



# BUILDING BLOCKS

Mills Group Newsletter

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Welcome to another issue of Building Blocks and our connection to you on the news and events of the Mills Group. We are finding the schedule for the spring and summer with many large new home projects, interior home renovations, and a couple commercial projects keeping the whole staff very busy.

You will find this issue bringing you up to date on one of our exciting mixed use projects in the Canaan Valley Area which is a direct result of an earlier master plan that the firm developed for a private client in an effort to maximize the opportunity, create a destination center, and spur a town's revitalization on many levels. Additionally this issue highlights one of our staff's recent accomplishments of obtaining national accreditation as a LEED Accredited Professional. We have also added a technical article topic in this issue that shall remain as a constant in future news letters.

We look forward to your comments and input with our newsletter.

Michael J. Mills

## *Designing on the Principles of the Past...*

**Riverwalk Shops-Davis, WV**



As a part of an extensive riverfront redevelopment project beginning in Davis, West Virginia, the Riverwalk Shops and Spa embody many of the goals set forth by The Mills Group design team. The aging standing seam metal building currently is vacant, but will soon house three retail shops

and a holistic spa. Adaptively reusing the existing building brings new life and a prominent cornerstone to the downtown. The existing building is designed on the principles of the past, reflecting the timber extraction roots that was the foundation for the Blackwater River milling town and utilizing historic architectural materials and components, such as reclaimed lumber, corrugated metal, steel brackets and traditional storefronts with a modern twist. The renovated structure will be the core of what promises to be an exciting overall plan that will incorporate new housing, riverfront trails, and recreation areas for the local citizens and visitors alike.

For updates on the Davis Riverfront Development Project, email [info@boomtowndesign.com](mailto:info@boomtowndesign.com).

[Click here to download the project sheet for the full story](#)

## Taking LEEDership in Preservation, Planning and Architecture

In effort to create awareness and share environmental responsibility, the Mills Group has increased our efforts to incorporate sustainability and "Green Design" into our work. Rather than making it an afterthought, we feel it is important to integrate it into the initial design process. This ensures greater success in the implementation of "greener" materials, energy efficiency strategies and an increase in environmental quality. We are proud to announce that our Director of Sustainability, Billy Plyler has recently received his LEED accreditation. Billy is a 2003 graduate of Fairmont State University and a 2007 Graduate of Boston Architectural College. He has genuine passion for "true" sustainability and responsibility in design. He works to inform those inside and outside of the industry how some forethought, planning and a sense of accountability can drastically increase the quality of life in our built environment.

The **Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Green Building Rating System** promotes a holistic approach to design and sustainability. In achieving a "LEED" rating, the designer, builder, and owner must work together to address and fulfill requirements in the key areas of human and environmental health as categorized by the US Green Building Council. Those are:

- 1) Sustainable Site Development
- 2) Water Savings
- 3) Energy Efficiency
- 4) Materials Selection
- 5) Indoor Environmental Quality

For more information on the LEED rating system or how to get accredited visit:

[www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org)

## Beyond the Paradigm What a Preservation Architect Does

Historic preservation, according to the National Trust of Historic Preservation, is the protection and preservation of buildings, sites, structures, objects, or districts, which reflect local, regional or national history in its cultural, social, economic, political, archaeological, and/or architectural components. It provides many benefits, positively impacting local economies, stabilizing property values, promoting community pride, and increased awareness of the built environment that shapes our lives. That being said, it is also important to take a look at those responsible for facilitating historic preservation. It involves many people--architects, historians, contractors, lawyers, planners, local citizens--to name a few, all of which are integral in the preservation process.

The role of the Architect in Historic Preservation is diverse and can encompass many aspects. A quite generic outline of a Preservation Architect's role can be found on the American Institute for Architect's web site:

1. To serve the needs of the profession of the historic architect, as well as the public, in national advocacy and education for preservation.
2. To offer expertise in historic architecture to allied and liaison preservation organizations.
3. To teach the value of preservation as design, and to develop case studies in best practices for components and other organizations.
4. To enhance standards of practice for preservation architects.

But of course, it goes much further than that. There are many different times in which an architect's knowledge is imperative to the preservation process. If dealing with an individual building an architect can provide information relating to the original design of the building and how that building can be restored accurately. An architect can help a person update their historic building while maintaining the historic significance. If discussing a historic district an architect can provide general information regarding the styles of architecture and the impact of changes on design. All of these examples are ways in which a preservation architect serves the community and fosters a good mix of yesterday's design and beauty and today's modern conveniences.

The act of preservation of historic structures is a process and not an event so as the task follows a logical and sequential path. The approach for the sensitive preservation architect is to first and foremost, strive to achieve a balance of the overall "Rehabilitation Objectives" that are either predefined or formalized through a consensus building process with

those of the client's needs for the building's alteration. The rehabilitation dogma that the one should use is the maintenance of the building's original qualities which convey the historic character while incorporating provisions for life safety and accessibility requirements, indoor air quality and energy conservation requirements, as well as all of the real-life demands on the building program. The challenge is to achieve the end result of a modernized structure ready to meet the users needs well into the future while respecting the tangible features and historical context which is successfully illustrated in several of our completed projects.

The approach to rehabilitation projects starts with a thorough understanding of the physical and cultural evolution of a building, which results from a detailed research effort and time spent on the site to get the full breadth of the building's issues and opportunities.

As the preservation architect moves into executing the "Rehabilitation Objectives" of a project a very systematic approach to the building's assessment is established. The assessment phase of any project is the time at which the building is evaluated in its rarest form of components, starting with the Substructure up through the Exterior Envelope and Roof System with a detailed breakout of each component's conditions. Specialized consultants are utilized at the assessment phase of the project, providing scientific data and technical information on material conservation. Below is an outline of the methodology used during a typical assessment and evaluation:

### ***Building Evaluation Methodology***

- ✎ *Archival Research*
  - Â *Observe Existing Conditions*
  - Â *Analyze Issues and Opportunities*
  - Â *Evaluate Alternatives*
  - Â *Make Recommendation*

The conclusion of the assessment phase of any project leads to a period of decision-making related to the findings of the field work and with respect to the project budget. The decisions are often incremental in nature due to reviews with preservation and regulatory review agencies. It has been my experience that great focus is to be given to facilitate the review periods and expedite the resolution of any concerns that might arise.

*Designing on the Principles of the Past and Preserving for the Future*

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