View of Split Rock Healing House from the community gathering circle.

Split Rock Healing House

Project Description

Tsë Lhts'ënc'il Nec'igekh Be Yikh (Split Rock Healing House) is a community-led, cultural healing space for youth in the unceded traditional territory of the Likhsilyu Clan in Witset, British Columbia. The project includes a Healing House for youth and live-in staff and five visitor cabins for families. Inspired by traditional northern British Columbia pit houses, the Passive House certified building is embedded in the hillside and oriented to maximize solar gain and daylight. Developed through community collaboration, it provides a culturally safe, home-like setting for gathering, ceremony, learning, and retreat, strengthening connections to land and tradition.

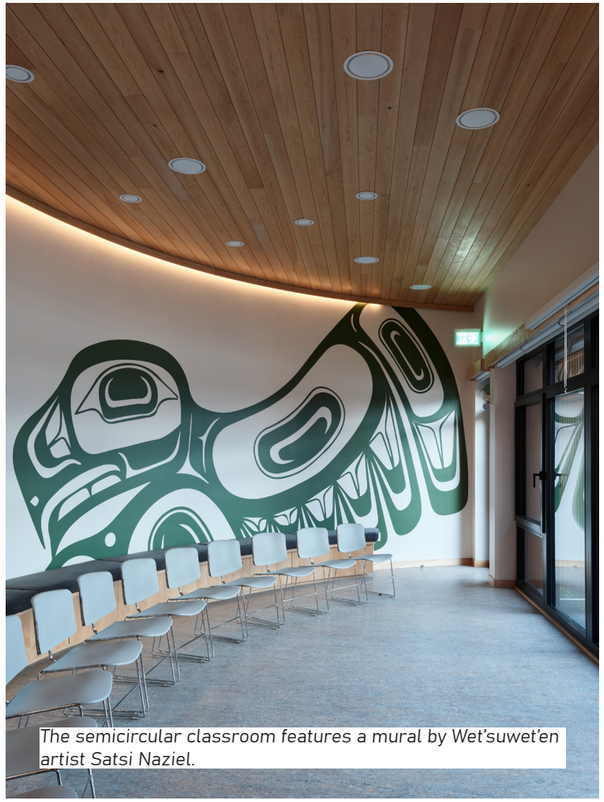
Environmental restoration shaped the landscape approach. All on-site soils were retained and reused, habitat trees preserved, and felled timber repurposed for slope stabilization. Native planting prioritized regionally appropriate and wild-harvested seeds to re-establish a resilient, self-sustaining ecosystem following wildfire disturbance. Green roofs planted with native and culturally significant species capture and filter rainwater, reducing runoff and supporting passive irrigation. Water-efficient fixtures and greywater reuse further lower potable water demand. Passive House features include a super-insulated, airtight envelope, energy recovery ventilation, and a high-efficiency air-source heat pump, achieving very low energy use.

Community and Wellness

Split Rock Healing House supports the well-being of the community as a culturally safe space where people can gather and heal by practicing cultural traditions. The building is located near an existing community space, expanding the infrastructure for community gatherings. The primary design intent of the Healing House is to support the physical and psychological health of its occupants.

Through extensive community engagement sessions, the design team developed a vision of the Healing House that was informed by the community's desire to be safe and feel welcomed, practice traditional forms of wellness, and connect with the land. Large windows maintain continuous views of the outdoors and local and natural finishes such as birch and hemlock are used throughout the building.

The building program provides a variety of spaces where youth can gather, engage in new activities, and learn new skills. Such spaces include a classroom – which also allows for smudging - a solarium, and a gym. There are also spaces for retreat, including the sensory room and bedrooms. The bedrooms contain millwork with magnetic door fronts and bedroom door signs that youth can personalize, supporting youth individuality and encouraging a sense of ownership over their space while staying at the Healing House.



The semicircular classroom features a mural by Wet'suwet'en artist Satsi Naziel.

Strategic Decisions

The Passive House certified building is partially embedded in the hillside to take advantage of the insulation provided by the earth while creating a strong connection with the land. Like sod-covered pit houses, an extensive green roof, planted with culturally significant plants, caps the Healing House. The main entrance to the building is located on the upper floor containing the staff and shared living spaces. The flow of circulation – from semi-public to private – then leads downwards, to the more private rooms on the lower level. The building orientation follows the curvature of the hill contour, blending into the landscape, and aims to maximize solar gain from the south, resulting in a southwestern orientation.

Site Ecology

Landscape Design Objectives

- Implement a planting approach that helps to repair the post-construction site activity as well as previous wildfire impacts and assist in establishing a restorative, resilient and self-sustaining native plant community that supports ecological function.
- Introduce a series of outdoor spaces that expand the interior programs and help facilitate cultural ceremonies and practices towards knowledge sharing and community healing on Wet'suwet'en territory.

The Healing House features two green roofs. The accessible green roof echos the design of traditional subterranean pit houses which can be entered from above.

Site Clearing and Preparation
All soils were retained on site, including the top organic layer with microbes, seeds, fungi, and woody debris, stockpiled for post-construction use. Partially burnt standing snags were assessed for safety—some preserved as wildlife habitat, while hazardous trees were felled and placed around the site perimeter. These logs support slope stabilization and continue to provide ecological value as they decompose, enhancing long-term site resilience and restoring natural habitat following wildfire disturbance.

Plant and Seed Sourcing Approach
Native plantings prioritized regional provenance for resilience in northern British Columbia's climate. Interior-sourced plants, suited to cold winters and seasonal variability, were used instead of coastal nursery stock. Local wild seeds were harvested, catalogued, stored, and hand-broadcast in spring across designated zones, supplementing a custom native hydroseed mix from regional suppliers, ensuring long-term landscape performance and ecological sustainability.

This approach aligns with current restoration and landscape best practices emphasizing locally adapted plant material to improve establishment success, resilience, and overall durability of the planting design.

Site Construction Material and Site Furnishing Selection
Significant site retention was required to enable usable and accessible spaces in and around the building and site. The team chose gabion baskets as the most sustainable way to construct the required site retaining walls, with the ability to use crushed, screened rock material sourced from a nearby quarry. The stone stair treads and crushed aggregate pathway material were also sourced from within the province. The timber site furnishings were intentionally fabricated from regionally sourced standard forest products and designed and detailed for durability and future maintenance needs.

Light and Air

Located on the side of a west-facing hill, the building features large windows and receives abundant natural light while 91% of regularly occupied floor areas are within 7m of operable windows. The building has an air change rate of 0.4ACH@50 Pa.

Water Conservation

Water conservation strategies complement the building's energy performance. Rainwater is captured within the green roof system and what is not taken up by the plants is channeled down to the planted conveyance troughs and swales or perimeter drain-away-pits, further slowing and filtering the rainwater before its acceptance into the

Natural materials are used throughout the building.

ground water system. WaterSense-certified plumbing fixtures reduce indoor water consumption, and greywater from the septic system lowers irrigation demands. Together, these measures support a resilient, low-impact facility aligned with community and environmental values.

Operating Energy Present and Future

As a certified Passive House building, the Healing House construction is characterized by extreme airtightness, a super-insulated envelope, and abundant solar gains. To reduce operational energy use, heating and cooling are supplied by a high-efficiency air-source heat pump, supported by backup electric heaters for peak conditions. ERV systems provide consistent, balanced ventilation while recovering heat and maintaining indoor air quality. The building envelope has effective R-values of R-75 for exterior walls, R-110 for the green roofs, and R-82 for the concrete slabs on grade. The building's EUI is 41kWH/m2/yr.

Materials and Resources

Materials were selected for indoor environmental quality, renewability, recyclability, and local sourcing. BC-milled wood was used for landscape furnishings, structural framing and interior finishes. Carbon-negative products such as wood-fibre board insulation, and bio-based flooring were used throughout.

Education and Information Sharing

The idea for the Split Rock Healing House was initiated by the community to address the need for local, culturally relevant care and support for youth. It is an example of how developments can be collaborative processes between the designers and the community. Split Rock Healing House is a safe, welcoming space designed to feel like a home, not an institution. As a Passive House project, the building emphasizes resilient, high-functioning design, promoting the well-being of its residents while benefiting the broader community. The project encourages occupants to understand the principles of Passive House construction, with a manual provided to guide them in using the building efficiently. This approach fosters both environmental sustainability and a deeper awareness of the space they inhabit.

Wide tilt-and-turn windows bring abundant natural light into the bedrooms.

Cedar slat brise-soleils provide shading over large windows, creating comfortable interiors.