



TO ACHIEVE A SEAMLESS TRANSITION FROM THE OUTSIDE-IN, **ONLY WOOD WILL DO**

When a venture capital firm that specializes in clean-technology start-ups retained Paul Murdoch Architects to design their corporate headquarters, they came to the project with some very specific—and somewhat unusual—requirements.

“This is a very hi-end and high-pressure corporate culture,” says Paul Murdoch, president of the firm. “We knew we needed to create a warm environment. We also needed to provide flexibility regarding the interior

spaces. The building has to function as temporary office space for the start-ups being incubated within. And finally, we needed to accomplish this on a very tight piece of property with zoning restrictions.”

Located in Menlo Park, CA, the infill site is nestled among redwoods in a mostly residential neighborhood of primarily wood construction. The key question became, how does one create a space that meets these needs, seems spacious and projects the client’s culture and values?



Wood is the Clear Choice

The obvious material choice was wood. The architects created a 12,500 sq. ft. glass, two-story building, which rests atop a podium that provides underground parking. In order to meet LEED certification requirements, provide a measure of privacy, and blend into the surrounding neighborhood, a layer of wood screens were attached to the exterior of the entire building. These screens are essential for keeping the building cool yet maintaining the sense of transparency that the underlying glass box was designed to create.

“Wood was certainly the best material for creating these exterior trellises,” explains Murdoch. “We could have used another material—metal might have matched the performance of wood, but the building would not have the same aesthetic quality. It would be harder. Sharper. Wood creates softness and a sense of continuity from the outside, in. It’s seamless.”

The exterior trellises are made from reclaimed cedar, a native species. The wood has a very tight, linear grain and is stained with just a tint of silver and gold.

To complete the seamless transition from outside to interior space, gardens were incorporated on each level of the building.

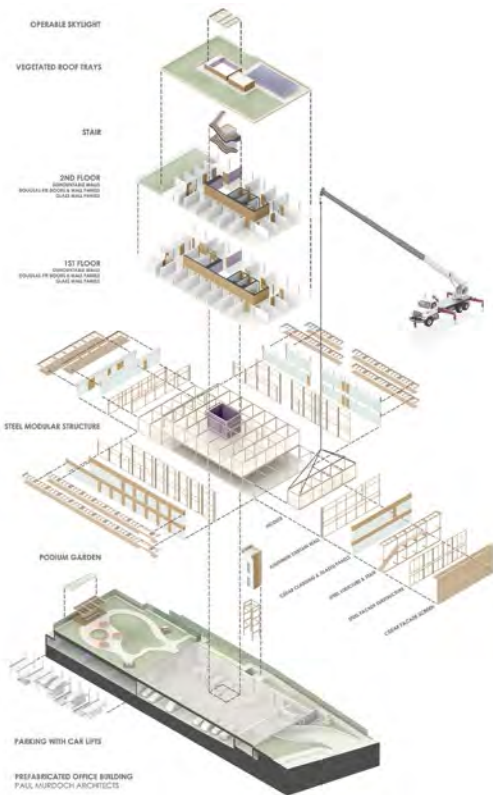
A New Model of Modularity

Construction of this building was challenging given the size of the lot, its lack of a staging area, and the conditional use permit on the project. In an effort to create goodwill within the surrounding neighborhood, a goal to decrease noise and construction time was necessary. The architect chose to pre-fabricate most of the building off-site, including the wood trellising. The podium/parking garage took a full year to construct; the building itself, an additional sixteen months. The architect estimates that by using pre-fabricated modules, they were able to shave almost four months off of the total construction time.

“The entire curtain wall system—the glass, flashing, doors and windows, and insulation behind the cladding—were all fabricated in Northern Italy. The cladding and window screens were all pre-fabricated in Northern California,” explains Murdoch. “This was like an R&D project to see how it works. We can certainly translate some of the benefits of this project to others, but not all. We’d need to evaluate it on a case-by-case basis.”

Because the interior office space requires flexibility to accommodate short-term occupants, a modular “de-mountable” wall system was developed. While many of the walls have a marker board finish to stimulate brainstorming, the remaining walls are made from Douglas fir. The wood has a narrow grain with natural variations and was lightly wire brushed. De-mountable wall systems are a novel way to remodel commercial spaces with low-impact.

Incorporating varied, pre-fabricated wood components (i.e. trellising, interior modular walls and ceiling panels, doors and built-in cabinetry) is the prime design feature that makes this a stand-out project. Wood provides the required warm aesthetic, enhances energy-efficiency and delivers the flexibility that was needed to serve the client, the neighborhood and the building codes.



PROJECT
Venture Capital Office Headquarters

LOCATION
Menlo Park, CA

ARCHITECT
Paul Murdoch Architects

ENGINEER
Simpson Gumpertz & Heger

CONTRACTOR
Louis Ptak Construction

PHOTOGRAPHER
Eric Staudenmaier Photography

AWARDS
2014 Institute Honor Award In Interior Architecture, American Institute Of Architects
2014 International Award Of Excellence, IALD

2014 Sustainability Award, IALD
2013 Merit Award In Architecture, American Institute Of Architects California Council
2013 Lumen West Award Of Excellence, Illuminating Engineering Society
2013 Edwin F. Guth Memorial Award Of Excellence, Illuminating Engineering Society
2013 Light & Architecture Design Award, AL Magazine