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Works In Progress

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By Preston T. Phillips, Architect **May 21, 2012 3:58 PM**

Driving around in mid-winter, it occurred to me that in my nearly 30 years as a full-time East End resident I had never seen so much large-scale public sector construction under way.

Driving from Shinnecock Hills to Sag Harbor, one passes project after project under construction. I am not referring to small-scale undertakings, but serious earth-moving, foundation-laying, steel-hoisting construction efforts.

While I have seen no statistics, I can't imagine that there is a single Suffolk County construction worker looking for work: be they masons, electricians, roofers, framers, plumbers, or painters. The pace at these construction sites is heady, with numerous building trades descending daily on projects of considerable scope and import.

Almost all of the projects in this survey met with controversy; community opposition in one form or another; and many, many years of hearings and approval presentations. A few even stopped midstream and started anew. Others required forensic studies in an effort to document, preserve, or duplicate historic building practices and materials.

Combined, these projects represent a broad range of architectural styles, materials and cutting-edge technologies. Over the course of the next three months I will review these projects individually and in great detail. For now, we will look at them collectively with an eye toward the big ideas surrounding them.

THE BULOVA WATCHCASE FACTORY

I first visited the Bulova Watchcase Factory in the late 1980s after moving here full time. My New York City practice had focused primarily on loft design, which then, as now, remains a mainstay for city dwellers. As I walked through the four-story factory—with light pouring through its hundreds of windows, its rich Southern yellow pine beams and ceilings and its exposed brick walls—I thought at the time, “this would be a perfect loft conversion.”

After decades of fits and starts from many disparate investment groups, the Watchcase Factory finally found an appropriate suitor in Manhattan- and New



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Jersey-based Cape Advisors. It is a match made in heaven. Cape Advisors, noted developers of both modern and historic buildings, have approached the project with both delicacy, finesse and bold strokes.

Experts in forensic disciplines have been retained to analyze and evaluate the structural components of the building, including the yellow pine beams and cast-brick walls. Great care is being taken to replace "in kind" any elements not deemed stable or secure in an effort to replicate the original conditions as closely as possible.



Inside the former Bulova Watchcase Factory. COURTESY CAPE ADVISORS

The bold strokes involve what would easily be labeled "urban renewal" if this project was not in Sag Harbor. A new through-street between Division and Church is planned, along with a pool, fitness and spa pavilion, and 17 townhouse units—all of which will sit above a 130-car parking structure. If you have driven past the site when the construction gate is open, you saw that it was a jaw-dropping experience.

Upon completion in 2013, there will be 47 apartments in the factory proper, and 17

townhouse units, totaling an astounding 116,000 square feet of living space, all



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designed by the highly respected firm of Manhattan-based Beyer Blinder Belle Architects. The completed project promises to have the greatest impact on Sag Harbor since the collapse of the whaling industry in the 1850s.

With The Parrish and Bulova projects as bookends, this is quite a formidable list, covering every possible facet of architecture. I look forward to exploring these projects firsthand over the coming months and reporting accordingly.