

Mountain Hardwear: The Mountain Moves to the Bay

Mountain Hardwear, the newest addition to the Ford Point Building in Richmond's Marina Bay, is all moved in, and the company has created a truly unique and comfortable work environment for its dedicated employees.

It's important to note the spelling of Mountain Hardwear's name, because it is definitely not a hardware store. Mountain Hardwear designs and develops top-of-the-line outdoor gear, including clothing, tents, sleeping bags, backpacks and other accessories. Although there are almost 100 employees at the new Richmond location, which covers almost 78,000 square feet, there is a family atmosphere in the air, and a friendly down-to-earth attitude. This is almost certainly because the entire staff shares a passion for the outdoors—a passion that drives their desire to develop innovative, technologically advanced outdoor gear and the company's desire to create a working environment dedicated to keeping the employees happy at the same time.

Mountain Hardwear was formed in 1993 by a small group of people that included: Jack Gilbert, former VP of Sales and Marketing at The North Face and former president of Sierra Designs; Paul Kramer, avid backpacker and snowboarder, also from Sierra Designs; Mike Wallenfels, an experienced climber and mountaineer with sales experience from Adventure 16; and Paige Boucher, an enthusiastic backcountry skier with strong marketing



Richmond Mayor Gayle McLaughlin welcomes Mountain Hardwear to the Ford Point Building at the Open House on April 8th.

experience, also from Sierra Designs.

Founded on a principle of radical thinking, Mountain Hardwear has been very successful in continually inventing and re-inventing some of the most functional and innovative outdoor gear available, and it has changed the industry as a result. As part of its research and development, Mountain Hardwear sponsors over 20 athletes and uses their real-world challenges and experiences to continue to advance the technology and fabrics the company builds into its products.

Mountain Hardwear has taken claim to the north section of the Historic Ford Point Building, which includes the original Ford Company executive offices and former

showroom. From the minute they started designing their new workspace in the 78-year-old Ford Point Building, there was an unwavering commitment given to environmental sustainability.

The list of green initiatives

undertaken by Mountain Hardwear is very impressive, but also, it should be noted that some of the features initially designed into the over 500,000-square foot building by architect Albert Kahn would be considered environmentally sustainable today. The sawtooth roof was designed to feature large northern skylights, which provide abundant natural light, and the hinged windows along the western and northern walls are aligned perfectly to draw in the cool Bay breezes, which provide natural air conditioning. Following Kahn's lead, Mountain Hardware was able to design a ventilation system that will draw cool Bay air during the summer months, which will cut down on cooling costs.

"We made sustainable decisions from top to bottom," said Operations Director James Bottoms. He added, "Another key sustainable component of our new space is that 100 percent of our annual electrical needs will be supplied by on-site solar power." The aforementioned sawtooth roof design is also a

perfect host for a solar panel array, and it just so happens that a fellow Ford Point Building tenant, SunPower, designs, manufactures and delivers the highest efficiency solar electricity technology worldwide. Mountain Hardwear has made arrangements to purchase enough of the power generated by the one megawatt system installed at the Ford Point Building by SunPower to cover all of its electric needs.

"Just because we are going solar does not mean that we plan to waste power," said Bottoms, noting that the large skylights and ample windows allowed them to install less fluorescent lighting per square foot than would have been possible elsewhere. "The open-space lighting that we do have is controlled by photo cells, so output is less when there is enough natural light and all the offices and meeting rooms have motion detectors to turn off the lighting when rooms are not in use."

The green approach can be seen from the ceiling to the floors. According to Bottoms, "In addition to our hanging



Kayaks and bicycles are available for Mountain Hardwear employees to take advantage of the beautiful surroundings of Richmond's Marina Bay.

fluorescent lighting, we made sustainable flooring decisions. In many areas, we did not use any floor covering. We cleaned and sealed the existing concrete floor, significantly reducing our consumption of materials.” In the company’s showrooms, 100 percent natural, nontoxic, dye free, biodegradable wool/hemp/cotton carpeting was used. The employee store has compressed bamboo flooring and the recreation room uses flooring tiles made from recycled tires.

In addition to everything that the company has done to be environmentally responsible, the employees have pledged to continue their sustainable practices and even implement a few new ones. The kitchen areas include dishwashers and are stocked with plates, glasses and utensils to eliminate the need for any disposable products. Trash will continue to be separated from recyclable waste, but the employees will be able to separate waste that is compostable too.

Employees are also encouraged to take public transportation; a free shuttle bus is provided for employees every morning and night from the Ford Point Building to the Richmond BART station. On-site showers are even available for those that bike to work, and, remarkably, at least one or two employees say they will use the on-site kayak launch to kayak to work.

The location of the Ford Point Building along Richmond’s beautiful waterfront will also allow Mountain Hardware employees to have more fun. Because the scenic Bay Trail runs right in



Photo by Joel Williams

The sawtooth roof at the Ford Point Building features large northern skylights that provide abundant natural light.

front of the building along San Francisco Bay, Mountain Hardware provides its employees with temporary use of bicycles and kayaks in order to take a ride in or along the Bay. The company has also provided the employees with a recreation room that has ping pong, pool and foosball tables as well as a climbing wall. Employees are even allowed to

bring their dogs to work too if they want. All in all, the company is an exceptional place to work.

Bottoms sums thing up by saying that, “Mountain Hardware prides itself on innovation in product, people and process. Albert Kahn was one of the world’s best innovators of places. With our relocation to the Ford Point Building, Mountain

Hardware is proud to be headquartered in such an innovative place.”

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Photo by Joel Williams

Mountain Hardware employee Joy Doyle and her husband Rick along with their Golden Retriever, Mr. Beauregard Dubois.



Photo by Joel Williams

The Mountain Hardware employee recreation room features ping pong, pool and foosball tables along with a climbing wall.