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Taking Care of its Own

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The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) works in 50 countries across five continents to protect endangered species and endangered spaces. The work that it does—from forest conservation to monitoring the health of the corals of the Great Barrier Reef and testifying on the impacts of climate change—is critically important, so much so that providing nurturing workspaces for its own staff is in itself a priority.

Headquartered in Washington, DC, WWF was the anchor tenant in an unusually well-designed office building, but its own space had aged and at lease renewal the organization decided to buy the building and use the opportunity to update its offices to their best use.

It carefully crafted its vision for the renovation project: an open, collegiate and consensus conducive work environment, built to strict economical and schedule guidelines and, of course, in accordance with its mission, a sustainable approach.

Conserving resources, limiting waste and pollution and protecting the natural environment were a few of the initial goals, as was finding the right design and construction team.

Envision Design, a Washington, DC architectural and interior design firm, was the logical choice. The design of headquarters for Environmental Defense and Greenpeace USA were just two of its sustainable design projects; Envision Design's non-profit experience thus became a deciding factor in WWF's selection. Next on board was a construction manager, Mark Anderson Consulting, hired in part to

Sources

Cabinetry and Countertops

Casework Ltd (labor), PrimeBoard, Stone Source, Yemm & Hart, Abet Laminati

Flooring

Invision Carpet, EcoTimber Wood Flooring, Armstrong Linoleum, Roppe Rubber Base

Low- or zero-voc adhesives

WW Henry Co, Roppe, Para-Chem, Armstrong

Coatings

Duron, Sierra Performance Coating, Benjamin Moore, Architectural Coatings, Inc.

Fabrics

Sina Pearson Textiles, Carnegie

Ceilings

Armstrong Ceiling Systems, Ecophon

Lighting

Edison Price, Louis Poulsen, PMC, Focal Point, Steng

Furniture

Humanscale, David Edwards, Versteel, Nucraft

administer the District of Columbia bond financing of the project. Envision Design's Diana Horvat, principal-in-charge for the WWF project, credits Anderson as a great help in meeting a tight time frame and in facilitating the sequencing necessary for an in-place renovation. Finally, Davis Construction was awarded the project largely because of its focus on sustainability and the fact that, unlike most construction companies, it had a sustainability director on staff. Kim Pexton, a LEED Accredited Professional, focuses her efforts full-time on handling green projects and, therefore, becomes an additional resource to the design team.

This project team for WWF's headquarters was tasked with developing an economic, sustainable approach while making wise use of donated and bond funding. Working with five staff committees, they developed a consensus design process. Mary Jane Jamar, WWF's vice president for human resources and facilities, credits everyone involved for the success of the project.

"We renovated in place," she explains, "and the team helped facilitate a lot of staff involvement by closing a floor at a time and organizing a flexible work arrangement. They worked hard to help us meet our goal of designing and building the greenest solution within our budget."

The 106,000-square-foot project spread among four floors included the design of a flexible, centralized conference facility, scientific labs, staff work areas and other support functions typical of a multi-national non-profit. Using basic program and budget information provided by WWF, Horvat's solution proposed to preserve most of the perimeter offices and focus the overhaul on the interior zones of the space that had been cannibalized over 10 years of ad hoc renovation.

To meet the client's immediate needs, the plan mandated a major shift from 60 percent offices/40 percent workstations to a 30/70 split. Staff workstations are situated on a 45-degree angle within each quadrant of the floor. This configuration of rotated pods enhances the access to natural light and increases the sightlines between staff, something not possible with a rectilinear plan. It also facilitates easier communication, a key component of the program. An internalized workroom within these workstations enables WWF to customize the common workspace for each department's individual requirements. The overall result is less private and more added public space.

The design solution also created a centralized reception and conference facility that enables WWF to accommodate a variety of internal and external meeting functions and groups. The conference rooms provide flexibility for meetings varying in size from 12 to 190 people, and integrate a variety of audiovisual capabilities, including teleconferencing. A catering pantry provides the necessary support for the conference center.

Project Team

Client

World Wildlife Fund
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Architecture & Interior Design

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Washington, DC 20036
(202) 775-9000

Construction Manager

Mark G. Anderson Consultants
555 12th St. N.W.
Ste. 770 North
Washington, DC 20004
(202) 942-3900

Contractor

James G. Davis Construction Corp.
12530 Parklawn Dr.
Rockville, MD 20852
(301) 881-2990

MEP Engineer

Girard Engineering, PC
1355 Beverly Dr.
McLean, VA 22101
(703) 442-8787

Located nearby, a lab to facilitate WWF's watchdog mission houses equipment displaying color-coded geological mappings of the world to track such things as temperature, erosion and the state of today's forests versus five years ago. Equally vigilant in planning its own environment, WWF insisted on a high level of ecological responsibility in the design of the offices. Priority number one was to preserve as much of the existing build-out as possible. The majority of the offices along the building perimeter remained in place and existing doors and frames were reused; any remaining were recycled. Existing light fixtures were also reused wherever possible and the ceiling grid in the open office area remained as is. New acoustical ceiling tiles with 23 to 40 percent recycled content were used while old tiles were sent to Armstrong to be recycled.

For Davis Construction, this was the first time that the Armstrong ceiling tile recycling program had been utilized. The demolition subcontractor shrink-wrapped and palletized the old tiles to be stored until pick-up. It's a free service, Kim Pexton advises, but contractors must remember to take into account additional costs such as truck loading expenses. Using the lessons learned from this project, Pexton has since worked with interior demo contractors to build the Armstrong program into their proposals and budgets.

Another learning opportunity presented itself in the selection of woods to be used in the project. WWF was an early proponent of the Forest Stewardship Council's (FSC) certified wood program and has worked to promote economic development in areas of Central America through initiatives that would bring little known species of wood and wood products into the U.S. Designers were asked to consider specifying alternative species for the floors, millwork and other uses, but the problems of availability and timely delivery schedules provided a dose of reality. Horvat and her team reverted to locally available FSC- certified product— cherry, maple, red oak and poplar—mostly from Pennsylvania.

Wherever new materials were needed, the best environmental choices were made. New carpet with high-recycled fiber content and low VOC emissions was installed and drywall made of 100 percent recycled paper and synthetic gypsum was used. Lunchroom countertops and tabletops are composed of recycled detergent bottles and milk jugs, and the pantry laminate is made with recycled coffee burlap bag fibers. All paints, primers and adhesives have a low- or no-VOC content. The substrates for all cabinets in workstations and pantries are from a natural formaldehyde-free composite straw product. Glass sidelights and conference room window walls are frosted in a polyester film in lieu of vinyl and the flooring in the common work areas is linoleum with a rubber wall base installed throughout.

Reductions in energy consumption were a priority reinforced by WWF's recent decision to purchase wind power to provide 10 percent of its electricity needs. Numerous improvements in the use of natural and artificial light and improved controls of the heating and cooling system will produce energy savings of 20 percent over time. Replacement of the cooling tower achieves an additional 10 percent reduction and modernization and computerization of the elevators cuts energy use by 20 to 25 percent. All new appliances are 2001 Energy Star rated, light fixtures are energy efficient fluorescent and motion sensors were added to all offices and workrooms.

Pexton credits the team with extremely good planning: a pre-construction coordination meeting to get everyone on the same page detailed a waste management plan to maximize recycling and reclamation despite having to overcome some local ordinance challenges. Tracking of materials was achieved through detailed chain of custody documentation.

This project has won a Presidential Citation for Sustainable Design from the Washington, DC chapter of the American Institute of Architects for design excellence that promotes the use of sustainable methods and technologies, proving that architecture can be at once beautiful and environmentally beneficial. Of far greater significance, it has won praise from the client. As the largest privately-supported international conservation organization in the world and as a conservation leader for over 40 years, WWF's renovation of its U.S. headquarters office reflects the words of Sir Peter Scott, WWF's founder, who said in 1961, "We shan't save all we should like to, but we shall save a great deal more than if we had never tried."