



PROJECT OF NOTE

A River Runs Through It

HOW LUXURY CONDOS TURNED BACK TIME ON A PIECE OF NEW CANAAN'S PAST



Beautiful Mill Work (TOP) It wasn't required to build a modern-day mill look-a-like at Jelliff Mill Falls, but Gardiner & Larson Homes did it, effectively turning back time on a much-loved New Canaan landmark. Individual homes (ABOVE) bear the names of former mill owners. See Resources.

Look carefully, and you'll see the region's future here too. As homeowners age, many no longer want the cost and upkeep of large houses and sprawling acreage—but they also don't want to lose the charm that first attracted them to the area. Developments like Jelliff Mill Falls solve this dilemma by taking precious pieces of the past and creating village-like communities of new homes on small lots, cared for by an association and sited close to town and other amenities. They're constructed for the good life—fewer resources required for outdoor maintenance, heating, cooling and driving; more time to spend on family fun, leisure and entertaining.

"This is what so many people want as they move toward retirement," says Larson. "They want to keep a home here but one that's easy to maintain and that they can leave behind when they travel without worrying about it."

As a proponent of smart development, Larson still thrills to the history of the region—and is willing to invest in it. Before designing the new mill building, her development team dug up paintings and photographs of the original site. They contacted a water-wheel expert to create a working wheel. And each of the 10 homes bears a nameplate honoring one mill owner or another, including Deliverance Stevens, who built the first mill in 1709, and Deodate Waterbury, who converted the plant to a gristmill for grinding oyster shells to make lime and plaster. Units are also named for the generations of Jelliffs who presided over Millville, as it was called, milling wood and manufacturing wire.

Larson's not alone in her passion for converting old structures into new housing. In South Norwalk, the mixed-use Ironworks development reflects the city's industrial past. In Rowayton, the exterior of the once-glorious Winthrop House hotel was plastered over with stucco and left for dead, only to be reconstructed into three luxury condos. At Jelliff Mill Falls, most homes sold before construction: Today just one is available, a 3,800-square-foot unit on three floors listed with Mary Higgins of Halstead Property in New Canaan. —Diane di Costanzo

When Judy Larson and her husband, Bill Gardiner, first considered purchasing the old Jelliff Mill site in New Canaan, what they saw was far from lovely. The heart of the complex had always been the barn-red mill along the Noroton River, powered by a water wheel. But the historic mill burned to the ground in 1949, replaced by a squat concrete factory building.

Another piece of New England's past lost. Regrettable, but inevitable? Not in the hands of the design-build team of Gardiner & Larson Homes. Today, the collection of 10 new homes that comprise Jelliff Mill Falls is a smart blend of old and new. Most obviously, history is reflected in a handsome reproduction mill that houses three townhouse units and is graced by a old-fashioned wooden wheel, churned by waters rushing over a rebuilt dam.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NEIL LANDINO, JR.