

Recycled Wallcovering Gives 34-Year-Old School Sustainable Facelift

How do you update a 34-year old school facility on a streamlined budget and incorporate green architecture that's durable enough to withstand 1,800 high-school students? Those were the challenges Ukiah Unified School District faced in renovating the Ukiah, California high school campus that was built in 1976 and never substantially updated.

Ukiah called on AXIA Architects of Santa Rosa, CA to design the multi-phase renovation and source high-performance, environmentally preferable materials. "Sustainability is part of the school's systemwide efforts, and our firm seeks to use environmentally friendly materials whenever possible," said AXIA Architects Principal Karen Pregler. "The challenge was finding green materials that were also cost-effective and durable."

The walls in the school were a particular challenge that needed a high-performance solution, according to Pregler. "Acoustics are extremely important, so we looked to wallcovering to reduce the sound reverberations. Wallcoverings also hold up better to wear and tear. Maintenance staffs keep getting cut, so we knew we would not be able to maintain drywall. The wallcovering also would camouflage tack holes from posters and information that is constantly pinned to the wall."

For its durability, Pregler turned to vinyl wallcovering. For sustainability, the firm selected Second-Look, the first vinyl wallcovering with post-consumer recycled content. "Second-Look was an easy decision as it had it all – durability, sustainability and an economical cost." The wallcoverings contain 20% recycled content, are low-VOC and meet CA 1350. They are projected to last 10+ years and can be repeatedly recycled to keep the material out of landfills for decades.

"Most importantly, there was not a premium cost for the recycled wallcoverings," says Pregler. "That's important because budget is always a constraint. We were able to save money now, and we'll save money later when the wallcoverings need to be replaced. In California, it's less expensive to recycle than to landfill."

The wall treatments changed the looks of the 1970s throwback interiors dramatically. The "brown burlap" walls were replaced with a sophisticated textured linen design. The school, which was originally built with few windows, received much needed natural light via nine new skylights cut into the roof. The wallcoverings reflects this light, helping to brighten halls and classrooms. Other interior finishes were replaced, including the original orange cabinetry which were exchanged for natural wood. The school was thoroughly modernized with energy efficient mechanical systems, new roofing and fire safety upgrades.

With Phase I completed, the school system continues to revamp the rest of campus, following LEED and CHPS guidelines and installing recycled wallcovering as they go. "The vinyl wallcovering industry has come a long way, with Second-Look in particular

providing us with a cost-effective, sustainable offering that has a great design selection. The final products are very sophisticated, and that's what we're trying to accomplish. We want to elevate the school atmosphere to a higher education level to honor the advanced learning that occurs here.”