

Drachen's New Building: Modest and Efficient

Open now for almost two years, the Drachen Foundation's headquarters in Seattle's charming Queen Anne community of small speciality shops and comfortable houses has fitted right into the neighborhood. It combines a low key presence there with a notable efficiency of operation.

That was the intention of architect Ibsen Nelsen, chosen specifically by Scott Skinner and Ali Fujino, president and administrator, respectively, of Drachen. Nelsen has a lifetime reputation of maintaining Seattle as a livable city. The city is now in fact considered to be one of America's favored places to live, and this despite a decidedly weepy coastal climate. As sculptor Isamu Noguchi commented of Nelsen, "His concern is for human beings...the importance of architecture as environment."

On tree-lined Queen Anne Avenue North, lined by mostly one- and two-story buildings, Nelsen's three-story structure blends in easily because its façade is broken up instead of being massively flat and he was careful to use unobtrusive building materials—green tile, glass brick and glass.

As viewed from the street, a busy espresso shop occupies the right-hand side of the structure on the ground level. In the middle is a sidewalk sitting area for patrons. To the left is the entrance to elevator



This is what the Drachen Foundation building looks like. It was designed to fit into a neighborhood of small buildings and thus the facade is purposely modest. Except for an espresso shop to right and entrance to left, the structure is set back from the street. Trees, plantings and careful choice of building materials and trim enable it to blend in with adjoining structures.

and stairs to floors above. The setback second floor is fronted by a deck graced by trees and plants. The third floor, also set back, has a flat façade with another deck and a sweep of glass.

The bulk of the first floor is taken up by a medical office, the second floor has a conference center for community use with attached kitchen in the front and Drachen's spacious offices in the back, and the third floor is headquarters to a computer firm.



A view of the spacious Drachen offices. Administrator Ali Fujino uses file cabinets as convenient work space.



Advisory board member Bonnie Wright volunteers her expertise in the combined archive and library.

Drachen's airy offices in Suite 200 include massive cabinets for storing kites and files and a large, growing library and archive devoted to the scholarly documentation of kites and kiting. The total collection is an invaluable aeronautics study resource, the only one of its kind in the world. The floor also includes specially designed archival space for storage of fragile artifacts. Also invaluable are the array of computers and other electronic gear throughout the foundation offices which permit Drachen to spread the word about kites to an international audience.

Visits by kite enthusiasts to the Drachen headquarters are invited, but must be made by appointment. Normal office hours are observed. Telephone or e-mail Drachen (details on back page) to set up a visit. Note that most of the kites from the collection may be viewed by advance request. Exceptions are kites out on exhibition and those too delicate to handle.

"Come see us!" say Scott, Ali and staff to the world kite community. "We want to meet you. We are at your service."