

# R&A

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## classic reuse

vacant historical Armstrong warehouse...  
now high-end city living

featuring local home improvement professionals

**Duff Builders (Spotlight & Cover)**

**Joel's Painting**

**Stephen Black Builders**

**FALL 2011**

project description

Type:	Historic Lancaster city factory conversion to high-end apartments.
Contractor:	<b>Duff Builders</b> (see ad on p. 31)
Trade Partners:	Adam's Painting (see ad p. 36) Budget Blinds (see ad p. 34) HAJOCA Corporation (see ad p. 18) Ilkem Marble & Granite, (see ad p. 34) MaidenCreek TV & Appliance (see ad p. 32) Swartz Kitchens and Baths (see ad p. 32) To The Trades Wholesale Floor Coverings (see ad p. 38) Yale Electric Supply Co./Yale Lighting Concepts & Design (see ad p. 36)
Scope:	The renovation of this warehouse's second floor included converting the 22,000 square feet of open space into twenty-one high-end, urban apartments along with common areas such as the hallway and storage/trash room, and includes work on the impressive lobby area.  Each apartment was designed to have a spacious, flowing floor plan. The openness between the kitchen and living area of each residence, paired with high ceilings and large, sunny windows, contribute to the spacious layout. Apartments range in size from one bedroom, one bathroom units with as little as 750 sq. ft. up to three bedroom, two bathroom residences at over 1400 sq. ft. The exposed brick walls and rustic ceilings in each apartment contrast with the gleaming hardwood floors and contemporary paint colors. Every residence has at least one bathroom with a custom site-built tile shower, while second bathrooms include a shower/tub unit. To make use of every square foot available, many bathrooms have a wall of shelving to provide additional storage. Washer and dryers are provided in each apartment for convenience. The kitchens are fully equipped with stainless steel appliances and showcase dramatic granite countertops and beautiful toffee-colored cabinetry. The smooth, clean lines of the solar shades covering the windows provide a solution to the natural light without detracting from the character of the brick walls.  The corridor running the length of the building takes advantage of the natural light from the long span of high windows in the original clerestory of the warehouse. The hallway is finished with modern lighting fixtures, vibrant artwork and high-traffic carpeting. The trash room is conveniently located at the intersection of the lobby and the main corridor. It also features several custom-built storage lockers available for rent.  The second floor trash chute leads to a dumpster in a centralized trash room on the first floor. The mechanical room, which houses the HVAC heat exchangers pumps, electrical meters, transformers, security monitors and access controls, is also located on the first floor.



During World War II, Armstrong fulfilled many military contracts for the production of artillery shells and camouflage netting within those walls.

The majority of workers in what was known as the "Shell Shop" were female, since a large percentage of the male population was serving in the war.

# classic reuse

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The carefully retrofitted apartments in a former manufacturing warehouse appeal to residents who desire a home filled with personality, attitude, style...and perhaps some local history. The long, narrow building sat as one of Lancaster's many abandoned warehouses before becoming a part of the redevelopment project known as Liberty North. Its past life is just as rich as the promise it holds for future generations of apartment dwellers. The original brick walls, structural steel beams and unique architectural elements hold a story of Lancaster's history. The thoughtful design and construction of twenty-one upscale, urban apartments on the second floor of the factory building successfully blend the original aesthetics with the necessity of contemporary design and modern conveniences. As residents raced to sign leases, it became apparent that Lancaster continues





to have a need for sustainable, high-end housing options.

Owner and developer of the Residences at Liberty North, Ed Drogaris had been listening to the needs of the market... and he knew just the right contractor for repurposing that empty warehouse into residential housing. His long-standing relationship with Duff Builders was cultivated over many decades and multiple housing projects. The Drogaris team was confident in Duff's ability to handle the details of a complex job with fairness, efficiency and quality construction. "We knew going into this project that Duff Builders would be fair and would be able to work with us hand in hand in providing customized project options and decisions each step of the way," explains Andrew Oak, Senior Project Manager with the Drogaris Companies. "That interaction was key in troubleshooting the unique characteristics of this project."

Duff Builders was contracted to transform the empty second floor into twenty-one luxury apartments along with common areas, such as the hallway and storage areas, and to perform miscellaneous work in the lobby. Owner Joe Duff is proud that his family-operated company can contribute to the revitalization efforts in Lancaster. Sharing his enthusiasm are his son, Joe IV, and daughter, Laura, both who played integral roles in the success of the Liberty North project. While the concept of family members working together in business can sometimes be unpredictable at best, the Duff family doesn't feel that way. It is their shared passion for building and their vision toward creating a better community that offers their clients a strong unified commitment to quality and service. "We take our clients' needs and expectations very seriously," explains Joe. "Because our reputation is our namesake, we pride ourselves on being fair and flexible while surpassing those expectations."

The Duff family believes the story told through a building's history is crucial in the care with which it is transformed. The original structure of the warehouse was built in the 1920's when Armstrong Cork Company (later known as Armstrong



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World Industries) opened their Lancaster plant. An addition was constructed in the 1950's that extended the warehouse. During World War II, Armstrong fulfilled many military contracts for the production of artillery shells and camouflage netting within those walls. The majority of workers in what was known as the "Shell Shop" were female, since a large percentage of the male population was serving in the war. After the war, the first floor of the building was used as Armstrong's Flooring Installation School and the second floor housed their printing operation and marketing efforts. "I like to think that the walls hold a story of times past, memories of a different era which are preserved," Laura explains. "I always cherish the opportunity to respect a building's history while breathing new life into it."

Ed Drogaris, President and CEO of the Drogaris Companies, has been on the cutting edge of creative



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land development and adaptive reuse of local buildings for years, specializing in smart growth and redevelopment of historic buildings. In 2005, a few years into the phased closing of the majority of

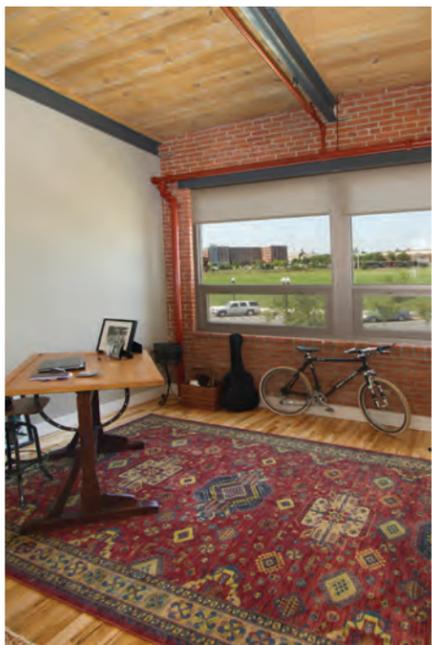
Armstrong's Lancaster plant, Ed purchased the block of buildings on North Charlotte Street and Lincoln Street which included the Liberty North warehouses. After receiving an overwhelming interest in rental

applications in their other successful warehouse conversions, it was obvious that the market was calling out for more upscale housing opportunities for local professionals and commuters alike, many working

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in Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York. Liberty North is a convenient walking distance to the train station, Franklin & Marshall College, local restaurants and shops, the Clipper Stadium and many downtown areas such as Central Market. Residential housing was a perfect solution for this vacant warehouse.

With a project of this nature, it was imperative to get the most out of the square footage with smart space planning. The design team needed to consider that this was an existing building with existing support structures and beams. Working together with the architect, Murphy Dittenhafer, and the developer in the design phase, Duff Builders was able to maximize the use of the square footage around those existing beams and structures to create apartments that were spacious and appealing.

Walking down the center corridor, one can't help but look up. A long clerestory brings a flood of natural light into the hallway. The exposed rustic wood planking is complimented by modern light pendants and colorful artwork. The layout of each residence is designed to fit within and around the



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existing features of the building. This creates special characteristics unique to each individual apartment, such as the original kalamein doors that connected the warehouse to an adjacent building in just two residences. While each residence is a bit different, the thread of similar amenities and materials can be seen throughout.

Residents are invited to relax in the convenience and luxury of modern amenities. The kitchens are brought to life with gorgeous granite countertops and stainless steel appliances to compliment the rich, toffee colored maple cabinetry. The contemporary sinks and frameless glass shower doors on the custom tile showers create visual appeal in the bathrooms. Beautiful, sleek solar shades cover the expansive windows. From the gleaming hardwood floors to the painted accent walls, Liberty North has succeeded in offering a luxurious, urban residence.

Finding creative solutions to meet the goals in the design and construction of the renovation, while still respecting the aesthetics of the building and its history, was important to the owner/developer. For example, the use of cork flooring covering an unsightly block wall section in one of the apartments provided an interesting feature as well as a throw-back to Armstrong's history, which flourished in the cork industry for many years. Skylights were installed in some apartments to flood even the interior spaces with sunlight, while other residences feature high windows on an interior wall between the living room and bedroom. The natural light that washes over the space creates a welcoming feeling of warmth.

Since the building was not originally designed with residential needs in mind, Duff Builders gave careful thought to each process of the renovation. One of the challenges faced throughout the process was how to incorporate the modern mechanical systems with the existing building and its support beams without taking away from the aesthetics of the original



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on page 18



structure. The mix of modern metal ductwork and painted sprinkler lines against the exposed wood ceilings found in some apartments creates an appealing contrast between old and new.

Duff Builders collaborated with the developer and subcontractors to find creative solutions to budgetary limitations. In one such example, Duff Builders installed hybrid, water loop systems that operated in a highly efficient manner utilizing an existing heating system from an adjacent building. The system provides heat in season at no additional cost of energy to the apartments. This collaborative solution not only addresses the owner's desire to maximize the efficiency of the HVAC systems, but provides a direct savings in the winter to the tenants as well.

For the Drogaris Companies, it was clear that the respect and cooperation forged between Duff Builders and its subcontractors was integral to the successful outcome. "A contractor is only as good as its subcontractors," Andrew points out. "We associate each of the subcontractors on the project with Duff Builders and hold them to a high standard." As for the ultimate success of the Residences at Liberty North, Andrew says, "We were confident that Duff Builders would perform, and we think the end product and success of the leasing has been a testament to that."

As the trend can be seen of more and more people moving from the suburbs into the city, the Drogaris Companies is balancing the market's expectations with the reality of the economic climate and challenging development process. Notes Andrew, "The typical residents in our Lancaster City projects are already attracted to everything the City has to offer; however, they are often frustrated with the availability of quality product. We are committed to listening to what people want and finding



creative and sustainable ways to continue to offer responsible, high-quality development projects."

It comes as no surprise to the Drogaris Companies and Duff Builders that the project has been so successful. From the moment construction began at Liberty North, potential residents showed a high amount of interest. Were they drawn to the convenience of sustain-

able, urban living...or the blend of luxury, quality and modern amenities? Perhaps what appealed to them was the quiet nod to the stories of the past. And perhaps, within those exposed brick walls mottled with age, and around those strong, soldier-like steel beams, a new story will be told.

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