

WHERE THERE'S A MILL THERE'S A WAY CASE STUDY

CABLE MILLS APTS.
WILLIAMSTOWN, MA
SR6700 STEEL REPLICA WINDOW



GRAHAM
ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTS



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—Christopher Lane, AIA, Project Architect

+ PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Architect

Finegold Alexander Architects
Project Architect Christopher Lane, AIA

Window Design Consultation

Bill Homer, Graham Architectural Products Rep
Doug McClelland, Graham Architectural Products Rep
Bill Wilder, Director of Technical Sales

+ CHALLENGE

Replicate, while bringing up to date, the historic windows that once graced this 140-plus year old mill so that a dramatic renovation may comfortably accommodate 61 luxury apartments...and so that the National Park Service will grant its approval.

+ A DRAMATIC RENOVATION

It took 14 years, three developers, and the unveiling of a new window design from Graham Architectural Products, but Cable Mills, nestled along the banks of the Green River in Williamstown, MA, is now open and looking marvelous.

The project, an adaptive reuse of the one-time Water Street Mill built in 1873, “turn(ed) a decrepit hulk of a mill into 61 luxury housing units,” according to one local report.

“It was just a disaster. It was a mess,” said Jim Alexander, FAIA, LEED AP, recalling his first trip to the site with original developer Bob Keuhn back in the early 2000s.

“We had to remove 83,000 square feet of structure, because all these buildings were connected with this shed-type stuff just nailed to the sides of the buildings throughout the forties, the fifties, the twenties, the thirties,” added Alexander, principal in the Boston firm Finegold Alexander Architects.

With the hodge-podge of structures came a mish-mash of window openings – 13 to be exact, some less than four feet tall and others standing over nine feet high.

Christopher Lane, AIA, project architect, said, “One of the oddities of this project was we had a lot of different window types – even on one façade – because of the way the buildings were built and added on to one another. You’d have three or four window types, ranging from a steel industrial type window, to a double hung, to an awning – all on the same elevation.”

When Keuhn, a giant in the field of historic rehab and mixed income development, passed away suddenly in 2006, the property went back on the market. Subsequent developers, The Traggorth Companies, decided to pursue historic tax credits. This requires National Park Service (NPS) approval and awarding historic preservation status.

According to the architects, Graham played a key role in overcoming challenges and obtaining those credits. The NPS wanted the windows to be more representative of the original structures’ disparate collection, as opposed to presenting the more cohesive look first suggested by Finegold Alexander. In addition, there was one particular configuration where the operable panel was in the middle of the grid. “It was tough to replicate that floating operable window,” Lane said. Graham’s initial solution involved variations of its single hung 2000 Series window and its standard 6700 Series.

But according to Bill Homer, Graham’s New England sales rep, that was only the start of the give and take. The parties eventually agreed instead on 248 of Graham’s 2200H Series single hung windows, and 218 of Graham’s SR6700 Series windows, a fresh variation of the standard 6700. The SR6700 offered that floating vent, large opening sizes and the minimal sight lines preferred by the NPS.

According to Bill Wilder, Graham’s director of technical sales, arriving at the right solution wasn’t easy. “You’re trying to replicate with insulated glass an appearance that basically meets the minimal amount of material required to hold a single piece of glass. So that becomes a challenge – trying to meet the historic criteria while

meeting the structural requirements and the enhanced thermal performance as well.

“But we do a good job with that, adapting to the different requirements for different buildings, even though the windows may appear the same. That’s because we specialize in historic windows and customizing our base product line per project.”

Alexander said, “What was really so helpful with Graham is that we were able to compose the elevations and do the historically correct thing using solutions that were pretty much available from Graham, and which weren’t available elsewhere.”

Added Lane, “I’ve worked with Graham on many buildings over the past 20 years with no notable quality or performance issues. I would also add that we have been quite satisfied with the end product.” Beyond the \$4 million in Federal Historic Tax Credits and another \$3.5 million in Massachusetts Historic Tax Credits, Williamstown committed \$1.5 million in Community Preservation Act funds and the state provided \$1.3 million in support of affordable housing.

In return, the state and the town received the pristine preservation of an 19th century mill building, a pedestrian walkway allowing access to the Green River, and 61 luxury housing units, some of which are income-sensitive and many of which offer spectacular views of the river and the Berkshires, thanks to Graham.



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