Many have heard of the White Stag Block. In the past, it was best known for its illuminated ‘Made in Oregon’ rooftop sign shining over the Willamette River and Governor Tom McCall Waterfront Park. In a riverfront location in Old Town Portland adjacent to Chinatown, it contributed to the Skidmore District’s listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Now with a renovation completed in 2008, the White Stag Block will be known for its beautifully restored historic architecture, its green building features, and its new tenants.

The University of Oregon in Portland, along with Venerable Group, Inc., United Fund Advisors and others, has played a vital role in the green restoration of these historic buildings. The White Stag, Skidmore, and Bickel buildings, together known as the White Stag Block, have earned Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED™) Gold Certification. The United States Green Building Council’s LEED Green Building Rating System is a national benchmark of sustainable building techniques. The rating certifies the measures taken to make the buildings’ construction and operations sustainable. In making the green building renovations, the historic character was carefully preserved so that the buildings could retain their place in the National Register of Historic Places.

The importance of retaining existing buildings cannot be understated, as a building that is already standing requires far fewer resources than a building built from scratch. In this case, the buildings themselves were not only reused, but more than 98% of the materials salvaged out of the buildings were diverted from landfills, using a combination of salvage, reuse, and recycling. And, many of these materials were reused within the White Stag Block itself. In addition, materials salvaged out of other buildings were used in the White Stag Block renovation. For instance, the gym flooring salvaged out of the Gerlinger Annex on the University of Oregon campus in Eugene was reused to create the beautiful wood flooring in the University of Oregon in Portland’s School of Architecture and Allied Arts space, as well as the flooring in the Portland Duck Store.

“The fifth floor view will change with the seasons; trees will block the river in the summer, then leaves drop and the mountains in the East appear.”

Hal Ayotte, Principal Fletcher Farr Ayotte Architects
Also significant, the White Stag Block has a rainwater catchment system that will capture almost all of the rain that falls on the roofs of the three buildings. Water is piped to a 10,000+ gallon holding tank, located in what was once an open-air, dirt-filled, basement-level lightwell. From the tank, the rainwater is filtered and piped to low-flow bathroom fixtures that help conserve water. The rainwater catchment system combined with the low-flow fixtures are expected to meet, at a minimum, the White Stag Block’s entire winter flushing demand. This will reduce the buildings’ water use by over 40%.

Several strategies help the White Stag Block to reduce the energy consumed and pollution created by building users both in commuting and at work. The block is conveniently located close to public transportation and it provides support for carpooling, car-sharing and bicycle commuting. Bicycle support facilities include a storage room, locker rooms, and showers. Energy-saving heating equipment, energy-efficient lighting, and daylighting all help to reduce the buildings’ energy consumption. Green housekeeping products and techniques protect human health and the environment.

Finally, the White Stag Block has an Education Program to explain about its green features and to promote more sustainable behaviors among the building users. User behavior is just as important to sustainability as materials and resources used in the renovation process, the buildings’ water efficiency and energy performance. Behind the historic facades, the building has been infused with new interior spaces and sustainable technologies. Now that the renovation is complete, the responsibility rests with the building users to facilitate the White Stag Block’s sustainable performance.

The LEED Education Program Design Team was created to educate building users, visitors, and building professionals about the White Stag Block, as well as to help gain LEED certification. This Case Study was created by the Design Team. The Education Program was led by Faculty Coordinator Nancy Yen-wen Cheng, Associate Professor of Architecture, and Project Coordinator Diana Fischetti, Graduate Teaching Fellow. The Design team was composed of graduate and undergraduate students at the University of Oregon from a variety of disciplines. The students participated in either one or two academic terms of a course entitled LEED Eco-Communication, spanning from January through June of 2008. You can find more information about the LEED Education Program and the White Stag Block at: http://pdx.uoregon.edu/leed.

~ Diana Fischetti

Photos: James Descoteaux, Jessica Engeman, Ray Neff, R.N., D. Corneilus, R.N., R.N.

“In a community like Portland, when you see some of the hardwood floor that has been recycled, as in the White Stag, it has more character. You can tell people that this is the original floor that came out of such-and-such a building, this floor is 100 years old or so. It increases value, people will see that it’s richer, it tells more of a story... A lot of Portlanders appreciate that.”

Art Demuro, Principal Venerable Properties, Inc.