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Design with a Nordic flair

By: [Stephanie Basalyga](#) in [Architecture and Engineering](#) March 19, 2013



Sometimes the answer to a design problem is as close as one's own backyard – or in the case of the **Scandinavian American Cultural & Community Center**, one's own ancestral heritage.

For years, the **Scandinavian Heritage Foundation** served more than 500,000 Nordic immigrants and their descendants in Oregon and Southwest Washington with classes, workshops and meetings at borrowed or leased spaces. Recently, though, the nonprofit group realized it needed to build a cultural center so that the Nordic community could gather in a common location.

The organization brought its ideas for a Southwest Portland cultural center to **Di Loreto Architecture**. The firm's team assigned to work on the project saw an immediate problem: raising enough money to pay for a building as large as the foundation envisioned would take the group far longer than it wanted to wait.

"If they'd gone bigger, it would have taken 10 to 20 years," project manager **Stephanie Fitzhugh** said.

Fitzhugh and other design team members, including firm principal **Chris Di Loreto** and project designer **Brian Melton**, looked to the foundation's Nordic roots for inspiration as they scaled down the original version of the building by creating spaces that could be used for multiple purposes. The approach offered a modern play on the Nordic tendency in architecture to use materials in a sustainable manner, while helping reduce the building to a realistic – and

affordable – 9,800 square feet.

“The Nordic tendency in architecture (is to) care a lot about preserving materials,” Fitzhugh said. “So when we talked about how (to) use space more efficiently, it was a way to think about how to use space for multiple purposes.”

Other Nordic influences in the design of the center ran along more traditional lines.

The interior features wood ceilings and trims, white walls and concrete floors – all simple in detail and left in their natural states. An exhibit space benefits from skylights and walls of glass that allow “light to wash the walls and keep a natural glow,” Fitzhugh said.

Outside, the building boasts green roofs and a bio-swale that will collect rooftop stormwater.



Even the site will pay tribute to Nordic tendencies. The foundation wanted to preserve a good portion of the trees on the Oleson Road property where the center will be built. So the design team positioned the building in a way that allows adequate parking, while preserving a forested, meadow-like area that Fitzhugh said will allow people to “spill out of the building” into the outdoor space for events.

“It’s sort of like a big back yard,” Fitzhugh said. “It has a lot to do with the Nordic relationship with the weather. It’s a lot like Portland; everyone walks outside the

minute the sun comes out.”

Construction of the center is slated to begin this summer, with an anticipated completion date in spring 2014.

Joining Di Loreto Architecture on the project are **Andersen Construction Co.** as general contractor, **WDY Inc.** as structural engineer and **SDC Inc.** as mechanical/electrical engineer. **WH Pacific** is handling landscape architecture and civil engineering duties. **Acoustic Design Studio** is the acoustic engineer, and **Alder Geotechnical** is the geotechnical engineer.

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