

SALES & MARKETING

# Garage Doors... Answer to Architectural Question

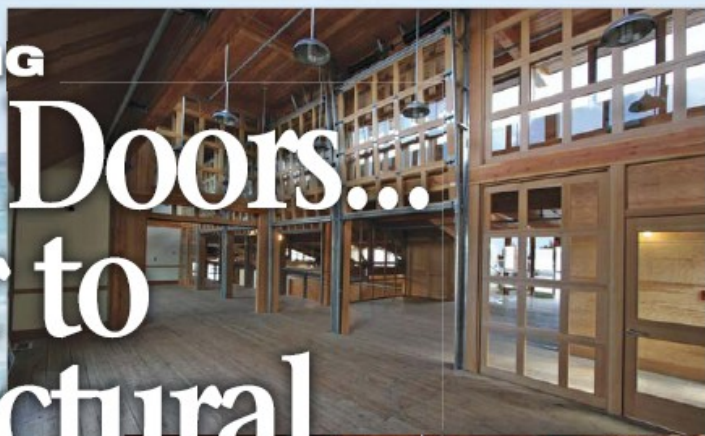
By Tim Newcomb

Garage doors were the answer to an architectural question at the Northwest Maritime Center in Port Townsend, Washington. The creative use of custom-made doors (Ranch House Doors) created walls for classrooms and hallways, an unconventional application that the California-based company and custom arm of Overhead Door Corporation fully embraced.

The \$12.5 million complex unveiled its Chandler Education Building in September — the portion of the project that garage doors played a major role in — and will complete the Maritime Heritage Building by January 2010.

The educational venue serves as a live museum for the history of maritime life in the Puget Sound and as an opportunity to showcase the art of building wooden boats. In that vein, the center wanted to highlight boats and teach the public in the most versatile way possible. That is where the garage doors came in, becoming an artistic device to separate rooms and create spaces.

Tim Matthews, vice president sales for Overhead Door Corporation, says that in his 29 years in the business he has seen a recent shift toward new applications for garage doors. "There have been some really cool applications that the architectural community has allowed us to participate," he says. "It changes sectional doors into moving walls."



Tony Neal, vice president of Ranch House Doors, says that the concept of custom building garage doors for a second-floor, pedestrian-only location was an exciting way to apply his product. "The doors are central to the architectural intent," Neal says. "Normally they are an add-on. We took the function of the door and reinvented it. The only use is for people."

The company created 27 units on the second floor of the Chandler building. What started as a plan for 11 different garage doors grew to include more doors and side panels. The vertical grain Douglas fir-encased glass doors serve as walls in some locations, windows in others and noise barriers in different spots. The roll-up garage doors serve as movable walls and view-enhancing windows.

As part of Seattle-based Miller Hull Partnership's architectural scheme doors play a central role. The design stretched Ranch House's understanding of what they could do with their own product. To fulfill the look the architect desired, Dave

Robison, project manager for the Northwest Maritime Center, started scouring the history of doors in the Port Townsend area. From the local fire hall and city hall to historic buildings and photos, he searched for a look that would mesh the Northwest Maritime Center with local aesthetics.

Overall, the center highlights wood, light and open movement. The pedestrian-driven feel of the buildings needed to be congruent throughout the center, including in its classrooms. To meld the look together, the Fir was left in its natural state to "accent the idea of a wood boat building" and glass lets light flow generously. The center also needed to feature versatility, something the doors took the lead in, with their ability to be walls, create open spaces or serve as barriers.

The upstairs is typically split into two classrooms. The roll-up doors act as a way to create a hallway between the two rooms, or they can be opened to allow the second floor to function as one large conference center.

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Robison says that on the first day the center opened, September 11, 2009, he was part of a morning meeting that utilized the second floor as one giant room. Later, the group split into two and the doors were rolled down. He said it worked "really well."

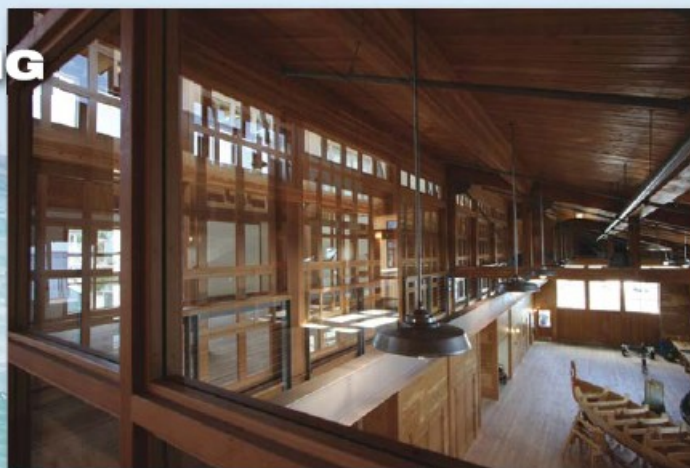
On one side of the second floor mezzanine, another set of doors can be opened or closed to serve as a barrier from the boat-building shop located below. The original plans didn't call for that aspect, but Robison says that he is glad that he had Ranch House add barriers for both noise and dust from the woodworking.

The doors "helped define our space" and have become a central aspect to the feel of the center, Robison says. The amount of light that is allowed to freely flow throughout the classrooms has turned out to be an added bonus.

In an "entirely new" application, Ranch House Doors constructed stationary glass panels as one would see in a window setting. Eleven of the vertical-grain, square-edge doors with one-quarter inch tempered clear glass (the glass runs top to bottom with the Douglas fir serving as the structural integrity) roll straight up and behind a matching stationary piece above it. "It is a pretty trick," Neal says about the floor to ceiling look.

The doors utilize a full vertical lift track system and roll directly up rather than back, keeping the ceiling space open and accomplishing the goal of full views for the visitors at all times. The glass is double the thickness of what is normally called for as a safety feature in the high-pedestrian area. Other smaller panels create windows where needed.

Each door is fitted with a serial number, giving the clients the



knowledge that their door was a one-of-a-kind, hand-built door and also allowing information on the door to be easily tracked for inquiries after installation.

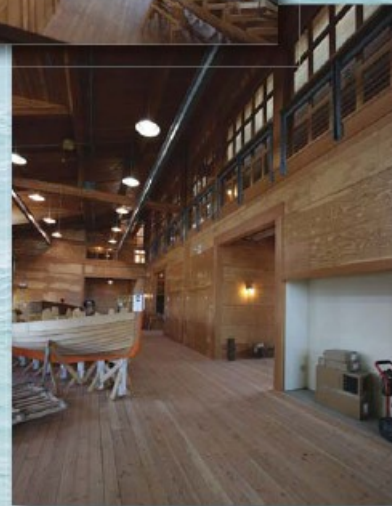
While creating doors for the Northwest Maritime Center didn't make Ranch House Doors change its process, it did allow them to expand it. "It opened up new ideas and opportunities," Neal says. "Now we are targeting consumers with a need for high design. We were willing to listen to other people's ideas and take time and energy to make them come true. We were able to become a major part of accomplishing someone's vision, which is very fulfilling.

"We knew we had never done it, but it made me hungry, and gave me a desire to get our product in prestigious places," Neal says.

Since it was the first museum-like setting design of its kind, Neal wasn't sure what to expect during the process. But he said that the need to produce a high quantity "all at once" was really the only unique challenge. After all, building custom doors is what his company does.

And Neal is pleased with learning the new application. "When I got to the center I was very surprised at how it looked," he says. "To use our garage doors to only handle pedestrian traffic blew my mind. Garage doors are being used just for pedestrian control!"

That change in thinking has helped the company push for new business. "We aren't stuffing ourselves into a box and saying this is what we do," Neal says. "We have a creative willingness to listen and meet the needs of



the clients. Listening on the front end gave us the freedom to do what they wanted and piggyback on their ideas."

Matthews says that as architects call for these styles of doors more and more, the general public will be exposed to even more uses for garage doors. "It is like creating a fine dining room table out in the weather," he says. "It is a difficult thing to do and make it last for a long time. The center looks great."

Neal says that Ranch House Doors is taking that 'listening to new ideas thing' seriously, selling to government buildings, malls, high-traffic pedestrian spaces and plenty of locations that the company wouldn't have before thought to contact. "This project has expanded my mind and our options for where our custom garage doors can go," Neal says. Turning a conventional garage door into a moving wall was just one step. Neal wants to see where this journey takes them in the future. 

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