



CELEBRATING
55 YEARS

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The Architectural Team celebrates milestone at Baker Chocolate Factory

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This year, The Architectural Team will celebrate a 30-year milestone for one of the firm's signature specialties: the master planning and conversion of defunct historic mills and factories into a new destination places for people to live, work and play. The occasion is the 30th anniversary of new multifamily housing at the award-winning Baker Chocolate Factory, which over the decades saw the conversion of eight abandoned mill buildings into a mixed-income development.

Since the firm's founding 42 years ago, The Architectural Team's design and master planning has led scores of mill conversions in the Northeast helping to revitalize neighborhoods, preserve American architectural heritage, and revive what were, in many cases, decaying urban environments. Today, these historic factories have become the cornerstones of bold master plans, new affordable housing, and highperformance, sustainable architecture.

The notable milestone in 2013 - one that also epitomizes the firm's successes with mill conversions - marks how 30 years ago the Baker Chocolate Factory campus in Boston's Dorchester Lower Mills area broke ground on Phase One of its decadeslong renovation. Its transformation began in earnest in 1983 with the late Bob Keuhn, Keen Development Corp. when 143 mixed-income apartments opened to the public.

After its completion, President Ronald Reagan honored The Architectural Team for its work on the historic factory reuse, bestowing the 1988 National Historic Preservation Award to the architects. Over the next few decades, Baker Chocolate Factory grew to encompass three phases of master planning and adaptive reuse to convert its centuries-old building and factory facilities into live/work artist lofts, affordable rentals, an assisted-living facility (ALF) and market-rate apartments developed by Beacon Development Company and WinnDevelopment.

With courtyards and access to the adjacent Neponset River, the development has become a catalyst for new businesses and active street life in Dorchester Lower Mills, which began to suffer declining prominence and creeping urban blight in 1965.

That year, production of Baker's Chocolate moved to Delaware, leaving the site subject to decay and vandalism. Yet, nearly a half century later, the neighborhood is enjoying the reinvented property as a memorable, attractive and safe place to live, shop and visit - a renaissance largely due to the conversion of the Baker Chocolate Mill 14-acre site.

"Reflecting on our firm's four decades-plus of historic restoration and adaptive reuse provides us with a unique opportunity to examine the lessons learned, and apply them moving forward to other buildings and sites," said Robert Verrier, FAIA, managing principal of The Architectural Team. "One of our firm's primary goals is to help a new generation of young professionals develop the expertise, skill sets, collaborative mindset and creativity needed to design new uses for these amazing historic structures - and develop them in thoughtful, sustainable and innovative ways. With that, we can

delight our clients and help these communities celebrate the legacy of their industrial past through the new uses."

With more than 150 historic adaptive-reuse developments designed by the firm, The Architectural Team is nationally renowned and respected for its urban revitalization strategies, its deep knowledge of materials, expertise in recognizing the opportunities and anticipating the challenges inherent in adaptive reuse, and methods for successful historic building preservation. "These projects aren't just about preserving our past," Verrier said. "Our planning and architecture firm is - in the words of the futurist David Zach - all about 'designing useful things that connect us into life in this world, and designing good tomorrows.'"

After 30 years of opening its brick walls and cobblestone walks to the neighbors - many of whom had family members who worked at the factory - the Baker Chocolate redevelopment is regarded as a national model for other gateway cities like Boston with evolving industrial bases. The techniques that transformed the facilities into highly desirable homes and real estate for residents, businesses and others are being emulated in New England, New York, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere along the East Coast. Case studies of the firm's earliest mill conversions include the first U.S. powerloom textile mill, Francis Cabot Lowell Mill in Waltham, Mass., now a senior housing community. Projects like these reveal important lessons for stakeholders with economic development interests, including:

- * Multiple strategies for blended federal and state historic tax-credit financing;
- * Enlisting key allies including developers, preservationists and nonprofits;
- * Novel building techniques that make adaptive reuse projects easier;
- * Engendering community and local agency support; and
- * Accelerated paths to LEED certification.

Since the Baker Chocolate Factory was first converted to apartments three decades ago, the remaining historic factory structures have been restored and adapted in three phases to adding senior housing, artist work/live lofts, and both affordable and market-rate housing. In 2010, the firm completed the conversion of its final phase with The Watermill Lofts at Lower Mills - formerly the factory's boiler room and now home to 17 loft-style apartments. This final conversion phase earned the 2011 Preservation Achievement Award from the Boston Preservation Alliance.

Over the years, hundreds of industrial-era mills in New England have been spared the wrecking ball, thanks to savvy developers and master planning and design firms like The Architectural Team, at the vanguard of this trend. The firm's four decades of over 150 historic conversions have seen not only the completion of three phases of Dorchester's Baker Chocolate Factory, but also more recent developments to include The Apartments at Boott Mills (Lowell, MA), Loft Five50 (Lawrence, MA), Linwood Mill (Northbridge, Mass.), Canal Lofts (Worcester, Mass.), Curtain Lofts (Fall River, Mass.), the LEED Silver Certified Bourne Mill (Tiverton, R.I.) and Rice Silk Mill (Pittsfield, Mass.).

From preserving sturdy stone foundations, intricate masonry walls, and massive wood timbers, the architectural and historic character of these buildings has been restored and maintained while also creating vibrant, sustainable neighborhoods.

"These projects are the epitome of true sustainability, saving energy and conserving resources, while simultaneously preserving a community's historic fabric," said Michael Binette, AIA, a partner at The Architectural Team. "We employ, as part of each building's rehabilitation program, state-of-the-art green design techniques and technologies to create a healthy space and to help ensure high-level performance and contribution to the community well into the future. The lessons learned at Baker Chocolate transcend historic preservation techniques and instead present new

ideas about improving the quality of life for residents by providing innovative affordable housing and attracting new businesses to the neighborhood."

"It's a catalyst for positive change," Binette adds. "And in the process, we've helped secure the legacy of the mill's architecture with a unique mix of uses."

The Architectural Team's broad portfolio of historic conversions includes a range of unique building types that have been converted to new use: former trolley car barns, U.S. Navy joinery buildings, schools, hospitals and police stations, to name just a few. By utilizing a combination of subsidies, federal and state low-income housing (LIHTC) and historic tax credits (HTC), developers are able to continue transforming communities while preserving America's architectural heritage for future generations.

Currently, the firm is working on numerous historic adaptive-reuse developments including Cliftex Mills in New Bedford, Mass., which has been applauded by Governor Deval Patrick as a project that is "revitalizing our gateway cities, and providing a much needed boost in terms of jobs, economic development, and affordable housing."

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