

# Recycled buildings

Labors of love add up to good stewardship

BY SANDY COMPTON



**R**oss Hall once climbed the J.C. Penney building at First and Cedar – now Snow River – and made a picture of downtown Sandpoint. It was 1955 and (maybe) before a Fourth of July parade – there are no flags to be seen. Nonetheless, Sandpoint's entire population appears to be on the sidewalks. I find myself looking for family in the clumps of folks visiting in front of businesses, a localized version of "Where's Waldo?" Knowing Ross Hall, maybe he invited his friends and acquaintances – which *was* the populace of Sandpoint – to come stand around while he made a couple of exposures.

"You can all go home now! Thanks."

Comparing this picture to now, I find that nearly all the buildings are original, but most of them have been repurposed. The only businesses on First from earlier times are Larson's Clothing and the Panida Theater. If you look west on Cedar, the only survivors are Connie's Café and the Tam O'Shanter, also known as the Tervan.

Sandpoint has become a recycled city.

## A recycled block

In fact, the corner of Sixth and Oak could be recycle central. Face north in that intersection and rotate clockwise. You encounter first Redtail Gallery, formerly the Episcopal Church. Mark



Inset, Sandpoint, as Ross Hall captured it in 1955, and the modern-day, reclaimed corner of Oak and Sixth, above, featuring the Heartwood Center. PHOTO BY DOUG FLUCKIGER

Kubiak turned the building into an art studio and a home for Sandpoint Arts Alliance for a time.

East on Oak is Foster's Crossing, a railroad warehouse rescued years ago by Dick and Betsy Foster and turned into Sandpoint's first antique mall. On the east side of Fifth, Domino's makes pizza in the former Alpine Motors sales room – which explains the big windows. The attached Quonset-hut shop building once contained Alpine's service area but now houses an auto detailing shop.

Kitty-corner across Fifth, the Army Surplus Store was Sandpoint Ice and Fuel for decades, even after they quit selling ice. To the south, the Pie Hut occupies what were offices for Cenex CO-OP Gas and Supply, renamed the CO-OP Country Store and moved to Ponderay in 1996. The CO-OP, where a kid could get lost in long aisles of every sort of hardware, smelled of new tires and petroleum and occupied the space that is now Marketplace Antiques. Bizarre Bazaar is in the former CO-OP Auto Center, where once tires were sold and oil was changed.

In the old CO-OP Farm Store at the corner of Sixth and Church, once stocked with barbed wire, fence posts, corral panels and watering troughs, Evans Brothers Coffee has found a home. In the elevator east of Evans Brothers, rolled oats, chicken scratch, horse pellets, and bales of alfalfa once waited in dark, dusty rooms for a ride to the farm and farmers brought grain to be stored and sifted into trucks or rail cars for a ride to market. Now, the Sandpoint Climbing Gym occupies part of the building. But not the tall part.

Continuing north along Sixth toward the point of beginning, we come to a cross-street dichotomy where two disparate buildings are being "saved," one of humble beginnings and the other with a more glorious past.

## Shibusa Studios: An architectural lump reborn

At the southeast corner – 525 Oak, an address a numerologist could love – the nondescript red-and-gray cube that housed Darigold is being transformed



Before and after: Pine and Florence. PHOTO ABOVE BY DOUG FLUCKIGER. PHOTO AT RIGHT, COURTESY CHRIS HECHT

### Saving the corner: The Heartwood Center

Across the street from Shibusa is the Heartwood Center, formerly known as St. Joseph's Catholic Church, and the inspiration of Susie and Mark Kubiak.

"It started with wanting to save the integrity of this corner," said Susie. "We wanted to restore the building as well as save the trees and preserve the park-like setting." With the help of architect Bruce Millard, landscape architect Karen Oleson and general contractor Jim Dustman, the Kubiaks have achieved their goal.



by artist Kevin Watson into Shibusa Studios. Shibusa is a Japanese aesthetic featuring "an enriched, subdued appearance or experience of intrinsically fine quality with economy of form, line and effort." Watson and his building mate, interior designer, painter and sculptor Dion Williams, are enamored of the shibusa style, evident in the display room and Williams' office. "We share the same sense of design," Watson said, "abstract, simple, clean lines. Our art will show well together."

But behind door No. 2, Watson's personal studio is forming, featuring dark purple, Moroccan décor accented by canvas-covered walls, a creative solution to what was once a walk-in cooler (the evaporators are still in place).

"It will look like an upscale wall tent," Watson said.

The building itself, built as a dairy warehouse with loading docks, industrial roll-up doors and three walk-in coolers, is an architectural lump. Cement block walls support two massive steel girders salvaged from a railroad bridge holding up a flat roof. It could have been designed as a jail.

Which begs the question, "Why this building, Kevin?"

"I walked by this building on my way to work for eight years," he said, "and the first time I saw it, I wanted it." Now he's got it and is following his vision.

Oleson's work outside is elegant and effective. "Karen not only designed the landscaping, she built it," Millard said. "It's all native plants that will take a lot of water or a little. And we solved the storm water management in an ecological way."

The building is "green" inside, too, with LED or LE fluorescent lights throughout and a zoned heat and cool system designed to maximize energy conservation.

From Darigold to Shibusa, it's a long step to Kevin Watson's vision. PHOTO COURTESY KEVIN WATSON





Wildflower Day Spa leases space from Chris Hecht for its new location. PHOTOS BY DOUG FLUCKIGER

## Sweating the details: Pine and Florence

The church itself has been restored to its original configuration. Gone with the Stations of the Cross and the stained glass windows is the balcony that was added to the north end of the nave. At the other end, under the brick arch that once rose above the chancel, is a stage with professional-grade lighting, a back stage dressing room, side curtains and a large stage front curving into a room that will seat 170 theater style.

The arch and condition of the 1960s add-on at the south end of the building were the big challenges. A crack completely through the arch required special engineering to repair. Except for that, Millard said, "the original 1908 part was just fine. But anything added later, we had to do a major rebuild."

They have been successful. The former parish hall next door is turned into the Grove Room, meeting space with lots of light from big windows and a small serving kitchen for catered events. The connection between buildings, designed by Millard, is graceful and airy and gives the impression of being outside. In the real outside are touches that add beauty and functionality simultaneously, like the rock slab "waterfall" that slows runoff from the Grove Room roof and channels it into the landscape.

The project has taken over two years and included disheartening moments – like discovering the crack in the arch – but Susie Kubiak is completely happy they have seen it through to completion. "For a long time, I've wanted to restore an old building," she said. "That's what towns should be doing instead of building out, especially with their great architecture."

Chris Hecht, whose recycling project is at the corner of Pine and Florence, has taken another lump of a structure – the former school administration headquarters and maintenance shop – and turned it into great architecture.

"One reason I bought such a headache," he said, "was the grandfathered wood shop." Hecht has been teaching woodworking to Waldorf students for 15 years. It used to be necessary for them to travel to Garfield Bay for classes. "Now, the kids can walk here."

The building is a mixed-use dream: semi-industrial classroom; garden space; living quarters; a sod roof that gathers irrigation water to a cistern; and 1,000 square feet of commercial space occupied by Wildflower Day Spa.

"I sweat details," Hecht said, and they are everywhere. He used doors saved from the Cedar Street Bridge, timbers left over from the bypass construction and much metal siding, some salvaged, some not. Hecht distressed new siding at the street level simply because he didn't want it to be reflective and distract drivers. One of the most unique uses of salvaged materials hangs from the eaves: snow-stops made of old band saws. A genius mounting system, which Hecht came up with, serves without penetrating the roof.

It cost thousands of dollars to bury the power lines servicing the building, but "I didn't ever want to see that over here," he said, pointing across Pine at trees topped or oddly pruned to provide relief from overhead lines.

A building tour reveals it to be a compilation of structures tied together by the metal theme and the idea of multiple use, "new urbanism," Hecht calls it. "My thing about living in town," he

said, "is that it should feel like you're living in the country."

## A view to a school: Northside School Bed and Breakfast

Our last example of a building saved is not in Sandpoint, but on a hill above the Kootenai River in Bonners Ferry: Northside School Bed and Breakfast. I hate to be prejudicial, but the old school transformed is my favorite. Gene and Ruth Perry have created something new – and lovely – while holding on to the original essence of the building that houses it.

Ruth herself went to school in the building, as did her father and aunt. Put into service 100 years ago in 1914, the school taught generations of kids. In 1992, it became a private residence, but it wasn't until 2005, when the Perrys bought it, that true transformation began.

Gene spent a career in California as an architect. He was tasked with creating what Ruth envisioned. "In my mind," Ruth said, "I divided up the classrooms," and where there were four big classrooms and a principal's office, now are a dining room large enough to seat a full house; nine themed rooms, each decorated differently and each beautiful in its own right; and the private suite the Perrys live in. Cloakrooms that divided the classrooms are now hallways. Instead of three bathrooms (which were in the basement) there are 15.

"We didn't intend to create a B&B in Idaho," said Ruth, "but we were looking for one to buy in California. We came home to visit and saw this for sale, and said, 'This would make a great bed and breakfast.'"

And it does, with preserved touches that harken back to the building's past: bird's-eye maple floors on the main level; vertical grain Douglas fir stair treads 14