The Belmont Hills Apartments

Technological feat and aesthetic delight

BY ANDREW STEVENSON

Commanding an unsurpassed view from Hamilton Harbour to the Great Sound, the Belmont has been a landmark for more than a century. When a five-storey hotel was constructed there over 50 years ago, surrounded by 96 acres stretching from Harbour Road across Middle Road to the Railway Trail, it dominated the north-facing aspect of Warwick Parish.

By the time Trust House Forte made the decision to close the Belmont's doors in 1998, the old hotel required a major injection of new investment. In 2001, the Belmont and its accompanying golf course were purchased by Belmont Hills Property Limited. Although the golf course had remained open, the hotel property had been left unoccupied and was rapidly deteriorating. In 2004, Belmont Hills Property bought the Newstead Hotel. As such, the combined Newstead Belmont Golf Resort & Spa includes two of Bermuda's oldest and finest hotel sites.

Kevin Petty, owner of the Newstead Belmont Golf Resort & Spa, explains the development of the new Belmont Hills Apartments property: "Our original residential development plans had the Belmont Hotel being completely knocked down with three-storey condominium blocks and townhouses being erected. But after our engineers took a look at the construction of the existing building and in particular the

Instead of being demolished, the old Belmont hotel was gutted and brought back to life in an awesome act of recycling

structural steel, we realised that the framework of the building was worth keeping. Because the structure was already in place, we were able to obtain planning approval for a five-storey condominium complex divided into 41 units within the footprint of the original hotel. We were also able to keep the golf clubhouse and restaurant within the same building rather than put up additional buildings on the perimeter."

Refurbishing the existing structural steel framework permitted a higher density building, something that might otherwise not have been approved by the Department of Planning. Placing more residential units in the original framework also allowed for the less dense construction of villas rather than blocks of condos and townhouses.

The total residential development now includes the 41 units within the old Belmont hotel plus 18 Belmont Hills Golf Course Villas of 1,400 square feet with access from Middle Road, and another 17 Belmont Hills Harbour Road Villas of 2,400 square feet with access from Harbour Road — a grand total of 76 units.

'The total residential development now includes the 41 units within the old hotel plus 18 golf course and 12 Harbour Road villas'

The project began when the golf course was closed at the end of December 2001. The neglected and swiftly deteriorating 18-hole course was completely redesigned and reshaped by Algie M Pulley Jr in close consultation with Mr Petty. By completion in July 2003, $10 million had been invested in the golf course, including a lake and waterfalls. This has been the most comprehensive overhaul of a golf course undertaken in Bermuda. It included remodelling and reseeding fairways to improve safety, appearance and playing standards of the course; 18 newly laid greens; a computerised irrigation system (the only one of its kind in Bermuda); a purpose-designed maintenance facility; a reverse osmosis plant and water storage reservoirs; and a comprehensive and ongoing landscaping and planting programme using a substantial number of mature palms and other trees. A new golf academy off Middle Road provides a state-of-the-art driving range with two tiers of automatic tees and a video teaching facility. The academy also includes practice bunkers, greens and chipping areas.

Construction was accomplished in three distinct phases. The first phase, the construction of the 17 Belmont Hills Harbour Road Villas, began in October 2003 after Hurricane Fabian and lasted about 24 months. The second phase of the Belmont Hills Golf Course Villas began in March 2004 and was completed, with the exception of the last three villas, by June 2006. The third phase, construction of the condominiums within the framework of the old Belmont hotel, was started in late 2003 and focused initially on the golf shop, golf cart storage and the golf club lockers. The golf facilities reopened in November 2005. Over-

The Warwick skyline has been radically enhanced by the development of the Belmont Hills Apartments

looking the Great Sound, the first-class Blû restaurant and its accompanying modern kitchen, managed by the MEF group, opened in December 2005. While these public facilities were still under construction, work on the condominiums commenced with occupancy scheduled for November 2006. All owners will be members of the Belmont Hills Golf Club.

Working within an old structural steel skeleton designed for hotel rooms, and converting this framework into condominiums, presented several challenges, further complicated by the fact that while the area was a construction site, it was also a functioning golf club.

"Having decided to retain the original structure, the question then became how to convert this space and make it suitable for residential apartments rather than hotel rooms." Kevin Petty explains. "We had to strip the old building right down to its structural steel. The floor slabs were too thin, so we took them out and replaced them with thicker floors. That compounded an existing problem, of maximising the relatively low heights of each floor. The bottom floor was fine with 15-foot ceilings originally designed to accommodate the hotel's lobby area. But we had to restructure the top two floors, four and five, by removing the original structural steel to recreate higher ceilings. We fashioned some extra space on the second and third floors by having the ceilings of the rooms coincide with the structural steel crossbeams and by minimising the service locations in the ceiling spaces."

'None of the condominium units is identical and each unit is designed for the unique space it occupies in the building'

Martin Bellamy, the Project Manager, says: "The original hotel had a corridor down the middle with rooms on either side facing north or south. To maximise the area of each condominium so that they extended from one side of the building to the other, and to provide for natural lighting for each apartment from both the north and south, we created an access catwalk on the south and east sides of the building to afford entry to each residence."

Two elevators and two sets of staircases service the brick-lined walkways leading to the doors of each unit of the L-shaped main building. A matching set of reinforced concrete pillars on the north and west sides supports extensive balconies, which are three times the area one might normally expect. The effective space of each apartment has been considerably extended through the use of the external catwalks and balconies.

Martin Bellamy continues: "Within the building itself there were additional challenges to contain all the plumbing, electrical wiring and air ducts because not all of these services were conveniently lined up one over the other. Bathrooms and kitchens, for example, did not necessarily stack on top of each other. None of the condominium units is identical and each unit is designed for the unique space it occupies in the building.

"Sound attenuation or soundproofing of each unit was given high priority.

Although some of the old structural steel was perfect, major changes had to be made to create top-class apartments

All the demising [separating] walls have four layers of sound insulation including a basic studwork of lightweight aluminium insulated top and bottom with silicone sealants. Metal stud is attached to both sides of the central concrete wall between each of the neighbouring apartments and drywall is attached to the stud and the space between is filled with sound-attenuating fibreglass. The stud is attached to the walls using neoprene washers and spacers to cut out noise vibration that would otherwise be transmitted through the walls and ceilings. Similar neoprene hangers have been used on the ceilings. A thin membrane of neoprene and fibre has been used beneath floor tiles to cut out transmission of noise down to the apartment below. Wooden floors have not been lined because of the natural sound insulation factor in the wood itself," Mr Bellamy adds.

Testing the sound attenuation ourselves by thumping hard on the walls and asking Project Manager Andrew Borland to do the same on the neighbouring apartment produced a barely audible thud.

'With 96 acres, 35 villas, 41 apartments and an 18-hole golf course, the logistics of this project were staggering'

Each of the apartments has a comprehensive sprinkler system as well as central garbage disposal chutes with a compactor at the bottom. There is a swimming pool where the old hotel pool used to be.

The complexity of the construction of residential condo units within the existing framework was compounded by the sheer size of the $75 million project. With 96 acres of landscaping and three onsite nurseries, 35 villas and a golf academy in addition to the 96,000 square-foot central condominium building plus its 41 covered parking bays and storage areas, the logistics of having everything arrive on time and in place without occupying undue space provided a challenge of monumental proportions. Three contractors worked at the project with numerous sub-contractors.

Basic infrastructure work was also undertaken with BELCO, recreating their electrical grid from Harbour Road to Middle Road, which has resulted in a new electrical distribution loop with seven new electrical vaults located on the property. This is expected to facilitate electrical allocation should there be localised outages. Piped water was also brought to the Belmont property to be distributed from Middle Road to Harbour Road. The Belmont Hills sewage system includes two wastewater treatment plants (one on Harbour Road and one on Middle Road). These high per-

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formance aerated filter plants (HiPAF) treat sewage in three stages from a primary settlement tank to a submerged-bed aerated filter to a final settlement tank. Although this water could be used for irrigation of the extensive grounds, the "clean" effluent is discharged into a deep sealed borehole. This HiPAF plant was manufactured by WPL Limited of Hampshire, England, and Watling-Hope were the consulting engineers.

The overall intent of the Newstead Belmont Hills Golf Resort & Spa is to create a fully-serviced resort with a wide range of facilities and amenities provided in a unique partnership between two properties just a couple of minutes apart on Harbour Road. The combined resort will have the benefit of two different but complementary Bermuda locations — the Belmont having access to and views of a newly refurbished golf course while the Newstead on the harbourfront has more intimate views and direct access straight across the harbour to the City of Hamilton.

In addition to the golf course, golf academy, swimming pool and restaurant at the Belmont, the refurbished Newstead will comprise a first-class restaurant, a purpose-designed spa with multiple treatment rooms, a fitness room, hair and beauty salon and a new infinity pool and whirlpool on the waterfront along with two tennis courts.

While the Belmont Hills is geared towards Bermudian ownership, the Newstead property will include fractional ownership units. When completed, the combined Newstead Belmont properties will provide a total of 98 luxury suites in different configurations with 163 bedrooms and sufficient space to accommodate over 400 people. The Newstead Belmont Golf Resort & Spa will provide a full range of services normally associated with a high-quality tourist destination including concierge and room service as well as housekeeping and laundry. Both properties will be serviced by a private ferry, which will operate on a triangular route between Newstead, the Belmont dock and the City of Hamilton. ■