

## Environment

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October 1, 2009

### Firm solves space problem by tearing a hole in the floor

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When Integrus Architecture decided to move into a new Seattle office, it wanted a space that made it easy for designers to collaborate. The finished product just received LEED gold certification.

Integrus bought the 32,100-square-foot Union Trust Annex in 2008 after selling its old office building, the 1925-era Bakun Building on Alaskan Way, to the Washington State Department of Transportation.

The annex is on South Main Street in Pioneer Square, across from Occidental Park. Integrus occupies 11,200 square feet on the first floor and leases out the upper levels.



Photos by Katie Zemtseff [\[enlarge\]](#)

**David Van Galen of Integrus said putting “a huge hole in the first floor” was the only solution that really brought people together.**

David Van Galen, design principal in the Seattle office, said the old building was sold in 2007 after the state decided it would need to be demolished to replace the Alaskan Way Viaduct.

It took Integrus nine months to design a new space and Kirtley-Cole Associates took six months to construct it before Integrus moved there in March of 2008. The renovation cost about \$1 million, Van Galen said.

The first floor was once the Klondike Gold Rush Museum but sat vacant for some time. The basement had been a restaurant in the 1970s, but had generally remained vacant since the 1980s.

Van Galen said the firm wanted a more sustainable and energy-efficient space that was also a better working environment. “In our old space, we were really confined. We were kind of isolated and segregated and chopped up, and now we all flow together and work really well.”

The team looked at a variety of design options before hitting on the idea of connecting the basement and the first floor. Van Galen said tearing “a huge hole in the first floor” was the only solution that really brought people together.

The team also extended and reworked a small mezzanine that the museum had used in the back

to create a three-tiered open space with a 30-foot ceiling. There are no cubicles, with staffers organized according to project. When a project is completed, people move to a new space.

On the lower level, the area surrounding the open space includes a lunch room, print area, library and storage. The first floor has conference rooms, the reception area and a welcoming space that is used to display Integrus' work but could serve as an art gallery in the future.

Van Galen said the office helps illustrate the architectural process for clients as they walk past working architects to get to conference rooms. "We made the process of architecture and what we do accessible and real to our clients."

Opening up the space provided daylight and views on all three levels. Van Galen said it also increased the value of leasable space because an open, renovated area is more valuable than a basement used for storage.



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**Wood joists became stair treads, as well as wall finishes, paneling and furniture.**

The team could have picked a new building, but Van Galen said Integrus is drawn to older buildings. The firm's Spokane office is in a renovated Carnegie library. "Although we have a really modern aesthetic, we've always been really intrigued and respectful of what's come before."

Another focus was reusing and recycling materials. When the team opened the floor, it poured a concrete slab to stabilize the wall and then removed wooden joists whose imprints can still be seen on the walls. The joists became stair treads, structural members, wall finishes, paneling and furniture. "We had very little wood left when it was all over," Van Galen said.

The team also found a number of swinging doors in the basement. They were turned into sliding partitions. Furniture was also moved from the previous office and is organized in new work stations.

Because the space had been a museum, most of the windows had been blacked out and brick walls covered. The team exposed the windows and brick, creating an aesthetic that Van Galen said is "simple and raw." Other materials used include raw aluminum, painted steel and rough wood. Colors are white and gray.

Integrus bought and designed the space during the real estate boom. Because it works primarily on educational projects that were funded before the downturn, Integrus has not struggled with layoffs and cutbacks.

Van Galen said the company has been very fortunate. The space was designed with room for four more people and the company has filled those positions in the past year and a half, growing from 25 to 30 employees.

Integrus is busy now, he said but next year or the year after is when the company will begin seeing the effects of school bonds that did not pass last year. The educational market, Van Galen said, lags behind the private sector. "There's a lot less work out there to chase than we normally do."

This is Integrus' first LEED gold project, though it has worked on LEED projects before. Johnny Hong, project architect, said the greenest aspects of the building are its urban location near multiple modes of transportation and its reuse of materials. "We tried not to use many new materials and to reuse a lot."

Other green features include a high efficiency HVAC system with displacement ventilation; Energy Star appliances and electronics; low flow, high efficiency plumbing fixtures; motion-activated lighting controls with high efficiency light fixtures; low VOC emitting materials and furniture systems; and low VOC emitting carpet, paint, adhesives and laminates.

"The big calling card is taking a space that had been vacant and unused... and turning it into a real asset for our firm," Van Galen said.

Integrus will hold an open house Nov. 5 to celebrate its LEED gold rating. The event is open to the public, coincides with Pioneer Square's First Thursday Art Walk and will run from 4 to 7 p.m.



**The greenest thing about the project: turning a vacant space into an asset.**

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