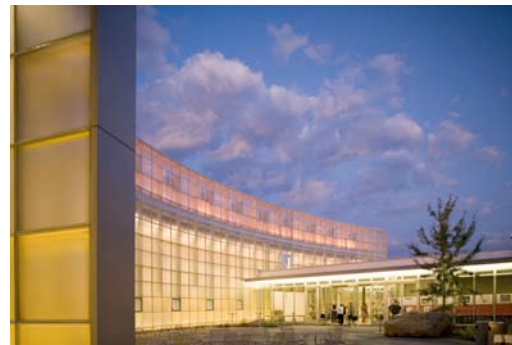


For Immediate Release

Lightcatcher at Whatcom Museum
designed by
Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects
Opens to the Public November 14, 2009

Seattle, WA, September 10, 2009—Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects, recipient of the American Institute of Architects 2009 AIA Architecture Firm Award, is pleased to announce the opening of the **Lightcatcher at Whatcom Museum**, a striking new addition to the City of Bellingham's downtown Arts and Cultural District. With its bold design and expansive facilities, the building is an architectural milestone for the city and a significant new resource in the cultural and civic life of Washington State and the region. The Whatcom Museum currently presents exhibitions on the art and history of the Northwest United States and provides extensive educational programming for visitors of all ages in two buildings—Old City Hall and Syre Education Center. The Lightcatcher will add 42,000 square feet of space to the museum and will house state-of-the-art galleries for art exhibitions and the new Family Interactive Gallery (FIG), among other things. The museum opens to the public on November 14, 2009.



The Lightcatcher

Designed by founding partner, **Jim Olson**, the Lightcatcher is named for its focal point and most innovative feature—a spectacular, translucent wall 37 feet high and 180 feet long that captures the Northwest's most precious natural resource, sunlight. The building utilizes natural materials endemic to the region and will be the first museum in Washington designed and registered to **LEED Silver-Level specifications**.

At the heart of the project, the “lightcatcher” gently curves to form a spacious exterior courtyard, bridging the Museum's interior and exterior spaces. During daylight hours, the light-porous wall floods the halls and galleries inside with a warm luminosity, serving as a beautiful, eco-friendly, and energy-saving “light fixture” that will also help to ventilate the building. The elegant wall also reflects light into the “Garden of the Ancients,” the Museum's courtyard that is destined to become one of Bellingham's most active public spaces. In the evening, the “lightcatcher” glows with the changing colors of the structure's interior illumination. Lantern-like, it provides a warm and welcoming beacon to the community, as well as an attractive new civic feature downtown.

“The lightcatcher wall celebrates the Northwest glass movement and glows like a yellowish agate from a nearby beach. I wanted to soften light like our clouds and create a sense of mystery like our mist and fog. It is also a glowing beacon at night,” remarked Olson. “The colors of the exterior and galleries reflect the bark of our trees and the rocks on our beaches, the ceilings reference weathered driftwood, and silver metal details reflect the Northwest's ‘oyster light’.”



The nearly 7,000-square-foot “lightcatcher” is a dynamic, porous backdrop for sculpture. Punctuated with openings, the exterior provides pedestrians with views of the art and activities within, ensuring the Museum will be as active outside as inside the structure.

The Lightcatcher achieves the institution’s goal to provide a cultural and social center for the City of Bellingham, as well as a home for world-class art. “The Whatcom Museum has given me the opportunity to explore new ideas about art, light, ecology, and people. It has also been a golden opportunity to create a public space that will become an integral part of the Northwest community,” remarks Olson.

In the new facilities, the Museum will expand its exhibition capacity and consolidate its public, education, and children’s programs with:

- State-of-the art, climate-controlled galleries for local and traveling exhibitions
- Naturally ventilated spaces for public programming
- Family Interactive Gallery (FIG) and community spaces with art- and environment-related activities
- Resource space for story time and materials on exhibitions in the galleries
- ARTCARTS with spontaneous activities for youth
- Lobby, Gift Shop, and Café
- Support facilities for exhibitions, collections, and education programs

The first floor of the building will feature a doubleheight Light Gallery with programming focused on the work of local artists, a second doubleheight exhibition gallery, and an interactive children’s learning space, among other amenities. The building’s second floor will house an additional exhibition gallery, meeting and classrooms, and Museum offices. Atop the Museum is a 3,000-square-foot green roof, which will feature a horticultural learning exhibit.

Just outside the Museum, the sweeping form of the “lightcatcher” creates a unique and meaningful public space—the Garden of the Ancients. Designed by landscape architect Charles Anderson, this 5,000-square-foot courtyard and garden contains elements of regional significance, both cultural and environmental. The garden’s immense glacial rock echoes the geology of the region and the distinctive rock outcroppings throughout Bellingham. The garden also contains native plants, such as ferns and a gingko tree, representing the region’s significant natural history.

The Whatcom Museum

The Whatcom Museum, a nonprofit organization operated jointly by the City of Bellingham and the Whatcom Museum Foundation, provides innovative and interactive educational programs and exhibitions about art, nature, and Northwest history. The Museum’s collections contain more than 200,000 artifacts and art pieces of regional importance, including a vast photographic archive. The Museum is accredited nationally by the American Association of Museums and is a Smithsonian Institution affiliate.

Located at the corner of Grand Avenue and Flora Street, the Lightcatcher enhances the quality of both the Whatcom Museum and the downtown Bellingham experience. As part of the newly created, downtown Arts and Cultural District, which includes restored adjacent landmarks, the Mount Baker Theater, and Old City Hall, it is a catalyst for cultural growth and local prosperity. The Lightcatcher joins the Museum’s two other structures—Old City Hall and Syre Education Center.

The Lightcatcher opens with *Out of Bounds: Art from the Collection of Driek and Michael Zirinsky*, and *The Elephant Bed*, an installation by John Grade.

For additional information, visit www.whatcommuseum.org.



Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects

Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects is an architecture studio based in Seattle, Washington and led by five partners, which was awarded the 2009 AIA Architecture Firm Award by the American Institute of Architects in 2009. The more than 80-person office combines the capacity of a large firm with the intensity of a small one, and its commitment to vigorous, critical design review sessions has infused its designers with a shared sense of commitment to every project and an appreciation of the technical and artistic elements involved in the realization of a building. The studio specializes in a range of projects both nationally and internationally including mixed-use buildings and complexes; academic and civic projects; museums and cultural spaces; exhibit design; places of worship; single use residential projects, often for art collectors; and interior design.

Founding partner **Jim Olson** began working in the late 1960s on projects that would explore the relationship between dwellings and the landscape they inhabit and was joined by **Rick Sundberg** in 1975 for a period of years that was marked by an increased commitment to urbanism and civic work with major projects in the Northwest. Such projects included the award-winning Pike & Virginia Building, the first contemporary structure to be built in Seattle's Pike Place Market Historic District in 50 years. In 1996, **Tom Kundig** joined Olson and Sundberg as partner, bringing a new level of creative exploration, building the international reputation of the office, and adding accolades, including Kundig's receipt of the National Design Award from the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt Museum in 2006. **Alan Maskin** and **Kirsten Murray** became partners in 2008, continuing the evolution of the firm and furthering its commitment to the craft of architecture through expanded work in exhibition design, interiors, and connections to urban and rural landscapes.

For additional information, visit www.oskaarchitects.com.

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