

Case Study 3

First Nations Administrative and Business Hub

Project

Quilakwa Centre

First Nation

Splatsin te Secwepemc, British Columbia

Design and Project Team

Norman Goddard, Principal,
Norman Goddard Architecture Ltd. & Civic Design;
Kevin Halchuk, President, KH Designs;
Peter Sperlich, Owner, Canadian Pride Log and
Timber Products and Sperlich Construction Inc.,
and **Graham Go**, Project Manager

By Louise Atkins

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In the British Columbia interior, the Quilakwa Centre is a favourite stop along Highway 97A on the way from Vernon to Salmon Arm and the TransCanada Highway. Back in the 1970s, the Splatsin recognized a good business opportunity and built a log cabin housing a gas bar, convenience and artisan craft store to serve the traffic along this popular route. Sadly, in November 2012 the original facility burnt down, and the Splatsin people had to act quickly to restore business operations and move forward. In the wake of their loss, the Splatsin built the Quilakwa Centre, a business and community hub with one of the most unusual Tim Hortons in Canada.

“Out of the ashes of that tragic event, rose a beautiful building that will really have an impact on future generations to come.”

Kukpi7 Christian (Chief Wayne Christian), Splatsin

Project Initiation

When the old log cabin burnt down, officials of the Splatsin contacted Graham Go to look after the fire insurance claim and get the high-volume gas bar and convenience store up and running without delay. Graham Go was a trusted local business person who had done other projects and jobs for the band and its development corporation. As project manager,

he quickly reopened the gas bar, brought in a trailer to serve as a temporary convenience store and turned his attention to rebuilding.

The Splatsin Development Corporation's vision was to replace and expand the former 139-square-metre convenience store to accommodate more tourists shopping for Splatsin arts and crafts. However, because the old log cabin was a band-owned building, the Splatsin chief and council were responsible for directing and overseeing the rebuilding project. When they stepped into the lead role, the scope rapidly expanded to include a restaurant, administrative offices, a boardroom for the Elders and the community and a full basement storage area for community records. It would be a hub for business and the community.

Co-design Process

Graham Go had to do a rapid reset. He had already reached out to Peter Sperlich, a local supplier of logs and timbers and a contract builder, and had engaged Kevin Halchuk, President of KH Designs to begin the design work. They promptly recognized that with the expanded scope, the new 1,300-square-metre multi-purpose facility would require the services of a licensed architect. They invited Norman Goddard, a Penticton architect, to join the project design team.

Chief Wayne Christian and members of the Splatsin Band Council formed the project steering committee. They met weekly, and three or four community Elders frequently joined them. Their vision was for a building that would reflect and showcase their culture to their community and visitors alike. They also made it clear that the new business hub would have to be designed very quickly, so it could be built and opened as soon as

possible. Project Manager Graham Go said, “The design process had to happen really fast. From the start of design to final drawings was three weeks!” Mechanical and electrical contractors designed within the drawings. The flexibility to move quickly was greatly facilitated by the fact that the Splatsin funded the entire project themselves using a combination of fire insurance, trust funds, and a loan. In the interest of completing the project quickly, a co-design session with the broader Splatsin membership was not practical.

From the very beginning, it was understood that the building would be framed in handcrafted logs, reusing some of the Douglas Fir salvaged from the old log cabin, and sourcing the rest of the wood locally, including a few “character logs” from the Splatsin’s forests. Wood is the traditional building material of the Splatsin people, and logs are valued for their intrinsic character and as a green building material with low net carbon emissions relative to other materials.

For the steering committee, it was important for the project to minimize environmental impacts, and demonstrate their dedication to land stewardship. With this in mind, the project team came up with a post-and-beam structure with insulated panels. As Peter Sperlich explains, “The entire structural frame of this building was engineered in massive, solid-wood components. The log posts and beams, some up to 1.5 metres in diameter, carry all the loads from the SIP (structural insulated panels) walls and roof panels through to the foundation. To further lessen the greenhouse gas emissions and impact on the environment, the radiant floor heating is supplied by a local wood-biomass district energy centre less than a kilometre away.”

Elders contributed their guidance as well. According to architect Norman Goddard, the Elders were “looking for warmth and open, non-hierarchical

spaces and natural forms. As an architect, it is very important to be a good listener, but especially for First Nations. The Elders have a deep understanding of their connection and co-habitation with the land. Listening allows time for them to articulate and convey what they are looking for.”

Natural surroundings and light were important to both the steering committee and Elders. The second-storey boardroom and the entire centre have views of Enderby’s scenic cliffs. Large windows and a lofty central gallery allow natural light to flood into all areas of the building.

The building is an opportunity to showcase Splatsin business and identity. As such, Chief Wayne Christian said the steering committee “wanted to ensure the content of the building was culturally appropriate and there would be artisans’ work throughout. Splatsin people would be involved and could contribute.” At each phase of the building process, artisans were enlisted to carve wooden posts and panels, etch glass and concrete, and design mosaics – from the massive nine-metre central supporting pole to the exterior sidewalk, entrance doors, and throughout the interior.

“The band and its Elders were part of the design from day one. And after several meetings with the Splatsin, we wanted to include as much of their culture to be displayed in the building as possible.”

Kevin Halchuk, President, KH Designs



The Quilakwa Centre in Enderby received a Sustainable Forestry Initiative award for using wood in innovative and beautiful ways

Image Credit: Peter Sperlich/ Photo courtesy of Wood Design & Building Awards

“We opened the store as phase one of the new building. The contractor had it ready in three months.”

Graham Go, Project Manager

Construction

Quilakwa Centre was built and opened in phases. Following the fire, the business reopened in January 2013 with the gas bar and temporary convenience store. The new Quilakwa Centre was designed in February 2013, and the contractors broke ground a month later in March. By June, the new convenience and artisan store was built and operating. Nine months later, in March 2014, the entire centre was completed.

The chief and band council selected two band councillors to liaise with project manager Graham Go and the project team throughout the building phases. As a requirement of the bidding process, contractors hired local band members and provided training.

Elders and band councillors travelled to Peter Sperlich’s lumber yard to choose logs with character for the building. Their efforts were supplemented by two Elders, former loggers, who selected and felled unique trees from the band’s forest for prominent places in the centre.

Outcomes and Reflections

For travellers on Highway 97A, a stop at the Quilakwa Centre is a treat – not only for the Tim Hortons fare and the Splantsin artisan crafts but also for the unique building. The architecture, natural light, and scenic vistas are complemented by an interior design which showcases Splantsin culture.

Seated in the soaring main gallery, visitors and community members alike can enjoy their coffee while their children follow the footsteps of fox, bear, deer, and other animals etched in the floor. All the prints lead from side posts to the huge central pole carved with scenes of traditional

Splatsin life. One side portrays women picking berries and the other, men spearfishing. Nature is central to the Splatsin people. Beams and supporting side posts are carved with bald eagles, bears, salmon and many other birds, animals, and fish, while designs of Splatsin artist Tony Antoine adorn glass entrance panels and interior tile mosaics. For the wood carvings, local artist Bob Whitehead involved the steering committee to ensure his carvings were reflective of Splatsin culture and imagery.

Because the Quilakwa Centre is a favourite gathering place for people from the reserve and nearby Enderby, Chief Wayne Christian believes it strengthens connections between the two. And he is pleased that for the first time the Splatsin have a real showcase for their culture.

Since the Quilakwa Centre opened, business at this economic hub has boomed. Splatsin Development Corporation, which operates the hub, has doubled the number of Splatsin employees from 25 to 50. Meanwhile increased artisan sales in the spacious new store have given new life to the traditional arts such as bead and basketwork and seen the development of new art forms.

Chief Wayne Christian explained that having the expertise of architects and designers is always useful. As the client, the band has concepts and ideas that architects and designers can turn into a structure that expresses the vision and values while ensuring it meets the building code requirements and will be durable and lasting. The rapport and trust between the Splatsin leadership and the entire project team were key to project success. For Kevin Halchuk, “the Quilakwa Centre is an achievement of co-design between a Canadian First Nation and several facets including designer, architect, log home builder and a general contractor. I see the structure of logs and carvings as a symbol of all parts



Image Credit: Peter Sperlach. Photo courtesy of Wood Design & Building Awards

“Tim Hortons wanted their standard design, but we insisted on putting our own mark on it, and giving visitors the opportunity of seeing who we are.”

Kukpi7 Christian (Chief Wayne Christian), Splatsin

respectfully working together to make the building stand up so that the end result is something to admire and be proud of.”

The Splatstin are the most southern tribe of the Shuswap Nation, the largest Interior Salish speaking First Nation in Canada. They have 1,000 band members, of whom 600 live on reserve. Through their enterprise and leadership, they have financed, built and now operate their own highly successful business hub that is the pride of Splatstin members, and a showcase for their arts, culture, and traditions. It is a warm and welcoming point of connection for visitors from near and far. In Chief Wayne Christian’s words, “I am inspired whenever I go there!”



Source: <http://shuswappassion.ca/category/culture>

Sincere thanks to those interviewed for this case study:

Norman Goddard, Principal,
Norman Goddard Architecture Ltd. & Civic Design

Kevin Halchuk, President, KH Designs

Kukpi7 Christian – Splatstin (Chief Wayne Christian,
Splatstin First Nation) and Tribal Chief Secwepemc Nation

Graham Go, Project Manager, and Consultant

Peter Sperlich, Owner, Canadian Pride Log and
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