

## PROFILE

# Lessons from Landscapes

Seattle architect Tom Kundig reinvents spaces, connects to locations *By Margot Kahn Case*

At **Studhorse**, an exquisite home in Winthrop, Washington, a giant rock sits at the center of a cluster of buildings. It is a focal point, a place to set a drink and a reminder of the land that was here well before the house was built.

In the buildings around it, hand cranks open windows and reconfigure walls to allow for views and access between spaces. The casual-yet-breathtaking, modern-meets-nature design is textbook work from **Tom Kundig**.



Architect Tom Kundig.

Kundig, a Seattle-based architect, is the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2008 National Design Award from the Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum. His latest book, *Tom Kundig: Works*, features recent projects set in varied landscapes around the world.

Born in Merced, California, and raised in Spokane, Washington, Kundig has connections to the land that run deep. He spent his formative years climbing mountains in Washington. “Climbing taught me how to understand failure, and how to assess risk, and how to work hard,” he says. It also likely taught him a thing or two about topography and perspective.

“The Pacific Northwest is a big landscape,” he says. “As a kid growing up in it, I think it gave me a sense of a larger world, of our position in this larger cosmos.”

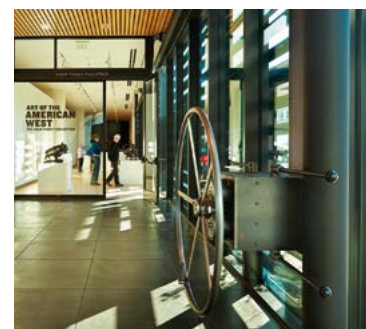
From choosing materials that blend into the surrounding environment to siting a building for maximum day lighting, Kundig’s history and biography are reflected in his work. There is the influence of his

architect father (who was supportive when Tom initially steered away from architecture) and his summer jobs at sawmills, where he learned the dynamics of wood. Before choosing architecture, he studied sciences at the University of Washington. His study of physics informed many of his legendary “gizmos”—the gadgets that open entire walls of windows, or move a wall to make one room into two—designed with his longtime collaborator, Phil Turner.

Kundig’s own home, the **Hot Rod House** in Seattle, is named after another influence: the 1960s and 1970s hot rod culture that Kundig observed growing up in Spokane. “It was a culture of reinvention,” says Kundig of the car tinkerers he watched on his street. “They would take a commodity and then reinvent it, give it their own take. And I learned that this was the spirit of the artist, to look around and recognize the common denominator and provoke another way of thinking.”

After more than 30 years in architecture, reinvention remains an important part of Kundig’s style. When the **Tacoma Art Museum** commissioned Olson Kundig (at which Kundig is a principal and owner) to replace the building’s entrance and add the new Haub Galleries wing, Kundig had the opportunity to reinvent the museum’s relationship to its site. His design repositioned the entrance and included a tall entrance canopy, open lobby space, floor-to-ceiling gallery windows, sliding screens to allow variable exhibit lighting, and earthy colors and materials that emphasize sustainability. The overall effect is to make the space more welcoming. In the museum’s new iteration, it “invites people in,” Kundig says. “It opens its doors to the city.”

Nineteen of Kundig’s latest projects—including Studhorse, the Tacoma Art Museum and others from New York to Seoul—are featured in his new book, published by Princeton Architectural Press. Learn more about Tom Kundig’s work at [olsonkundig.com](http://olsonkundig.com).



Top: The 2012 Studhorse project, in Winthrop, Washington, features a low profile that blends into its surroundings, and gadgetry to move walls and reconfigure spaces.

Above: The Haub Galleries addition at the Tacoma Art Museum (2014) includes open, adaptable spaces with exposed mechanisms.