



## **talking trash**

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JACKSON CAMPUS

# contemplative conversations

Wyoming-based architecture firm Hawtin Jorgensen Architects uses questions to answer the environmental challenges that come from working in such sylvan settings

by *Tricia Despres*

**Arne Jorgensen grew up in Jackson, Wyoming, to him a wonderland with a great sense of community and a small-town feel. He spent his summers working alongside his father, a local civil engineer who focused his efforts on providing high-quality services in this small town they called home. And though it would have made sense for Jorgensen to follow in his father's footsteps—and though working outside with the survey crew was a great summer job—the thought of working inside as an engineer was simply not in the cards for Jorgensen. Instead, he set his sights on architecture.**

“Architecture was interesting but not as I expected,” says Jorgensen, a partner at Hawtin Jorgensen Architects since 1998. “As I got into the architectural programs, they fit me well. I was an average student in high school. It didn't really engage me that much, but the ideals behind the architecture courses at college did.”





**space**

Jackson Campus

**client**

Teton Science Schools

**type**

Educational

**location**

Jackson, WY

**square footage**

88,000

**completed**

2005

**unique fact**

Built structures occupy only 2% (16.5 acres) of the 880-acre wilderness site



“We are beginning to look our clients straight in the eye and ask them point blank: ‘do you really need all of the square footage?’”

—Arne Jorgensen, Partner

Now, as partner of one of the oldest practicing architecture firms in the state of Wyoming, Jorgensen says he is most proud of the firm’s sustainability efforts. In fact, several of the firm’s projects have been collaborations with nationwide leaders within the sustainable building field. “We have always attempted to be five to 10 years ahead of the industry in terms of efficiency projects,” explains Jorgensen, who works alongside partner Bruce Hawtin. “In the ’70s, we were among the first to move toward thicker walls to add more insulation. In 1980, we installed one of the largest solar systems in a house in Wyoming. It’s been ingrained into this company for many years.”

Jorgensen admits that an aggressive efficiency approach isn’t something he ever wants to force an unwilling client to accept; yet it is intuitively layered into every design discussion. “The efficiency efforts are something that is baked into all of our processes,” he notes. “We like to discuss it up front, but we certainly won’t jam it down anyone’s throat. Instead, I would say we have four-to five-layer discussions with our clients, where we look for catch words they use to describe their projects—whether that’s ‘love’ or ‘maintenance’ or ‘cost’ or ‘desire.’”

Back in 2004, Hawtin Jorgensen Architects entered into those discussion surrounding the Teton Science Schools Jackson Campus project, specifically designed to LEED standards. “There wasn’t really the awareness to support certification back then,” he mentions. “Today, it would be pursuing certification...no question about it. It definitely taught our community about the values of certification.” Jorgensen says the project clearly had a “leapfrog” effect in greening other schools and community buildings in Teton County and the state of Wyoming, including the architects’ most recent project, the Davey Jackson Elementary School, which is the first LEED Gold-certified school in Wyoming.

“The school itself is 88,000 square feet, built for nearly 500 K-12 students,” Jorgensen explains of the Teton Science Schools project. “Working on a project like this that will provide kids so much for so many years to come is so rewarding. I specifically remember watching the Teton County School Board sit up straight in their chairs when we began talking about efficiencies and LEED certification.”

Yet despite such noteworthy success in the educational sector, 70 percent of the firm’s current work is in residential architecture. Recent projects include the 3,600-square-foot private residence of Bruce Hawtin, which will be the first custom-built, LEED-certified residence in the state of Wyoming. Getting the local construction industry tied into the process of LEED certification helped in this and many others of the firm’s projects.

“We will always design and build in a way that is the most efficient,” Jorgensen says. “This could mean something as simple as using the least number of BTUs to heat a space. We often ask ourselves ‘what makes a project truly green?’ I mean, solar panels on a poorly insulated building makes no sense. The bottom line is a poorly designed building that is not loved, not comfortable, and will therefore, never be sustainable.”

Striving to be the best listener and informer, Jorgensen says that this firm works hard to make sure its clients are thinking through every option when it comes to their architectural project. “Take, for example, square footage,” Jorgensen says. “We are beginning to look our clients straight in the eye and ask them point blank: ‘do you really need all of the square footage?’ When they begin making decisions by answering honest, probing questions, we know we are all then on the same base.”

In recent months, the firm has begun to use the Energy Star rating system, comparing building to building against an average and watching the progress it makes in terms of energy use. “Most of the news regarding this company comes via word of mouth,” Jorgensen says. “This is a small town. Staying successful is all about individual connections and creating a reputation with the local builders in Wyoming. We have been around since 1970, and a good majority of our staff has been with us for multiple years,” he adds. “As we look toward the changing marketplace and employment realities, we are excited to be in a place where we are experiencing a transition in terms of how we approach projects. The best news is that, while the market has slowed a bit, it’s getting back to steady. The future is looking up.” **gb&d**

OPENING PHOTO: The Teton Science Schools Jackson Campus project, shown here at dusk, was designed specifically to LEED standards. The pioneering project inspired other schools and buildings in Teton County and throughout Wyoming to go green. Photo: Eckert & Eckert Photography.

PREVIOUS PAGE:  
TOP LEFT: A birdseye view of the campus. Photo: Eckert & Eckert Photography.  
TOP RIGHT: The Jackson campus dining lodge corner detail. Photo: Eckert & Eckert Photography.  
BOTTOM: Students play in front of the Journeys building. In sum, school structures only make up 2% of the site; the rest is wilderness. Photo: Juan Hernandez.