



Rockwell Storage South Salt Lake, Utah by Kerri Fivecoat-Campbell

Many studies have found that people want to purchase experiences more than things, but what happens when the concept of experiences and things are combined?

A New Facility of the Year winner is created.

Rockwell Storage, located in the Mill Creek area of South Salt Lake, Utah, is on one of the busiest intersections that lead people into the city.

However, that isn't the only thing that makes this facility so special. The facility not only has an overall Route 66 car theme, but it bucks the idea that the upper floor of multi-level storage is the "stepchild" of the facility.

"The fourth floor is always the hardest to rent, and typically goes for lower rents than the other floors," says James Mitton, owner/developer in Salt Lake City, Utah.

"The opposite is true at Rockwell."

The fourth floor at Rockwell Storage is actually considered the VIP floor, featuring extra security, a conference room, lounge, pinball machine, refreshments, and a putting green for its very important tenants.

"There is a lot of storage in the area, so I knew we had to build something really outstanding," says Mitton. "I build my facilities really slow and like them to be unique, different, and fun."

Though the \$6 million-plus project faced a lot of opposition and almost didn't happen, Mitton says, "the results were worth it."

Building Unique Facilities

Mitton has been developing and building self-storage since 1999. Perhaps one of his most recognized themed facilities is King Arthur Storage, which was built in 2006.



After he conceives an idea, Mitton starts looking for the perfect location for his next project, a process that typically takes five to six years.

Four years ago, he came upon the two-thirds-of-an-acre property adjacent to a 7-11 convenience store on one of the busiest arteries of South Salt Lake. He purchased the property for about \$450,000.

Mitton knew he was going to have to design and build something very special, due to the existing competition in the area. "What I didn't know when I purchased the land was there was already another one approved two buildings away," says Mitton. "They were about a year ahead of us."

The challenge just made Mitton strive to develop the nicest facility, with more amenities than others in the area. He went with Vincent Design Group, Inc., in Salt Lake City, and Menlove Construction, both of which he had worked with on previous projects.

Knowing the city was against the project, Mitton hired a professional decorator to help design the outside of the facility. "We had a beautiful design," says Mitton, "but the city, and especially the mayor, just didn't want storage."

The original design Mitton presented to the city was a four-story building with clock towers. "That was the first problem," says Mitton. "They tried to discourage us at every turn." Mitton knew he needed four stories to make the project pencil, but the height restrictions the city imposed put it at a three-story grade.

"We were dealing with constricted height limitation," says Brent Vincent, president and project architect for Vincent Design Group,

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Inc., who explains they typically go 47 to 48 feet with four stories, but they had to cut at least five feet from the plan. As well as taking it a little lower into the ground, “every floor got a little bit shorter,” he says.

Unfortunately, the city just kept coming at them with reasons to deny the project. “They tried to push us to give it up,” says Mitton.

Not only was the city blocking the project, a group of neighbors, led by an elderly next-door neighbor, was opposing the project. “That isn’t uncommon for neighbors to oppose self-storage and be concerned about safety,” says Vincent.

One of the primary complaints neighbors had about the design was the windows facing their properties. “They didn’t want renters on the upper floors to be able to look out onto their property,” says Vincent, “so we designed opaque windows for that side of the building.”

Opaque windows basically look like decorative windows from the outside but a wall from the inside, which prevents people from seeing out.

Finally, the city decided the building had to be completely fireproof. “We had to come up with a way to fireproof while still allowing the building to be esthetically pleasing,” says Vincent. “Most spray on fireproofing is pretty ugly.”

For every problem, there is a solution, and the team came up with a fireproof paint that is attractive and can be exposed. “It was an interesting way to solve the problem,” says Vincent. “James has several self-storage facilities, and he wanted a specific color to match the others, so it worked out well.”

With these modifications, the city finally relented. “We finally appealed and eventually got the go-ahead,” says Mitton. “We ended up with the most beautiful building in Mill Creek, and now the city is very happy.”

Mitton thinks even the neighbor who was one of the most vocal against the project is now grateful for its presence and advanced security features. That elderly man, who rarely leaves his home, left for a period to visit some relatives. “When he was gone, his home was burglarized,” says Mitton. “Our cameras, which have car plate recognition, caught a photo of the vehicle involved and the license plate, which allowed them to make an arrest.”

While Mitton hasn’t spoken with the neighbor, he feels the man might be thankful the facility and cameras were there to help. Mitton also takes satisfaction in helping improve the perception of self-storage. “Self-storage



is about the people, and if we can change their opinions about self-storage and put a smile on their faces, that is great,” says Mitton.

Breaking Ground On Limited Space

Originally, Mitton thought they were going to have problems with a soil test that was required due to the neighboring 7-11, which sells gasoline. He explains that the first soil test, which tested for the presence of oil, didn’t pass code. “We had to do another test,” says Mitton, “and that one came out good.”

Once ground was broken, the biggest challenge was due to the small print of the site. “Staging was tricky because there wasn’t a lot



of room to work," says Ken Menlove, president of Menlove Construction. "We also had to work with 7-11, but they were great to work with."

Menlove explains that on a site so small, you must schedule trade crews to come in one at a time. "We had winter days we couldn't work at all if there was too much snow, and that throws the schedule off," he says. "We would have days where more than one crew would show up and we'd have to send someone home, because you can only have so many people there at once."

The other challenge the project presented was the fact that it is masonry, which had to be built floor by floor, rather than the entire skeleton of the building constructed at one time. "Masonry had to come back and do it level by level," says Menlove.

Other than the issues with dealing with a postage-stamp-sized site and coordinating efforts with 7-11 that involved moving some overhead power and communication lines, the process was a smooth one. "It was a long

process, but a pretty clean build," says Menlove. "James designs great facilities that are all unique."

The Interior Is An Experience

Rockwell is not only a beautiful property on the outside, but the interior represents a Class-A, modern storage facility with a touch of nostalgia. Customers enter a clean and bright office area featuring marble floors and a leasing counter with wood plank inlays.

Although Route 66, the Mother Road and one of the first highway systems that connected the country doesn't set far away, Rockwell isn't right on Route 66. Still, Mitton wanted to bring a classic car, Route 66 theme and feel to the facility. Outside there's a classic '57 red and white Corvette convertible that's used to draw in customers. "Basically, I wanted to get a Corvette, and the only way my wife would agree to it is to help the business," Mitton jokes.

The Corvette and car theme continues inside. There is a wall that displays original license plates from all 50 states. "It's kind of a fun little hobby," Mitton says of the

collection. An old-fashioned gas pump further adds to the display.

The fourth floor is where the car theme races to the finish line. Of course, the walls are lined with paintings and photos of classic Corvettes. There is a working Corvette-themed pinball machine for tenants to play and a 50s car-themed sofa. A large mural of Route 66 is near the putting green, and a statue of a butler offers refreshments to customers. If the VIPs on the fourth floor are sore and tired, they can also take a spin in the leather massage chair.

What's more, there are themed units on the fourth floor, like the Man Cave. All the units on that floor are carpeted and finished.

More Than Curb Appeal

Rockwell isn't all about looks and fun things to do. First and foremost, Mitton builds his facilities with a high level of security. "Especially on this facility, James wanted to go overboard on security," says Ray Tuohy, owner of TNT Storage Management in Anaheim, Calif. "If James' wife comes on the property and feels safe, then he knows people will feel safe there."

The property features 62 high-definition cameras, including license plate recognition cameras on the exterior of the building. The fourth floor also has several hidden cameras for extra security.

Michael Perkins, owner of Security Plus in Chino, Calif., installed the door lock systems for PTI Security Systems. He says the facility is equipped with the top-of-the-line PTI Apex keypad system with four-line display that allows tenants to enter the front door and first floor. There are elevator keypads on the two hospital-sized elevators that enable tenants to enter a code and only go to the floor where their unit is located.

Each unit on every floor is equipped with a PTI Quick Switch door alarm, while units on the fourth floor are also equipped with the DoorBoss wireless smart lock for an extra layer of security.