

COWICHAN REGIONAL VISITOR CENTRE

LOCATION

North Cowichan, British
Columbia

COMPLETION

2013

ARCHITECT

Cohlmeyer Architecture
Limited

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

Crosier Kilgour Partners
Structural Engineers

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Kinetic Construction

WOOD FABRICATORS AND SUPPLIERS

Pacific Homes and Live Edge
Design

PROJECT OWNERS

Duncan-Cowichan Chamber of
Commerce and BC Forest
Discovery Centre

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Cowichan Regional Visitor Centre was developed as a joint project between the Duncan-Cowichan Chamber of Commerce and the BC Forest Discovery Centre. The building has a large, open space for exhibitions and events, a covered “front porch”, and a small park and gathering area to the south — all designed to showcase local arts and culture.

The west wall of the building presents a strong image along the highway, acting as a giant billboard announcing to passers-by that the facility is open and that they are welcome. The positioning of the building gives the parking lot a sense of arrival, rather than simply feeling like another pull-out from the highway.

The form of the visitor centre was driven in part by the planning requirements of the site but also by a shared desire to reflect the rich agricultural heritage of the valley. The architect for the project, a frequent visitor to the area, had been struck by the very particular form of barns in southern Vancouver Island. These have steep central gables and shallower outer sections, resembling gulls’ wings.

The visitor centre is a celebration of this form, created by building a typical cross section of a local barn and then cutting it diagonally to fit the triangular site. The result is the ‘billboard’ wall facing the highway that has a stretched but recognizable abstraction of the barn form.



Photo courtesy of Cowichan Regional Visitor Centre

“The exterior look of our new Regional Visitor Centre has attracted a great deal of attention. The cedar cladding has given the building an authentic Cowichan Valley barn appearance. The intricately carved front door, made from different kinds of wood, stops people in their tracks.”

Mayor Jon Lefebure, Municipality of North Cowichan

WOOD USE

The building has been constructed using a pre-fabricated wood frame with structural insulated panel (SIP) walls. Roof framing is a combination of glue-laminated beams and “gang-nail” trusses with oriented strand board (OSB) sheathing. Wall cladding is a reverse-batten, rough-sawn cedar siding with a water-borne oil solid colour stain.

Wood was chosen for this project because of its importance to the local economy, the wood building tradition of the region and the availability of skilled labour in the community. It is also beautiful, durable and sustainable, with third-party certified material available locally.

Wood First is an important initiative on Vancouver Island, and the municipality of North Cowichan has adopted the provincial legislation into its bylaws. The design team worked closely with the local community and the clients to ensure that wood was the predominant building material for the centre.

Although this is a small building, its geometry is complex. The project therefore required a high degree of coordination between the specialist wood fabricators and the general contractor to ensure that the precision and craftsmanship envisaged by the architect were realized on site.



Photos courtesy of Cowichan Regional Visitor Centre

FOR MORE INFORMATION

This profile is published by Forestry Innovation Investment, the Government of British Columbia's market development agency for forest products.

For more examples of innovative wood building projects throughout British Columbia, visit:

naturallywood.com