The Moscow Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center, located in the heart of the city’s historic downtown, plays a vital role in bringing commerce and community together. Unfortunately, the organization’s existing building was not effectively facilitating this role. Instead it was a mishmash of past uses, dating back to the 1920s, ranging from a utility company, to private offices, to a bank. [Redacted] partnered with the Chamber to renovate the 3,150sf building. The renovated facility better aligns visitor and staff experience with the organization’s core mission.

As the city’s Visitor Center, the Chamber building has a role that transcends its primary use as office space; it sets the tone for the experience of Moscow through glimpses into the city’s unique identity. Each aspect of the design was viewed as an opportunity to connect building to place. This was accomplished by mapping material histories, phenomenological qualities, and cultural iconography onto specific project needs.

This ambitious approach combined with a very limited budget ($14.60/sf) necessitated concurrent applied research into circular and vernacular construction strategies. Students investigated the incorporation of multiple streams of waste material from sources of local cultural significance. The design focused on surgical interventions during the demolition process; moving and reusing existing building elements. The project also recalls Moscow’s well-regarded history of brick making through the development of a mortar-less compressed earth block partition wall system that challenges conventional office wall assemblies.

Through research, collaborative discussions, experimentation, prototyping, and construction students were able to provide a flexible and adaptable home for the Chamber. Integrating project responsive applied research and regenerative approaches resets the boundary for both students and the community of what architecture can be - both as a process and an outcome.

**MOSCOW CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND VISITOR CENTER RENOVATION AND ADDITION**
PROJECT LOCATION AND MATERIAL SOURCES - MOSCOW, IDAHO
Non-Functioning, Unused Restroom

Inconvenient location, too big.

Dangerous, unprotected stair.

Cluttered, foul smelling former locker room.

Non-Accessible Restroom

Non-Accessible, Outdated Restroom and Non-Functioning mop sink.

Disorganized reception and retail area Desk is outdated and uninviting.

Conference Room cannot fit all of the Chamber Members, Underutilized by public.

Community and Chamber member information relegated to unprofessional display on folding tables

Unorganized, Non-Cohesive Display for Retail

INHERITED CONDITIONS
Congestion point in hallway due to outward opening door cluster.

Front offices are exposed due to windows along the front. Blinds are broken and uninviting.

Non-functioning and unprofessional art display system.

Entry space not serving any purpose.

Outdated branding on cracked, flaking wall.

Office too large for one person. Does not allow for flexibility.

Insufficient storage, becomes disorganized.

Non-functioning and unprofessional art display system.

INHERITED CONDITIONS
Reconfigurable offices provides flexibility to users.

New covered entry and facade provide a direct connection to place and increase branding opportunities.

Flexible reception and event station, provides an immediate connection to place.

Primary information display, connects to the community.

Expanded restroom highlighting material reuse to create a cost-effective, bespoke sink.

ADA accessible restroom featuring art installation that highlights the local community.

Designing for the future

Material histories were uncovered. Providing a positive connection to past uses.

Accessible conference room with movable tables provides adaptability to users.

Art display has a low profile, allows for more focus on the artworks.
INTEGRATED MEANING AND APPLIED RESEARCH
In studying local building practices and the challenges associated with renovations, students realized a need to create a reconfigurable, low embodied energy alternative to standard stud wall assemblies. So, students researched and developed a mortar-less compressed earth block wall system, built a pressing machine, and created a mix using local, tested soil. The resulting solution allows for easy reconfiguration of an office space that has been renovated multiple times already.
Design CEB Machine

Component Assembly:

Parts Needed:
- Comp. A
- Comp. B
- Comp. C
- B.11

Source and Mix Local Soil

Parts Needed:
- C.E.B.
- Comp. D
- D.20
- A.5 x2

Compress and Cure Blocks

Parts Needed:
- Base Supports and Handle

Wall Assembly

Easy Assembly and Disassembly Creates Opportunities for Reconfigurability

DIGGING INTO MOSCOW’S IDENTITY
REGENERATIVE BUILDING PRACTICES
DIGGING INTO MOSCOW’S IDENTITY
REGENERATIVE BUILDING PRACTICES
The existing gallery and reception space had several things going against it. Upon entry visitors were confronted with windows looking into private offices. Students created a screen wall that provides a more welcoming entry experience while maintaining staff privacy.

The modular panel wall was created from salvaged offcut material from the new ICCU Arena. The remilling, assembly, and non-disruptive installation strategy allowed students to remove a major roadblock to a functional space without adding significant cost to the project.
SPRUCING UP CEDAR OFFCUTS

REPURPOSING LEFTOVERS
MAKING ROOM FOR CHANGE
ADAPTABLE/FLEXIBILITY

- Integrated storage for displayed material
- Modular components allow for adaptability
- Rearranged existing walls
- Reconfigurable conference and meeting space
The reintegration of project waste material was seen as an opportunity to create unique, cost effective solutions that feel personalized. Plywood and steel offcuts were given new purpose in the creation of bespoke bathroom elements that highlight the ideals of a forward thinking organization and the community it serves.

STARTING WITH REUSE IN MIND
DESIGNING WITH AND FROM SCRAP
As students looked to the particulars of place for design inspiration, opportunities to integrate context specific art and experience emerged. The ramped entry to the conference room demonstrates this approach. Here, a privacy screen does double duty as an abstraction of the agricultural patterns and topography in the surrounding region. The design lets light into the space while reconnecting the interior of the chamber building with the Palouse.
To reinforce the notion of the visitors center as a public amenity, students created a photo wall for the space that would highlight the people, places, landmarks, and events that make up the Chamber and community. The public submitted hundreds of images that were combined to create a community collage that lets Moscow to see itself literally and figuratively as part of the building’s story.
The West building facade highlights phenomenological qualities of place. The new covered entry provides all-season protection and better announces the entry. An art facade adds to a growing collection of murals that activate the alley-way. Hundreds of translucent panels create a constantly evolving experience as they capture and reflect daylight; emulating the vibrant colors of Moscow and the Palouse.

CONNECTING TO COMMUNITY
ART IN PLACE
CONNECTING TO COMMUNITY
ART IN PLACE
Participants:
1 Professor
16 students for credit - 6 credit studio, 3 credit Summer
1 paid Teaching Assistant - 300 hours
1 for credit Teaching Assistant - 3 credits
Electrician - paid for conduit, wiring, receptacles and switches
Plumber - paid for new supply at sinks

Start of Project and Associated Research: January 2023
Project Completion: July 2023

TAs: Brittney Ellenbecker, Riley Leighton

COLLABORATION AND CREDITS