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Shaping Northwest Architecture:

Modern Ideas and Practices Form Pacific Northwest's Built Environment

In both the commercial and residential arenas, local architecture is being shaped by designers who share an affection for the Pacific Northwest and want to celebrate the relationship between the built environment and its surroundings. Here's a look at a few who are making a difference.

Tyler Engle, AIA Tyler Engle Architects Seattle, Wash.



Seattle architect Tyler Engle sees great architecture emerging from close attention to both context and situation: designing a space that responds not only to the client, but also to the use for which the space is intended.

Several years ago, while he was still with prominent Seattle design firm George Suyama Architects, Engle served as the project architect on the remodel of Seattle's ACT Theater for theater troupe On the Boards. Since the building had always been used as a public venue - it was a dance hall around the turn of the century - Engle wanted to ensure that its new design continued to speak to the building's use as well as the people using it and living around it. Retail space was added at the ground floor to bring back the connection to the neighborhood, and inside, the building was gutted and left somewhat "raw."

"On the Boards is a non-profit organization," he said, "so we didn't want to alienate the audience by doing something flashy."

Engle has since started his own practice, forming Tyler Engle Architects one year ago and focusing on residential and small retail architecture. He continues to place an emphasis on responsive, quality design practices.

"Personally, I believe in creating architecture that lasts," said Engle. "So much energy is used in construction, that things shouldn't be wasted. Buildings should be crafted well to last more than 10 to 15 years. I don't like the phrase "more bang for your buck."

Engle is drawn to high quality architecture and designs that are durable. He likes to look beyond the expected use of a material and rethink the ways materials are normally used, for example, using cement board as siding, or flooring materials for a countertop. Often, Engle will find flooring or handrails at an industrial supply house or surplus store - places one wouldn't expect to find architectural materials.

"I enjoy seeing the inherent beauty in something that can be salvaged," said Engle.

Engle also enjoys creating relationships between interior and exterior elements by continuing a flooring material from the living room out onto the patio, for example, or asking a colonnade to perform double duty as a trellis.

There's an incredible interrelationship between indoor and outdoor, especially in the Northwest," said Engle. "There's so much wonderful landscape that should be brought in."