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Firm builds new offices out of cargo containers

By [KATIE ZEMTSEFF](#)
 Journal Staff Reporter

A commercial building made of cargo containers had its grand opening this month and one of the owners, Jay Stark, said the complex is the first of its kind in the country.

The complex at 616 S. Lucille St. has two U-shaped, three-story buildings, each made of six cargo containers. The containers are stacked on top of each other.

Jay Stark is operations manager for DA Stark Interiors, an interior design firm led by his wife, Dixie Stark. DA Stark occupies the building that faces South Lucille Street. The Dixie Stark Home boutique, a retail gallery with pieces Dixie Stark has designed and manufactured, is on the first floor and gallery level. The third floor is the company's office space.

The other building is available for lease. Beginning next week, DA Stark will use the second building as a consignment shop for home furniture and decor.

Stark said the project has gotten a very positive response from the community.

"We thought this would really be an iconic structure in Seattle after it was completed," he said. "But as soon as we dropped the containers, we had people coming daily to see what we were doing."

DA Stark wanted to open a retail space in Georgetown near the Seattle Design Center, which is across the street. Georgetown didn't have any retail that was right for the Starks, so they decided to build. But DA Stark had a limited budget and a short time frame.

Stark said he learned about cargo container construction in a 2002 issue of *Wired* magazine. When they decided to build, the idea resurfaced.

The cargo containers the team used came



Photos by Katie Zemtseff [\[enlarge\]](#)
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from the Port of Seattle. It took about two months to find a set of containers that were 9.5 feet high and built by the same manufacturer. Getting the containers ready for installation took about a week for each one.

[\[enlarge\]](#)
DA Stark occupies the building facing South Lucille Street. The other building is available for lease.

Last June, crews craned the 12 containers into place during a single day.

“It looked like a little Port of Seattle South down here,” Stark said. “Our neighbors were a little shocked when they came back from work that day.”

The project was completed in November, and took about a month longer than the team planned.

The roof is made of structurally insulated panels. Exterior walls were insulated and finished, while the interior walls were left as is to provide contrast with the softer design pieces on display inside.

Take a tour

DA Stark is offering tours of its space. To arrange a tour, call Jay Stark at (206) 227-8726.

Even with a longer construction timeline, Stark said the project made great financial sense and was cheaper than steel or wood-frame construction. Steel-frame construction would have cost around \$200 per square foot, he said, while cargo containers cost between \$150 and \$175 per square foot, saving about 25 percent.

“Just the raw materials alone... this is just an unbelievably low cost operation to start from,” he said.

Using containers meant the structures are made of 80 percent reused materials by weight, which Stark described as “unheard of” in the building industry. So the team chose to go further with green techniques.

The buildings have halogen and fluorescent lighting, an efficient reverse-cycle chiller HVAC system, and windows with argon gas sandwiched between the panes for increased insulation.

Each room has individual ducts so users can heat rooms separately without warming the entire building. The system is wireless and remotely controlled.

Water reuse is another focus. Each building will have a green roof with four inches of soil and planted sedums. Rainwater not treated by the roof will flow into a planter containing grape vines that will grow up the walls of the containers.

Any additional water will flow into a raingarden between the buildings. Walkways and parking on the site are covered with 6,000 square feet of permeable concrete.



[\[enlarge\]](#)
Dixie Stark has a boutique on the first floor and gallery level.

Stark said these features should treat all water that falls on the site, except during heavy rainstorms.

Building a fixed office complex with cargo containers wasn't easy. Stark said Seattle's Department of Planning and Development was helpful in sorting out problems, but many details such as electrical wiring and connections were quite challenging.

The project was also complex because it is not wood or steel construction. In the end, the team decided to classify it as wood-frame construction and then exceeded all the structural loads. The containers can hold 70,000 pounds of weight per container, Stark said.



Check out a video of the building at <http://tinyurl.com/ybytto6>

He expects such projects will have a much easier permitting process in the future.

Stark said he recommends cargo construction for office projects. DA Stark is also hoping to use its experience in Georgetown for future business.

“We think that now that we have this experience, we definitely could do more business helping people put together their own cargo construction projects whether it's residential or commercial.”

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