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SAG HARBOR: ROCK AROUND THE CLOCK

With a number of buildings—from the Bulova Watchcase Factory to the John Jermain Memorial Library to Village Hall—sheathed in scaffolding and protective netting, locals are likening Sag Harbor to “a poor man’s Christo.”

Luckily, the 120-year-old Bulova Watchcase Factory building on Division Street, vacant since 1980, is seeing new life, with Cape Advisors moving full speed ahead on the luxury condominium project. Even die-hard Sag Harbor boosters can hardly believe the reno is finally happening. Graffiti artists with spray cans have been replaced by construction workers using a special walnut-shell blast to gently clean the brick walls.

The building has a history of revival. The original Fahys Watch Case Company closed in 1931, a victim of the Depression. Sag Harbor’s private citizens and local businesses paid for the renovation and new machinery in order to reincarnate the factory in 1936, attracting Bulova for an almost-50-year run.



The Watchcase Factory (bought by Cape Advisors for \$16 million in 2006) was also a victim of the economy when the development hit the recession head-on in 2008. Cape Advisors co-founder Craig Wood says, “We had a fairly long, arduous process to get our approvals, which we managed to obtain in late August 2008, before the economy went into a real tailspin. It didn’t seem the best time to start.” Deutsche Bank stepped in last fall to infuse \$60 million into the project, fast-tracking the renovations.

The property will encompass 47 condominium residences ranging from studios to four-bedrooms, including penthouses and 17 new-construction townhouses. Manicured gardens and lawns, a swimming pool, fitness center, and underground parking are also in the works, according to the Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group, which will be handling sales.

“We’re anticipating a sales launch in early 2013 for presales, and building completion in late 2013,” says Wood. “If we keep to our schedule, we’ll be putting landscaping in next summer.”



Of the design, Wood explains, “We’ve spent an enormous amount of time and effort to retain the essence of the building, such as the arched windows, exposed beams, and granite vaults. We’ve saved 20,000 bricks from the original structure. You just can’t match that patina. The townhouses were designed to look like unique Sag Harbor homes.” There’s already a waitlist, even though the prices have yet to be published.

Cape Advisors has tapped New York– and Sag Harbor–based designer Steven Gambrel to do the interior design of the residences and common areas. Quennelle Rothschild will complete the landscaping using all native plants. The exterior will be done by Beyer Blinder Belle, the preeminent American architectural firm behind such restoration projects as Grand Central Terminal, the Ellis Island Museum, and the United States Capitol.

Another stalled Sag Harbor condominium development is showing signs of life again. East End Ventures is reportedly working on securing financing to complete the 21 West Water Street Condos next to Baron’s Cove, which have been sitting dormant at about 75 percent completion, though the company needs to deal with a reported \$3 million in liens from unpaid contractors recorded with the Suffolk County Clerk’s office. The listing for 21 West Water indicates 19 units ranging from approximately 1,500 to 2,000 square feet with prices ranging from \$1.6 million to \$3 million.

East End Ventures is also behind the proposed condominium complex on Ferry Road next to the bridge to North Haven. Recently, the firm’s \$30 million lawsuit against the Village of Sag Harbor and its trustees was dismissed in federal court. It had alleged discrimination because the developers of the (then 65-unit) Bulova project were given exemption from the new village code, while their proposed 18-unit luxury condominiums at Ferry Road were subject to the code’s units-per-acre limitation. East End Ventures is reportedly seeking to find a way forward on both projects.

Village codes notwithstanding, what remains to be seen is if there’s a demand for a large number of expensive condominium units hitting the Sag Harbor market. Not mowing the lawn is nice, but for \$3 million you can have a beautiful house with a pool and tennis court and not have to listen to your neighbor’s best “Poker Face” rendition.