



## Cornwall's cotton mill makeover

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For more than a century, until the 1990s, the hum of Cornwall's cotton and textile mills was the sweet sound of prosperity.

Now that the machinery has been silenced and the mills closed, developers are eyeing the solid old red brick buildings with renewed interest.

One building, the Weave Shed, has already been converted to offices. Among the tenants are Corus Radio's three stations and a small theatre. Adjacent to it, at McConnell Avenue and Cotton Mill Street, another giant mill structure is about to undergo a facelift the developer hopes will turn it into one of Cornwall's première residences -- aimed at the over-50 crowd -- the Cotton Mill Lofts.

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The property came to the attention of Prescott builder Bob Pelda, owner of R.M.P. Construction, about five years ago. Pelda had no experience with "brownfields" projects -- redeveloping old industrial sites - - but was encouraged by the sheer beauty of the riverfront view. As someone who had recently relocated to Prescott from Ottawa, he needed no convincing of the charms of a smaller-town environment.

Pelda's past includes building 1,600 units from Ottawa to Calgary to Tucson, Arizona. He has also been involved with some Ottawa projects, including Clarendon Lanes in the ByWard Market.

Pelda is a strong believer in listening to his customers, and over the years, he says, he has learned a lot about what they want. Waterfront views, spacious balconies with room for barbecues, open concept, energy-efficient materials, custom kitchens and hardwood are features he hears about time and time again.

He put that into practice when he built the 28-unit Mariners Club condo development on the St. Lawrence River at Prescott. He and his wife Teresa loved it so much, they moved in.

Down river at Cornwall, Pelda is planning a project of more modest units that he thinks will appeal to a different market. "I think it was the view of the Adirondack Mountains that probably caught me the most," he says, noting how rare such locations are in Ontario.

The 48 units will range from 1,000 to 1,600 square feet and cost from about \$154,000 to \$270,000.

That's roughly half the price similar units would cost if they were built on the Ottawa River with views of the Gatineau Hills, he estimates.

Pelda will be looking toward Ottawa and Montreal for the bulk of his customers, primarily among retirees and baby boomers looking for a quieter, small-town atmosphere with an eye toward retirement.

The old mill boasts architectural features and nuances you won't get in a new building, says James Murphy, the project's manager and lead designer. "It's great to work with something that old," Murphy says of the circa-1867 building. "The whole development will be quite spectacular."

He says many brownfield projects fall through because of complications. Delays in dealing with government programs and mounting costs frighten many away, he says.

Of the Cotton Mill, Murphy says: "We like the location of the building and the architectural ornaments," including the large arched windows, nine-foot ceilings, the façade and cylindrical fluted columns.

The flat roof offers space for a common terrace with gas barbecues, patio stones and furniture, and the bottom two storeys will be devoted to heated parking. Condo owners will be able to purchase a second parking spot. Pelda says a portion of the second level has been reserved for a second phase of eight more condos with 13-foot ceilings, provided the first phase sells out.

Pelda plans to wait until after the spring school break before pushing his marketing plan into high gear. He says that's when buyers traditionally become motivated by signs of warm weather. His goal is to have 50 to 60 per cent of the units reserved by May or June. If he does, construction will begin. He expects it to take 12 to 18 months.

There's no safe way to set up a model suite in the currently derelict building, so Pelda plans to open a show suite in the Weave Shed complex across the street at 709 Cotton Mill St. The project will open in mid-April. For more information, see [www.cottonmilllofts.ca](http://www.cottonmilllofts.ca).

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