

A building renewed: At The Factory, dental tool maker recycled into condominiums

By PAMELA J. PODGER of the Missoulian, <http://missoulian.com/>

This article from the Missoulian describes a variety of ways of how construction and demolition materials were used in a specific project in Missoula, MT. The highlighted information shows examples of how some of the materials were used.



Michael Gallacher of the Missoulian

The Factory, new energy-efficient, mixed-use condominiums by developer Jim Pelger at the corner of Sixth and Ronan streets in Missoula, uses salvaged, recycled and existing material in the construction.

At The Factory, edgy mixed-use condominiums under construction in central Missoula, little goes to waste.

A worker pulls nails from tongue-and-groove boards from the original Miltex Dental Tool building on Sixth and Ronan streets, across from a bike path and the railroad tracks.

Massive steel beams, which were salvaged from the defunct White Pine Sash mill, stand like sentries in the front of the building. A Chicago Bridge & Iron plaque from 1924 is stamped on the right beam. A pile of roof panels fashioned at the Bonner mill sits in the parking lot where they await reuse.

Developer Jim Pelger, who is building The Factory, says he enjoys the challenge of figuring out how to use existing materials on the footprint of an original building for his new projects.

"It is just a passion for me," Pelger said. "I think we're just using and consuming a lot more than we can continue to produce."

As the green building movement sweeps across the country, what actually constitutes "green" is being debated among developers and environmentalists alike.

The Missoula Building Industry Association's year-old green building guidelines will be expanded statewide in June at the annual convention of the Montana Building Industry.

Energy efficiency, indoor air quality, native landscaping, water conservation, recycling and reducing job site waste are some of the guidelines.

Renovation and demolition account for about 90 percent of the construction debris in landfills each year, according to the Building Materials Reuse Association in Pittsburgh.

Paul Shively, senior regional representative of the Sierra Club in Missoula, said green building has reached "a critical mass" across the nation. People who are concerned about global warming and the environment see their homes as a good starting place for conservation.

"I think a consumer has to be careful not to be 'green washed' by something," he said. "But, at the same time, corporations and contractors are seeing people want energy-efficient buildings. I think this is just a response to consumer demand."

Pelger said at his Rattlesnake Investments, they've approached the design and transformation of the 1920s-era building into The Factory with energy efficiency and sustainability in mind.

There will be two commercial condominiums on the ground floor and five residential condominiums on the upper floors. A rooftop terrace will be a common area for residents, Pelger said.

The units range from 1,400-square-feet to 1,600-square-feet and are listed from \$310,000 to \$325,000. The first ones are scheduled for completion by early June.

Studio 2, a hair salon, moved from downtown to one of the commercial condominiums at The Factory on April 21. The second condo is available for lease or sale for about \$285,000.

Keri Nielsen, one of three co-owners of Studio 2, said the commercial condo gives them control over their location and investment in their space. And they avoid having to renegotiate a lease every two years.

"This is in the center of Missoula and our clients come from all over the city," she said. "It was a nice spot for us with easy access and free parking."

Pelger said he's aware of the risk of building these condos, given the slowdown in the national economy. But he believes there is a market for green building for condos in Missoula even with the market's downshift.

"I think going to the extent of incorporating reclaimed materials into the project makes it very appealing, but we're sort of a guinea pig," he said.

Jeff Swarens, construction superintendent on the project, said nearly everything has been reused, recycled or donated.

"My main goal was to keep stuff out of the landfill and reuse as much as possible," Swarens said. "To truly recycle a building, you have to put in a lot of time and thought."

Pelger said the project follows some of green building guidelines, but he isn't trying to achieve certification from Energy Star, the National Association of Home Builders, or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED. The criteria for some of these programs are broad.

"There is a lot of buzz about certification of green building right now, but you see the spirit of the certification being manipulated for marketing," Pelger said.

He's had past experiences with green building in other mixed-use projects in Missoula at Kensington Lofts and Regent Place.

"Green building has been evolving for me. My interest in it has increased, and on this project I've become obsessed on how much we can reuse," Pelger said.

He pulls aside a tarp and points to a pile of pine and fir boards that will be fashioned into kitchen cabinets as well as stair treads and other pieces of stairways.

After the nails are removed from 2,500 square feet of tongue-and-groove boards, which were formerly part of the building's roofing material, it'll be reused as flooring.

They've reintegrated some of the original building's concrete, wood studs, trusses and roof panels.

Any trees removed from the project were ground into mulch or cut to firewood sizes.

As the original dental factory was demolished, Pelger said they found dental picks in the soil and found yellowed copies of the Missoulian during the early years of President Kennedy's administration tucked behind the walls. They also discovered a note of despair over money woes by a former factory owner, who eventually solved the problem and kept the factory operating for another 20 years.

Excess materials were given away, including part of the existing roof membrane to individuals and to the Missoula Children's Museum. Most of the original concrete blocks were removed and donated for reuse to Home Resources, a local nonprofit organization that resells used building materials and other goods.

Swarens said they used about half of the original insulation at The Factory and advertised some was available for free last summer.

Initially, couples came by on several weekends and examined the old insulation, but the wives rejected it because it was too dirty and itchy.

Swarens laughs, describing how the men returned later in the week, without their wives, and collected it.

Pelger said he prefers to focus on infill projects, even as other developers push out to Reserve Street as Missoula grows westward.

"We prefer to take a blighted building and work with the existing footprint and materials."

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