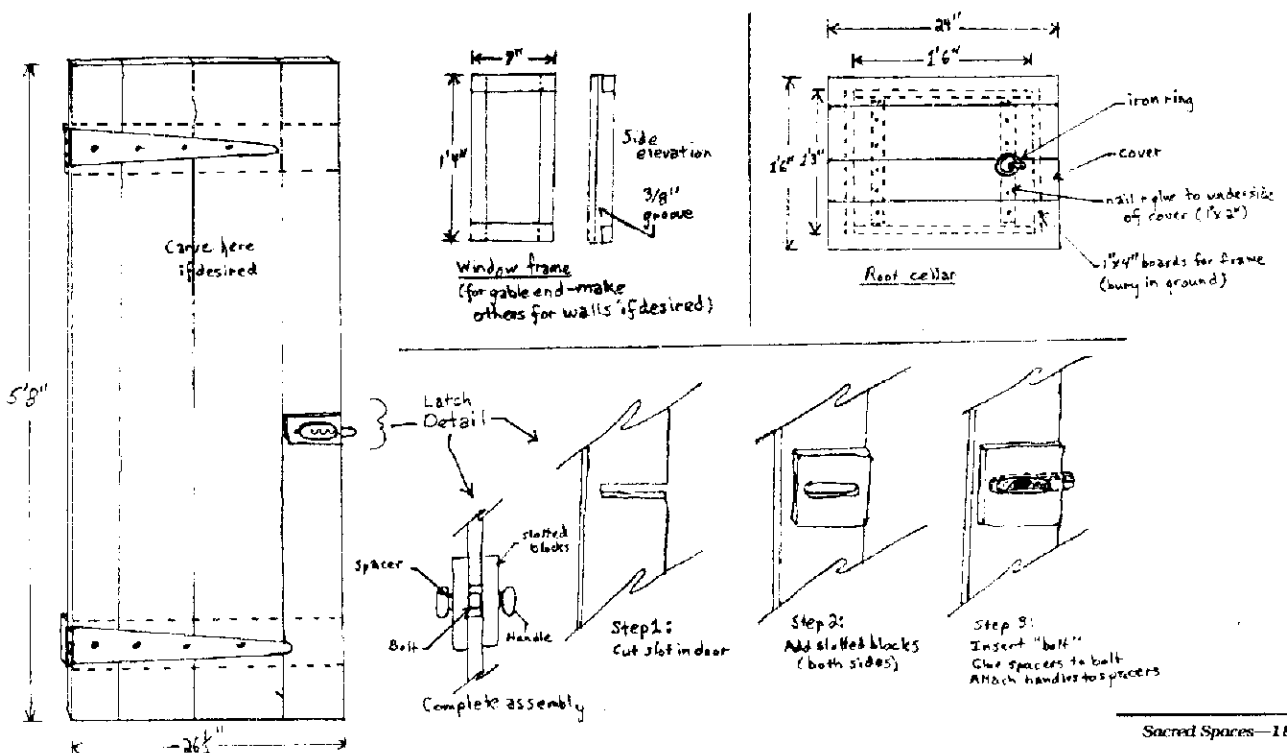
When the walls and panels are finished, first insert the gable end panels into the rafter sections and erect the roof. You will need to pull one post forward to insert two wall panels. If you can think of a solution to this difficult insertion process, please let me know.



Carving detail

### The windows and door

Build the windows out of 2"x4"s so they fit together with half-lap joints. Cut a hole in your stonework the size of the window and fit lauan strips between the stone facings as you did on the edges of the panels. Now rout a 3/8" groove around the entire outside edge of your window frames. Place the sides of the window into the completed opening, then twist in the top and bottom. It should fit snugly.



Build the door as shown from yellow pine or another cheap form of planking. Glue and nail or screw boards across the inner face of the door as shown in sketch.

You may either use real strap hinges, or make false ones (as I did). To create falsies, cut the desired shapes from 1/4" lauan. Sand them until the edges are smooth. Now bang the edges with a hammer to leave hammer marks. Paint them flat black, and glue them to the door. Add sawed off cut nails to complete the illusion. Use a standard door hinge (with removable pin) to attach the door to the appropriate post. You may want to add carving to the face of your door as I did.

### ***The thatching***

Does it leak? Well, yes and no. At our trial run at Pennsic last year, it leaked like crazy during the first downpour. After the straw became wet and expanded, however, it kept us dry for the rest of the week--while many of our neighbor's tents failed.

Let me be honest. Our thatching LOOKS period (in a primitive, early Saxon kind of way) but relies on some modern tricks. An accurate reconstruction thatching job would be very expensive and difficult to transport.

Ideally, you want to use wheat straw taken straight from the field--before it gets chopped into little pieces and baled. Unfortunately, we couldn't get any unbaled straw--so we bought some 36" wide chicken wire with 2" holes, and wove in short bunches of straw in straight courses starting at the bottom of each section of wire. We just stuck the end of the bunch in one hole and pulled it up through the hole above. This process took about 140 man-hours (to complete all 7 of the panels). You will need to make the peak panel by starting your courses in the center and working out toward both edges.

Be sure to cut the wire for the panels several inches long, and make it overhang the ends of the house. It tends to shrink in length as you add straw. You may want to weave the straw onto the wire using a natural twine to avoid shedding.

Attach open eye-hooks to the rafters, just above the purlins. These will hold your thatching in place on the roof.

When transporting, roll the panels into tight bundles, with the wire facing out. These take up lots of space, but they really add a period feel to the structure. The wire disappears in the dark interior.

### ***Other accessories***

Furnish your cottage to suit your period. You may also want to add a root cellar (see sketch). It's

just a box buried in the floor. Cover the dirt bed with small rocks. Then fill it with ice and use it as a cooler for your period vessels.

You also will need a ladder to help when erecting the rafters and laying on the thatching. If you build your own, be sure to make the steps from hardwood, not pine. Try to salvage an old ladder and rebuild it, if you don't want to pay top dollar for hardwood round stock.

If you want a place to hang garb inside the cottage, insert some extra dowels into the top plates. You may want to make some period candle-holders to hang from the interior collar ties.

Well, that's it. Undoubtedly, I have left some aspects of the construction hazy, but use your own creativity and research to fill in the blanks.

### ***References***

(1) Cruikshank, Charles Greig. *Henry VII and the Invasion of France* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 44.

(2) Audouze, Francoise and Olivier Buchsenschutz. *Towns, Villages and Countryside of Celtic Europe*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992)

**Editor's Note:** *If you want to acquire a portable house instantly, I'm selling the one described in this article for \$1000, approximately the cost for the materials and the 5'x8' trailer. I only have one, so it's first come, first serve. The house is sitting in a new trailer (purchased last year) at Cooper's lake campground. The deal includes: trailer, frame, roof, walls, thatching, pegs, ladder, carved door, 2 chandeliers, root cellar, a small wooden barrel and some moss. I will consider a payment plan between now and Pennsic-- Call weekday mornings between 9:00 and 11:00 EST (919) 757-6717--Arlof.*



**Interior of the cottage, showing tuam and garb hung on pegs**