

December 18, 2002

Snapshot: Stefan Hampden

By **SAM BENNETT**
Journal Staff Reporter

Title: Principal

Firm: CAST design/build

Founded: 1999

Number of employees: Nine

Address: 4216 Sixth Ave. N.W.

Focus: Residential and commercial design/build

Q: How does your firm operate?

A: We do design work, through construction documents, and are licensed general contractors. We are also finishing the process of becoming licensed architects.



Stefan Hampden

With design/build, there's so much to be learned from the feedback process between design and construction. It helps one understand the issues of craft and detailing by having to build what we design. When we started, the project lead would take a job from conceptual design all the way through construction. He would become the site lead in the field.

While there are some advantages for the designers to have that intimate involvement in the construction process, that model doesn't scale up well. Now that we have grown, and are trying to keep multiple jobs in design and construction, we have moved to having dedicated project designers, construction managers, leads and carpenters. The project designer takes a project from conceptual design through permitting, and acts in a more traditional construction administration role.



CAST designed two spec houses for a Madison Park client who was a playwright. Each home borrows its design theme from Shakespearean characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

We have gotten very positive responses from architects who value the insight and services that a construction firm, sympathetic to the architectural process, can yield.

Q: What do you like about design/build?

A: The great thing is having continuous face-to-face communication. We are able to consult very readily with someone across the desk as opposed to having to call a meeting. The continuity of information in a project is a major benefit of design/build. There's one point of contact, and everybody is engaged in the project from the start. They're in same room, hearing what's going on and they understand the constraints of the project. This type of continuity creates a much more efficient project.

Q: What is your firm's broader mission?

A: To create a business that works within the local community, and try to foster that sense of community. We didn't want to start a business that works on projects that are generating sprawl. Part of why we ended up in Seattle is it has fantastic sense of neighborhoods and communities. When we formed CAST, our goal was to work within the city and take projects that are rooted in place. The bulk of our work is in-city jobs and take advantage of our ability to work within neighborhoods, fostering a sense of community. We end up doing a lot of remodel work, which works well into that model -- taking housing stock which no longer functions in city and turning it into something which one would choose over moving outside of the city. This way you get a real community and the amenities, without contributing to sprawl.

"It helps one understand the issues of craft and detailing by having to build what we design."

Q: What projects advance that goal?

A: The Interbay P-Patch structure, we are currently finishing up, serves utilitarian and community gathering needs. It is basically a large concave roof that catches water for a portion of the garden. The roof covers two simple spaces (kitchen and utility) with a breezeway between, and a wide arcade for gathering during our rainy season. It was a pro bono project, and we had an old fashioned community barn raising to build it. While we've been doing lot of residential work, this is the epitome of where want to be as far as mission statement goes -- building community.

We also did a major remodel of a ranch-style house in Kenmore. We created a pavilion in front of the house that extends to make the garage feel like it's a much more minor portion of the facade and makes a clear gesture to a person entering. The scope of the project is a series of these small additions, along with a wholesale rearrangement of the interior spaces.

As far as style goes, we do a wide variety of projects. This one's quite modern and uses pretty simple raw materials with a modern sensibility. Other projects are more traditional. We really try to listen to clients desires and this is what drives style in our projects. In this case, the clients had a fun, funky, modern sensibility, and we really went with that.

Q: You entered a proposal for replacing the World Trade Center in the Seattle AIA design competition. What was your idea?

A: If you just build another huge office building at the site, it will become another target -- the gesture that makes is one of arrogance and defiance. So the design problem was how could we come up with something sympathetic to the tragedy while doing something that is as equally iconic as what was lost?

The inside corners of the structure mimic the volume and texture of the old WTC. Rather than try to build on the footprint, which has become sacred, we tried to balance the need to respect that space with need to replace an icon lost. By having a reflecting pool as the old footprint, we recreate the towers in its reflection. Since this was firmly rooted in theory, we did not have to deal with replacing the office space.

We decided that one of the things that made New York City a phenomenal community was the early move of placing Central Park in Midtown. Lower Manhattan doesn't have a major park, and the idea was to create a vertical Central Park, with a series of gardens which wind up the structure. It was an intriguing way to be respectful of the needs of a memorial, provide a civic amenity and replace a skyline icon.



CAST's Interbay P-Patch was a pro bono project. The concave roof catches water for a portion of the garden.

Q: Why architecture?

A: When I was younger I loved physics and photography. Physics has so much to do with observing and understanding the natural world. Architecture is a great combination of the fine art observations of photograph between reality with nature. It's a fascinating balance between being able to compose something both aesthetically pleasing and utilitarian in its function.

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