



Suyama Peterson Deguchi Architects revitalizes the long-vacant National Building in Seattle.



MICHAEL O'NEILL/EMPRESSOR

A NEW FACILITY BRINGS TOGETHER SEATTLE'S ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN ORGANIZATIONS

# Perfect Union

For the first time in Seattle history, four architecture and design associations have come together under one roof as the Center for Architecture and Design. While the four organizations—AIA Seattle, Seattle Architecture Foundation, AIA Washington Council, and Design in Public—are still operating independently, they are sharing office, exhibit, and community meeting spaces in a renovated storefront space downtown, close to Pioneer Square. Local Seattle firm Suyama Peterson Deguchi

Architects, led the design.

One challenge was finding the right sized space that was also walkable and within an appropriate price range. After looking at multiple possibilities, the Center settled on a ground floor space in the 1905 brick National Building. The 4,500-square-foot Center rests on the southeast corner of Western Avenue and Spring Street—just a couple blocks from the waterfront. The space stood empty for a long time. At one point it housed an Italian restaurant owned by Seattle

Mayor Ed Murray.

The Center is not the first storefront space for AIA Seattle. In fact, AIA Seattle was the first AIA chapter in the U.S. to take a storefront space, said executive director Lisa Richmond. Before the move to the Center, AIA Seattle operated out of a street level office on 1st Avenue near Pike Place Market for over thirty years. Later, Design in Public, an AIA Seattle strategic initiative founded in 2011, started working in their office too. By then, the 1,900-square-foot space was getting cramped. (A high-end cigar shop is expected to move into that space soon.)

For the Seattle Architecture Foundation (SAF) a move was imminent, as the building that housed their old office down-

town—Rainier Square—will soon be demolished to make way for a close to 60-story boot-shaped tower designed by NBBJ. (Full disclosure: I volunteer at SAF.) The University of Washington owns the land under Rainier Square and is developing the project. The curved shape of the planned tower is expected to help preserve views and sight lines of the neighboring 1977 Mironu Yamasaki Rainier Tower—the downtown Seattle building famous for its inverted pyramid base. (Should the big earthquake hit, some say Rainier Tower may be one of the most stable buildings, due to a lower than normal center of gravity).

The fourth organization, AIA Washington Council, had the farthest move, relocating

from Olympia, the Washington State capitol.

"We're really excited to be part of this project. It's an opportunity to connect with the public more," said Stacy Segal, executive director of SAF. The Center hopes their professional and public shared home will help facilitate greater collaboration and dialogue between designers and the public. Seventy percent of the Center is open to the public.

The program allows for a mix of uses. There are gallery spaces at the front, a multi-purpose homosote-paneled meeting room with pivoting panels for flexibility and soundproofing, a smaller conference room, an office area with large desks, a kitchen and work area, and more. Suyama Peterson Deguchi provided pro bono services. Their major design goals were many: to get the public excited about design, allow for ample spaces to feature rotating displays, to celebrate existing materials found in the historic building (aged wood and concrete slabs), to maximize natural lighting, and most challenging, flexibility.

"We also wanted to have the least possible disruption to the wonderful heavy timber column and ceiling structure and still

provide for the complex program," explained Ric Peterson, a partner at Suyama Peterson Deguchi. "Instead of dividing the space, the new parts are fashioned as flexible elements within the entire space."

Over the next ten years, the Center expects to grow incrementally and hopes to attract and connect not just built environment professionals, but also designers in other fields, policy makers, and the general public.

The Center relied on \$1.2 million in cash and in-kind donations from a mix of corporate, individual, and foundation support.

The grand opening was the first week of March, and the Center is hosting its third exhibition April 21–June 11. *Living Small: Ideas for Living in the City* looks at the impact of urban growth and density on micro-housing.

In its programming, the Center is integrating more design disciplines outside of architecture that are exploring urban issues. "Seattle is a little below the radar," said Richmond. "We want the public see the very significant and important role good design plays in our economy and our city."

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