



Rice Fergus Miller is targeting LEED platinum for its new offices. The architects say the green systems will save \$23,000 a year in energy costs.

Architects turn old Sears into new HQ

By LYNN PORTER
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In 1943 in downtown Bremerton, Sears built an underground appliance maintenance facility with parking on top near its main store. In the late 1940s, it added two floors and a mezzanine, which served as Sears Tire Center.

When the department store moved to Kitsap Mall in nearby Silverdale in the early 1980s, the building was left vacant and has been since.

Now Bremerton-based Rice Fergus Miller Architecture & Planning is transforming the roughly 30,000-square-foot structure at 275 Fifth St. into its headquarters. The firm is in office space nearby.

Tim Ryan Construction of Poulsbo started the \$3 million renovation last week. Other team members are: Ecotope,

Gerber Engineering, PCS Structural Solutions and Westsound Engineering.

The 38-person firm will move into the building next April. It will have room for growth as well as 2,000 square feet of retail space and 1,200 of office space to lease.

Besides a 22-stall underground garage, the structure has a full first and third floors, and a recessed mezzanine in between.

It has a concrete shell and wood frame interior, with exposed wood joists that make a "really nice pattern across the ceiling," said Senior Associate Jeremy Southerland.

Other old elements will also be retained, including large wood columns and a clerestory monitor on the upper floor that brings in light. In this "collision of new and old," as Partner Steve Rice puts it, a freight elevator cab screen will sepa-

rate forum space from the staff kitchen and Douglas fir from the ceiling will be recycled to become work tables.

"We're using all kinds of interesting things," Rice said. "We look at stuff and say 'what can we do with this?'"

Part of the structure's attraction is that it's kind of raw, Southerland said.

"The building is really deceiving from the outside because the inside is beautiful," he said.

Modern elements will be added: new windows, a balcony off the front, and a glass and aluminum window wall system. A large opening will be cut in the center of the building and a staircase installed, connecting the lower and upper floors. Conference rooms, a materials library, kitchen and studios will be added.

A "wall" will be installed that can be moved up and down in the staircase opening to divide space for multiple meetings



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or become a projection screen or pin-up surface.

Wood removed for the opening will become a feature wall in the entry.

The project is targeting LEED platinum. Green elements include energy-efficient windows and doors; rooftop rain water collection for toilets and irrigation; super-insulated envelope; highly reflective roofing; bicycle storage with locker rooms and showers; no- or low-toxic finishes; heat recovery ventilation; and efficient lighting combined with daylighting controls. The structure will also be pre-wired for solar panels to be installed later.

Green elements are expected to save \$23,000 a year in energy costs, Southerland said.

But the greenest thing is the building itself, he said.

“From a sustainability standpoint, the most sustainable thing you could possibly do is re-use an existing building,” he said.

Rice started the firm in 1987. It has outgrown space it owns and leases in two

buildings downtown, said Rice, noting “if I want to talk to any one of 10 members of the firm I have to walk across the street to do it.”

RFM has looked for a new headquarters downtown for years, but prices were too high, Rice said. The economic downturn has made “quite a bit more available,” he said.

In February of 2009 a partnership of RFM’s three partners, Rice, Mike Miller and Dave Fergus, and their wives paid local investors \$787,500 for the Fifth Street building, the firm said.

Despite its initial ramshackle appearance, the space has many positives: three times RFM’s present space, great light, heavy timber framing, lofty interiors and parking, Rice said.

Getting an appraisal for a vacant building in a down market can be a problem but Rice said things turned out well partly because of the value the LEED-certified appraiser placed on future green improvements and consequent lower operational costs.

RFM specializes in design for hospital-

ity, senior housing, health care, and fire and emergency services. It also designs office and other public projects.

Rice said the firm has doubled in size since Mike Miller came onboard in 2002. Under his leadership, the firm got into senior housing and health care.

RFM has grown in the recession, largely because of those practice areas and its fire and emergency services projects, he said. In 2009 the firm closed an office in Minneapolis that it had been opened for a specific project that was put on hold.

The community has supported RFM over the years and vice versa, said Rice. Remaining downtown, which has seen bad times over the years, is a way to continue to support the community, he said.

“We always felt if we could stay downtown and help bring it back that would be wholly satisfying as a layer on a career,” he said.

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