

## ***New Chapter for Peter Miller Books***

Lynn Porter, Daily Journal of Commerce, 11 April 2013



The store sells architecture and design books, as well as supplies and design products. "There aren't three of these stores in the whole country, and this town has managed to keep one of them propped up," says Miller, even with Amazon.com in its backyard. Photo by Lynn Porter

Peter Miller Books is moving after 25 years in the landmark Terminal Sales Building near Pike Place Market.

Starting April 21, the Seattle design bookshop will begin relocating four blocks north to a building owned by the architectural firm Suyama Peterson Deguchi at 2326 Second Ave. Reopening in the new space is planned for May 1 or sooner.

Peter Miller said the lease is up on the 1,700 square feet his bookstore occupies at 1930 First Ave. in the Terminal Sales Building. He said the landlord, Seattle-based Martin Smith Inc., was "very nice," but believes it can get more revenue from the space.

"They have higher dreams for this space than I can afford," he said.

Miller said Mickey Smith, principal with Martin Smith Inc., made a great effort to find a new home for the bookstore in his other Seattle buildings "but we were never able to get something to work out."

Smith did not return a call from the DJC for comment.

Peter Miller Books sells architectural and design books, as well as supplies and design products. It will occupy about 900 square feet in the new location.

Besides housing Suyama Peterson Deguchi, the building is also home to the firm's retail showroom for architectural furniture, lighting and accessories, and a nonprofit art gallery called Suyama Space.

Miller said his bookstore should benefit from those other uses, and he is grateful to George Suyama and his partners for inviting him to lease the space.

Peter Miller Books sells everything from books to drafting pencils, to Aalto stools, to home products by Alessi and Iittala.

The books focus on building, landscape, urban, product and graphic design.

Looking for a book on Brutalism? You can find it here, along with “Tom Kundig: Houses 2,” “Food for the City — A Future for the Metropolis,” “Digital Landscape Architecture,” “The Architect Says: Quotes, Quips, and Words of Wisdom,” “American Arts & Crafts” and “Graphic Design Process.”

Miller said his customers have very specific tastes. Pointing to books on graphic design, he said, “There are people who have come here for 20 years who shop only in these two cases.” Others buy only architecture books.

Loyal customers have sustained his shop, Miller said, even with Amazon.com in its backyard.

“Really. Think of it,” he said. “There aren’t three of these stores in the whole country, and this town has managed to keep one of them propped up.”

Miller said both his customers and his store were hurt by the economic downturn.

“In that sense I am sorry to be leaving right now because I could have used a couple of years to recover from the recession,” he said.

Along with books, Miller offers his take on just about everything: politics, food, soccer, life.

Miller said he senses more optimism since the presidential election. “That seemed to allow the country to breathe — at least the country I like — to breathe and architecture to begin to restore itself,” he said.

Miller holds a master’s in education and English from Harvard. In the mid-1960s he taught English at a high school in Cambridge, Mass., and founded the Cambridge Multi-Educational School for High School Dropouts, also nicknamed “Trout Fishing in America” after the Richard Brautigan book.

He moved to Seattle in the early 1970s, and started buying and remodeling houses. Miller also did carpentry, including the tenant improvements for The Elliott Bay Book Co. in Pioneer Square.

From 1973 to 1980, he co-owned Montana bookstore in Seattle’s Wallingford neighborhood.

In 1980, Miller opened a design bookstore in Pioneer Square after developing an interest in the subject and an appreciation for design books. The store moved to First Avenue and Stewart Street in 1984, before landing at Terminal Sales in 1988.

Miller said he worried about renting a space that was “twice as big and twice as tall” as the one he was leaving and concerned that there were few other businesses (Baby & Co. and Labuznik restaurant) on what he thinks is now one of Seattle’s great blocks.

“The interesting thing was in 1988 no one wanted this space,” he said.

Miller’s store has been there long enough that he can recall a hellacious snowstorm on Dec. 18, 1990. He and Howard Schultz, now chairman and CEO of Starbucks, stood in his doorway and watched as the flakes began to fall. “We both said, ‘This is going to be hard on our Christmas sales.’”

Miller, now 67, has immersed himself in the design community. He has served on the Seattle Planning Commission, and was named an honorary member of AIA Seattle.

He is married to architect Colleen Miller.

George Suyama, partner with Suyama Peterson Deguchi, said Miller is “the single most important person for the design community in the region.”

“There’s no other place where you can go to not only get information about architecture, but to get a dose of philosophy about life,” Suyama said. “He’s something that should be nurtured and supported — definitely.”

The Terminal Sales Building was constructed in 1923 and is a Seattle landmark. It was purchased in 2008 by principals of Martin Smith Inc. and Legacy Commercial of Bellevue, headed by Tom Ellison. They paid \$16.3 million for the 11-story building, which has about 90,000 square feet of rentable space. The new owners spent several million on upgrades and bought a nearby garage for tenants and others.

Mickey Smith told the DJC in March of 2011 that the building was 80 percent full when his group purchased it. According to OfficeSpace.com, 499 square feet is now available, and the gross rental rate is between \$25 and \$30.

Susie Detmer, a senior director with Cushman & Wakefield/Commerce Real Estate, said vacant retail spaces in the area tend to fill up. “It does help that it is near Pike Place Market,” she said.

Detmer said Target’s recent move downtown and H Mart grocery store on the way helps expand the whole retail area, and that benefits buildings nearby.

Miller said he expects to continue selling books for a long time.

“I have to go another 25 years because that’s what I do,” he said. “My job is always to stay, but if you set me somewhere else, I’ll stay there.”