

November 28, 2007

3 NW projects win awards for 'living buildings'

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Photo courtesy of GBD Architects [enlarge]
http://djc.com/stories/images/20071128/OHSU_big.jpg

About 73 percent of water used in the OHSU Center for Health and Healing in Portland comes from captured or reclaimed water, reducing water bills to less than \$100 a month. An on-site bioreactor cleans about 15,000 gallons of wastewater a day.

The Cascadia Region Green Building Council and the U.S. Green Building Council announced the winners of the 2007 Living Building Competition, and three of the six are in the Northwest.

The Living Building Challenge, a green design concept written by Jason McLennan, CEO of Cascadia, is an effort to push buildings beyond LEED platinum by encouraging them to be self-sustaining. It has 16 requirements that range from being energy self-sufficient to picking a site that won't negatively affect wetlands, wildlife habitat or farmland.

Though no living buildings exist yet, the competition honors projects that come closest to achieving the goals.

McLennan said, "This competition celebrates the highest level of environmental performance currently achieved or in the design process. The range of innovative ideas and design gives me hope for the buildings of the future."

Awards were given in the "operational" and "on the boards" categories. Operational projects have been in use for at least a year and were recognized for achieving one of 16 requirements of a living building.

Eden Brukman, research director of Cascadia, said the idea was to show that all aspects of a living building had already been achieved in different buildings. "If we looked at the composites together, we would have a living building."

The top award for operational projects, the Stepping Stone Award, went to GBD Architects' Oregon Health & Science University's Center for Health and Healing in Portland. It was recognized for its water use.

The 16-story project was completed in 2006. It reclaims rain and groundwater and uses it to flush toilets, irrigate and supply the radiant cooling system. About 73 percent of the water supply comes from captured or reclaimed water, reducing water bills to less than \$100 a month. An on-site bioreactor also cleans about 15,000 gallons of wastewater each day.

Two other operational awards were given. The Seminar II building at The Evergreen State College in Olympia by Mahlum Architects won for indoor air quality. Almost all areas in the building have operable windows and user controls. The project team also minimized the use of finishes and paint.

The other operational award went to the Warren Skaaren Environmental Learning Center at Westcave Preserve in Round Mountain, Texas, designed by Jackson & McElhane Architects. It won for beauty, inspiration and educational components that inform the public about the building and its systems.

On the boards projects are in some phase of design or construction. Each on the boards project is being designed to fulfill the Living Building Challenge.

The top award for on the board projects went to BNIM Architects for the Omega Center for Sustainable Living in Rhinebeck, N.Y., now under construction. The center is planned around a 4,500-square-foot filtration system that will use plants, bacteria, snails and fungi to recycle about five million gallons of wastewater annually. The center will supply its own energy and help educate the public about its systems.

Other on the boards projects that received awards are the Alice Ferguson Foundation in Accokeek, Md., by M2 Architecture/Re:Vision Architecture, and the Kenton Living Building in Portland by SERA Architects.

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