TOWN OF HILLSBOROUGH
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

2020 Preservation Award

BEST ADAPTIVE REUSE OF A HISTORIC STRUCTURE

The Historic District Commission awards
Bellevue Mill LLC
the 2020 Preservation Award
for Best Adaptive Reuse
of a Historic Structure.

ADAPTIVE REUSE OF BELLEVUE MILL

Built in 1909, the Bellevue Mill originally consisted of a two-story, side-gabled mill building with a one-story wing to the west and engine and boiler rooms to the south. By 1912, the mill was operating with 5,000 spindles and 200 narrow looms producing gingham cotton and later cheviot woolen cloth. A one-story weaving room with a full-length roof monitor and a small office at the east end was designed by noted mill architect Richard Biberstein and was built in 1920 parallel to and north of the original mill complex. The layout resembles other mills built in the Piedmont during the period. The designs were largely determined by Northern manufacturers, who supplied the machinery, and insurance companies, who demanded "slow-burn" construction with elements such as brick exteriors and fire walls; heavy timber columns and beams with cast iron fittings; and isolation of staircases, engine room and picker rooms.

Growth of the mill complex continued with additions designed by mill architect J.E. Sirrine completed in 1923. These followed the style of the 1909 building and included the construction of a two-story cloth building along Nash Street. The mill was also fully converted to electric power. Local ownership of the mill ended in 1945 and, after a succession of owners, the mill was closed in 2000. Bellevue Mill was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2003 and awarded Local Landmark status by the Hillsborough Board of Commissioners on the recommendation of the Hillsborough Historic District Commission in 2014.

The effort to transform the abandoned mill into a residential complex began in 2004. The Belk Architecture firm, which had experience in adaptive reuse of historic tobacco and textile mills including Durham's Bright Leaf Square and American Tobacco Campus, as well as Hillsborough's Eno River Mill, was engaged by the then-owner. Tax credits to renovate the structures allowed redevelopment, and construction finally began in 2016 with the new owner, Bellevue Mill LLC.

Tragedy struck in May 2016 when a fire destroyed 75% of the weaving building. Fortunately, the original "slow-burn" construction kept the fire from spreading to the mill building or other parts of the complex. While it was a tremendous loss, less than 20% of the overall complex was compromised, its place on historic registers was maintained and tax credits remained intact, allowing redevelopment to continue. The weaving building was reconstructed following its original design and materials.

Work on the complex was largely complete in 2019, and the Bellevue Mill complex now offers over 100 apartments, adding vitality to West Hillsborough and demonstrating the adaptive power of historic preservation.

Presented to

Bellevue Mill LLC,

Belk Architecture and CT Wilson Construction

TOWN OF HILLSBOROUGH
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

2020 Preservation Award

Best Artistic Representation of Local History

The Historic District Commission
awards
Max Dowdle
and
Tony Lopez
the 2020 Preservation Award
for Best Artistic Representation
of Local History.

BILLY STRAYHORN MURAL AT 226 S. CHURTON ST.

Historic preservation aspires to protect and support the history and character of a place and to acknowledge the changing identities of communities over time. Artist-designed murals can serve to capture that sense of history and community in addition to attracting tourism, promoting arts and culture, and encouraging pedestrian interactions with the history of the community. The Billy Strayhorn mural on the north wall of 226 S. Churton St. is an excellent example of public art which references the history of the community and is painted in a manner sensitive to the architectural features of the building and district.

Tony Lopez was interested in having a mural on the building he leases for his business Volume, a vintage record store. Strayhorn was a gifted jazz composer, arranger and pianist who became interested in music and piano while living with his grandmother in Hillsborough. He is the subject of a historical marker near Volume, and he became the inspiration for the mural. It seemed a good way to highlight Strayhorn's connection to Hillsborough and his achievements that were overshadowed in his collaboration with Duke Ellington. Max Dowdle, a local artist who was keen to paint a mural in Hillsborough, was commissioned to do the work. Building owners Mary and David Knox were thrilled with the idea, and they placed their confidence in Lopez and Dowdle to execute the vision.

Research produced photos of Strayhorn from an earlier exhibit at the Orange County Historical Society Museum. A photo of Strayhorn playing the piano as a young man seemed perfect. Blue, a color associated with jazz music, was chosen for the background and was balanced with complementary golden yellow colors. Lopez and his girlfriend Annie Charton found a photo of a New York City Subway A train, referencing Strayhorn's most well-known composition "Take the A Train," and the mural's elements were complete. Through an iterative process, Lopez and Dowdle finalized the drawing. To Dowdle, the yellow surrounding Strayhorn at the piano really makes the image pop.

While Dowdle was painting the mural in the summer of 2019, community members often stopped to talk with him about it, realizing a key aspect of community art.

This award recognizes the result of a collaboration of an artist, business owners and building owners — a striking mural that pays homage to Hillsborough history on a local business devoted to music. While modern and current in its execution, it is respectful of the building's architectural features.

"If you want something hard enough, it just gets done."
— Billy Strayhorn

Presented to

Max Dowdle, Tony Lopez, Annie Charton,
Nathan Andrews and Mary and David Knox