

Residential Designers

Sustainable lifestyles often begin within the home, and homeowners are finding it steadily easier to incorporate green features into their individual living spaces. The following firms attempt to green every part of the building process, and through smaller floor plans, sustainable energy systems, and client education, they set the precedent for green living.



Above: Local artists and reclaimed building materials provide ambiance for this warehouse that was renovated into a new bar and gallery.

Left: Remodel of a backyard guest house on Lake Washington in Seattle.

STRATA ARCHITECTS

Amoreena Miller leads firm in thoughtful, sustainable remodels with client-centric services

BY MEGHAN BOYER

AT A GLANCE

LOCATION:
SEATTLE, WA

FOUNDED:
2006

2009 REVENUE:
\$100,000

CREATING LARGE-SCALE PROJECTS AND NEW INFRA-structure are not the only ways to make a positive impact on a community. Smaller projects can make big impacts, as well—a fact Amoreena Miller at Strata Architects knows well. The goal of her Seattle-based architecture and urban-design firm is to get people to rethink their spaces and consider remodeling them for contemporary needs without losing all of the existing structure or materials.

Reworking a home or commercial space, “saves a lot of embedded energy and reduces waste, and it helps to reuse what is in place. It’s great for the community,” says Miller, who is the founder and principal of Strata Architects and a LEED-accredited professional.

Seattle has wonderful housing stock, but Miller says that many homes are slightly smaller than what consumers are used to living in, and some want additional space in their homes. Thoughtful remodels help bring additional comfort to homes, and the additional space often is easy to incorporate into an existing plan, she says.

Strata Architects completed 22 projects in 2009, and has completed roughly 100 since its inception in 2006. Projects range in size from small-room remodels to larger endeavors that include adding multiple green aspects—such as solar panels or geothermal heating systems—to an existing structure. The client base is split between commercial businesses and residential homes in the Seattle area, Miller says.

One of Strata’s recent remodeling project in Walla Walla, Washington incorporated multiple green elements into a 100-year-old residence while maintaining its historic style. The remodel received three out of five stars in Washington’s Built Green environmental building program. The firm incorporated such environmentally friendly aspects as geothermal heat, energy-efficient appliances, and a water-collection system into the home. In creating a two-story addition to the home, it also reused windows and material from an enclosed porch to reduce waste. The project recycled 97 percent of such materials as cardboard, lumber, and roofing from the total waste stream, totaling 249,791 pounds.



It's very important to listen to the client and be able to sit back and try to understand not just what they are saying, but how they want to use the space and their ultimate goal.

—Amoreena Miller, Founder & Principal



Deciding how to remodel a space involves communicating with clients. "It's very important to listen to the client and be able to sit back and try to understand not just what they are saying, but how they want to use the space and their ultimate goal," Miller says, adding that sometimes, clients may think they know what they want, but the most appropriate solution for a space may be something entirely different from what the client originally envisioned.

Miller also stresses the importance of meeting clients face-to-face to understand their needs, because then it is possible to view their reactions and body language when discussing potential projects. Her personal attention has resulted in receiving 100 percent of the firm's work from client referrals.

Miller recently met with a client who wanted to add a garage to his property. After talking with the client about his family, discussing how he wanted to use the additional space, and viewing his property, Miller realized the right project for the client was the addition of a small, backyard-cottage building.

At the time, Seattle had not yet passed the zoning change that allowed for such a structure, so Miller had to tell the client that she believed the cottage was the best solution in the long run, though it meant she had to put off the work for five months until the city passed the zoning change. "The right thing to do was not take the job at that time but wait," she says. Now that the project is underway, Miller is considering multiple ways to incorporate green design, including orienting the structure for maximum solar exposure and selecting environmentally friendly materials.

Miller says that it is important for sustainability and green design to be part of the process every step of the way during a project. "I want to create long-term solutions people are happy with and not create a bunch of waste." GBQ



Green and sustainable elements are incorporated into this two-story addition at a historic Walla Walla home.

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