Quilting with glass, cedar and fir: A workshop and studio in Rossland, BC

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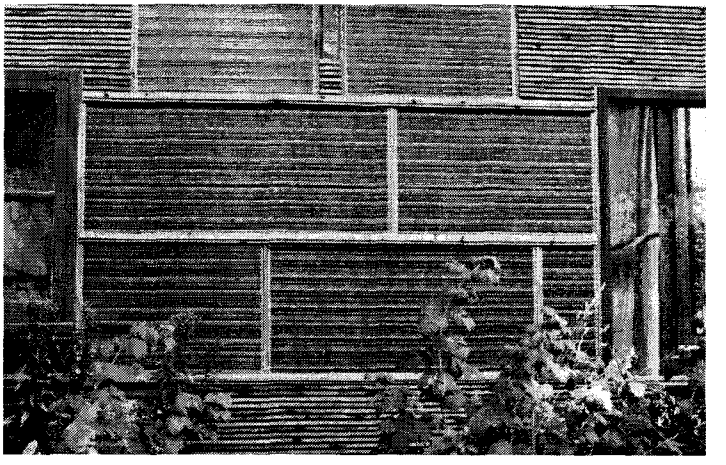
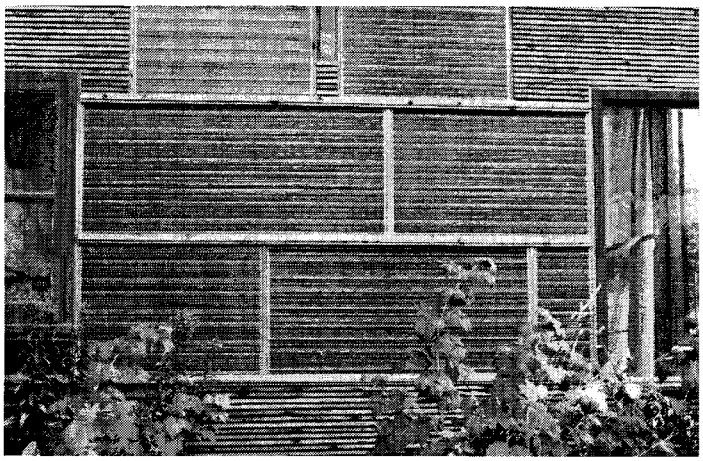
It is unusual to think about architecture in the same terms as we would think about making a quilt – sewing together patches of unrelated materials, often scrap, in a collage-like juxtaposition – but quilting describes the ways in which the workshop/studio project in Rossland, BC was designed and constructed.

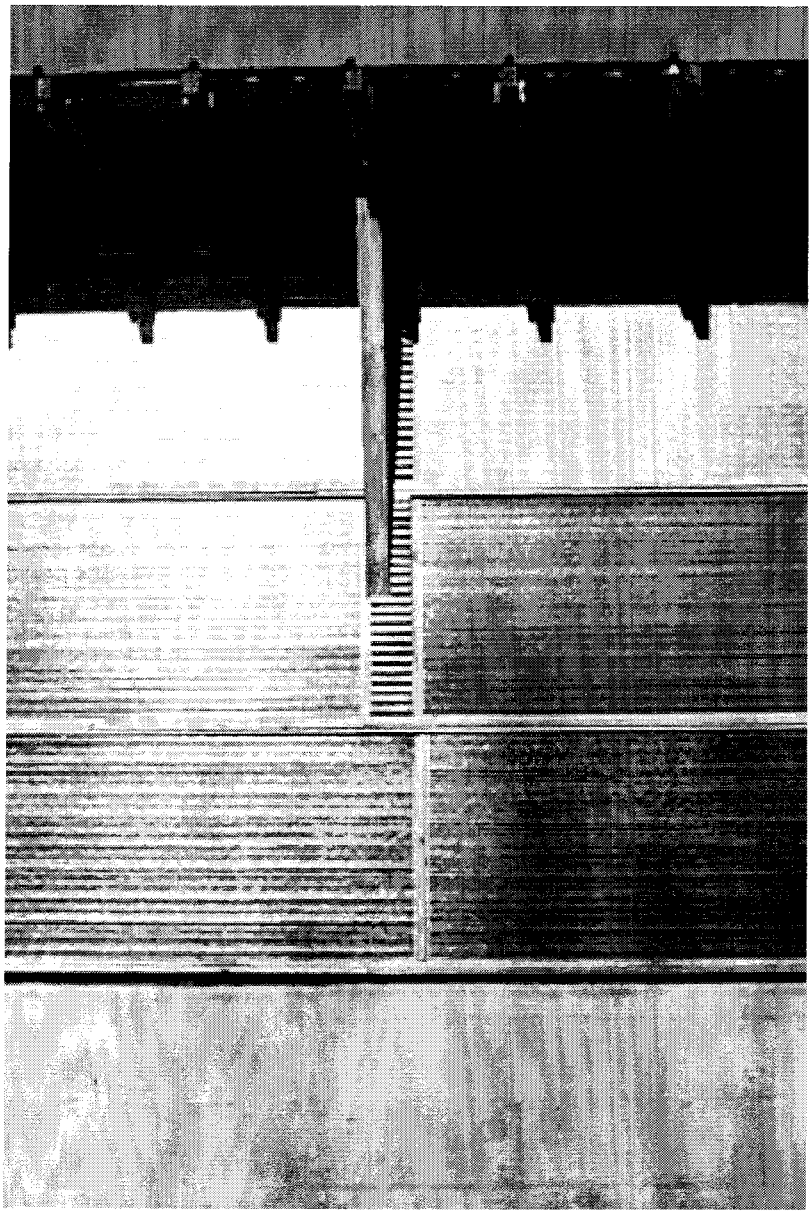
The project took a ramshackle, collapsing old truck workshop and transformed it into a winterized, habitable artist's studio. The original structure was a wood post and beam, wood clad shed with fourteen-foot high ceilings, as flat roof, an oil pit and two plywood panel barn doors on the front many of the rafters and much of the exterior wood sheathing was rotten: the entire building was leaning at a 10- degree angle to one side. The first challenge was to decide what could be salvaged and then to decide how to incorporate new construction into the existing structure. The technique was, from the start, the sewing together of old and new, collaging of found and salvaged materials with pre-existing ones. The concrete foundation walls, the large supporting posts and the ridge beam were all in fine condition and could be saved. After closer inspection, we discovered that the rafters were rotting at their otter edges. We realized that the rot was being caused by the excessive amounts of water rolling off the flat roof during the spring melt. By stitching rafter extensions onto the ends of the old rafters, we made the overhangs much longer so that when the snow melts, the water does not fall against the shed.

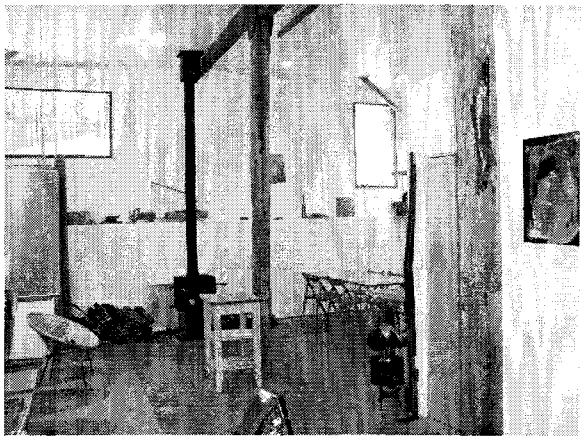


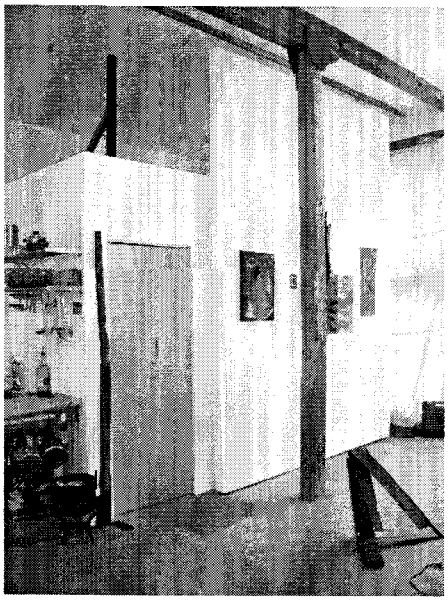
The front façade is made of recycled glass and surplus windows purchased from a local custom window fabricator. Both the steel frame for the two glass doors, and the façade, were designed like a quilt whose outer dimensions and component

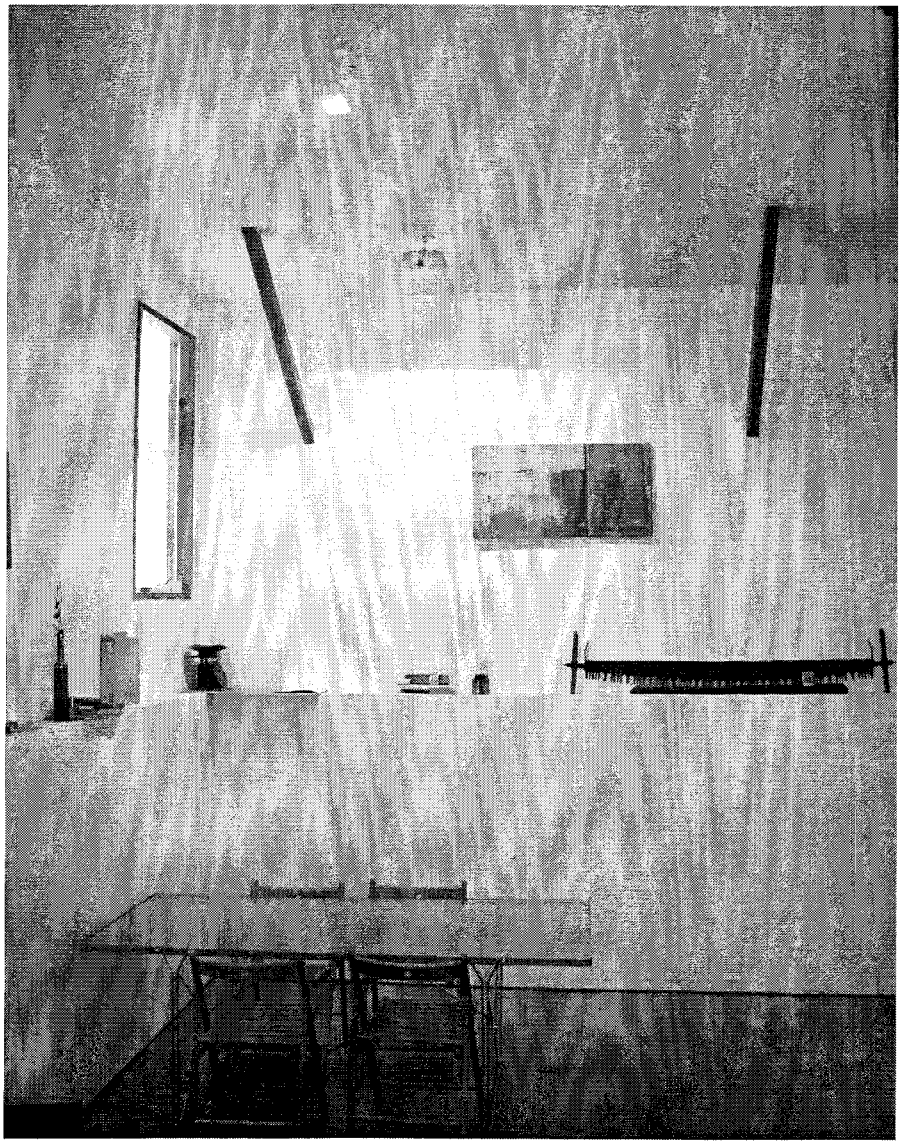
parts were fixed. The challenge was to make a coherent looking design from disparate parts. The deep red color used both on the steel and a wood frame helps stitch the pieces together visually. Because the façade is facing southwest, it acts as a passive solar collector.

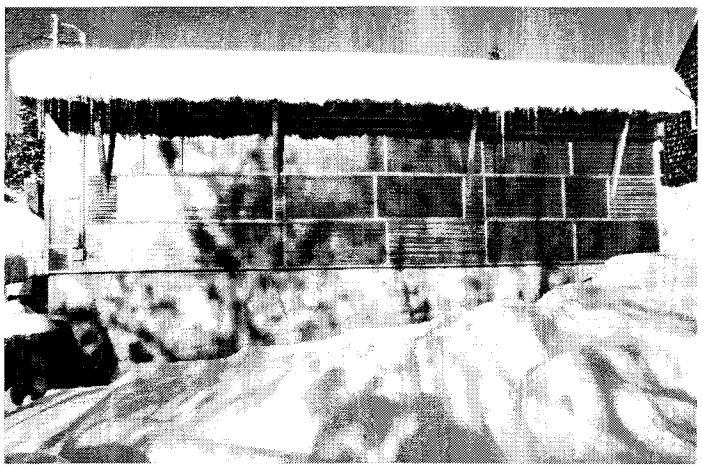












The side and back walls were constructed using salvaged, cast glass, door fronts from old Herman Miller casework, with occasional cedar lattice inserts. The glass and cedar panels are wrapped around the supporting building volume like a large blanket suspended a distance from the tar paper underneath, forming an air pocket that heats up during the day and helps keep the building warm at night. The cedar was used for visual relief and in places where cutting the glass would have been difficult – around the post wall connections for instance. The patchwork pattern developed here as on the solar façade, out of necessity. Although the panels had originally been one uniform size, some had broken, chipped or cracked, and had to be cut down. Even the application method is reminiscent of quilting techniques; strips of Douglas fir from the seams into which the glass and cedar is fastened. As on quilts, the seams are visible. Plus, the glass, cedar and battens are layered spatially like woven cloth. Even the interior was made using sewing and collage techniques. The building was designed to function as both a sculptor's workshop and living quarters. The columns march down the center of the interior space making a natural division into two. We inserted one new volume housing the bathroom, a closet, the water heater; and a kitchenette. Atop this box is a loft sleeping area separating the one side of the workshop into two smaller spaces. We mounted barn door tracks on the ceiling, next to the columns, and fabricated a 9′ by 13′ gypsum wall to suspend from the tracks. By moving the wall forward or backward along the tracks it is possible to alter the special configuration of the studio to accommodate different uses. The hanging wall therefore is simultaneously a stitching device and special divider.