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PAST LIVES

SAG HARBOR, N.Y.

Sag Harbor's Old Watch Factory Reassembled as Luxe Lofts

Wednesday, June 12, 2013, by Rob Bear

*Here now, **Past Lives**, in which Curbed explores what some of the country's most interesting residential buildings used to be before they became livable homes. Care to suggest a building with a fascinating past life? Do drop us a line.*



Show only before

Show only after

For decades, the former Bulova Watch Factory in the charming Long Island village of Sag Harbor sat abandoned and deteriorating. The 132-year-old landmark was in danger of degrading past the point of restoration by the time developer Cape Advisors—known for Manhattan's Jean Nouvel-designed 100 Eleventh Avenue—stepped in and began convincing the town to permit the transformation of the old factory into high-end lofts and the addition of new houses on the perimeter of the 2.5-acre property. Now known as the **Watchcase**, the historic building has been shored up and the project is finally entering the last phase of construction, with completion scheduled for early summer 2014.



↑ The cornerstone for the factory was laid in 1881. Then known as the **Fahys Watchcase Factory**, the structure was home to throngs of immigrant workers—some recruited directly from Ellis Island—who, by 1899, were churning out more than 12,000 watch cases per day. Purpose built for the task, the building incorporated exceedingly large windows situated at bench height, to provide adequate light for the intricate metalwork. A central courtyard brought that light into the heart of the building, while a towering smoke stack provided ventilation for the near-constant smelting. The impressive Second Empire tower, pictured above, was too far gone to save, as was the top section of the smokestack, the remainder of which now serves as a chimney for the double-sided fireplace in the lobby.



↑ The painstaking restoration work involved the repointing or replacement of the entire brick facade, and while the exterior walls are roughly half complete, the interior courtyard is still shrouded in scaffolding. The new mortar was matched exactly to the original, right down to the use of a darker shade on the window frames, a detail uncovered during the restoration project. With the original cornice long ago having succumbed to rot, a new version was installed (*above*) with a design based on historic photographs.



↑ Where possible, the architects sought to preserve and integrate some of the building's original features. The factory's **silver vaults***above*, designed as impregnable, granite-walled, windowless repositories, will be refashioned as kitchens in some of the loft units, all 46 of which will have unique floorplans. Hallways have been eliminated, thanks to the use of multiple elevator banks, ensuring that the light and air afforded to the workers of the 1880s will be preserved for the millionaires of the 2010s.

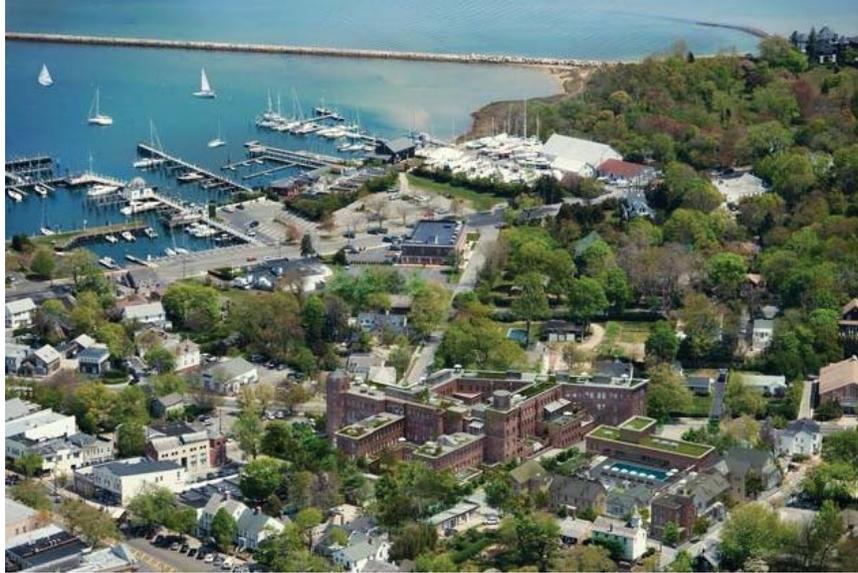


↑ In the early planning stages, architect **Jack Beyer**, of the venerable New York firm of Beyer Blinder Belle, suggested raising the floors of the residential loft units. This simultaneously solved two issues with the original configuration. One, that the factory windows—positioned so workers could stand at their benches—were far too high, keeping those seated at a normal height from enjoying the treetop views of the Village. And two, that conventional HVAC equipment would cover over the gorgeous original beams. Now, in a complex process helmed by builder Nick Racanelli, the systems are being secreted away in a cavity beneath the floor (*above*).



↑ The project celebrated its grand opening last week by revealing a model unit, done up by interior designer **Steven Gambrel**. Aiming for a design that "feels like it was always there," Gambrel was tasked with creating kitchens and bathrooms that weren't an afterthought and wouldn't be automatically replaced

by buyers. That's a tall order at this price point, where buyers are accustomed to getting exactly what they want.



↑ The smallest unit in the Watchcase complex, a 700-square-foot one-bedroom, is listed for \$860K, but the largest, a three-bed, four-bath penthouse with two terraces, will set buyers back \$7.25M. The asking prices haven't deterred early purchasers. According to Corcoran, 19 of the project's 47 lofts are already in contract. The townhouses, in less advanced stages of construction, have yet to be sent to market.

- [Watchcase](#) [official site]
- [Cape Advisors](#) [official site]
- [Beyer Blinder Belle](#) [official site]