

Institutional Wood Design: Small

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Klahoose First Nation New Relationship Centre, Cortes Island, BC



Timber frame, logs, log columns, cedar siding – the details are amazing. The Klahoose culture is reflected in this design, evoking First Nations traditions and heritage. The jury’s conclusion: it is stunningly beautiful.

High resolution images available. Please e-mail mmclaughlin@wood-works.ca

The Klahoose First Nation commissioned the design and construction of a new facility to house their current and growing health care, administrative and community-based functions. The nation has a large population dispersed across BC with the main reserve located on Cortes Island, on the shores of Squirrel Cove.

The construction of the Klahoose Multi-Centre was financed by the nation’s extensive economic developments which contribute to services for the community. They had outgrown their existing aging facilities and had a desire to create an accessible and welcoming place for the Klahoose people, and the local island community, that would establish a permanent home for the nation’s various cultural, economic and development ventures. The project was tasked with creating a strong physical presence for the Klahoose First Nation, placing them firmly in today’s society and looking forward to new horizons. The design drew upon traditional indigenous wood building forms and construction techniques for initial inspiration.

The straightforward assembly of a heavy timber frame supporting a series of single pitched roof forms is a response to the local conditions of climate, resources, and culture, and the constraints of the remote and rocky site. Using a repetition of identical heavy timber frames also acted to reduce the number of components and connection details, simplifying off-site pre-manufacturing and facilitating quick on-site construction.

Cortes Island is located on the eastern edge of Desolation Sound. Semi-remote in nature, the project required careful consideration of building siting and construction techniques in order to minimize impact on the forested site. The Multi-Centre is sited within the second-growth forest next to the Klahoose community settlement. The building stretches along a granite slope above the shoreline, resting on the existing topography to create floor levels and an exterior gathering space. Expansive glazing opens the building to natural lighting and views across Squirrel Cove. The dominant use of wood enhances both the design thesis as described while connecting the facility both literally and figuratively to the natural materials of the surrounding context.

Locally available wood resources owned by the Klahoose First Nation and milled on site at the nation’s milling operations influenced material selection and detail development throughout the building. An extensive use of Western red cedar as interior and exterior finishes is a reflection of the local ecosystem and a connection to the community’s input in the project.

Wood is used for as much of the building as possible: cladding, exterior fascia and barge boards, exterior trim and joinery, ceilings, stairs and railings, architectural woodwork and furnishings, and the main structural elements. As well as being a renewable resource, wood allowed the use of local materials and labour, along with higher efficiency pre-manufacturing. Interior and exterior finishes are selected for durability, easy maintenance, and easy replacement.