

Restoring to former glory

WE TALK TO BARRY MORGAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF MORGAN RESTORATION ABOUT THE TREND FOR RESTORING LISTED PROPERTIES.

There's a clear trend for the restoration of listed properties up and down the country. Everywhere you look, developments feature restored properties as an innovative focal point. Certainly in the South East and Kent, one name in particular keeps cropping up, Morgan Restoration.

The company was formed in 1987 by Barry Morgan, a former electronics engineer and was set up to bring back to life derelict

listed properties and abandoned industrial and agricultural buildings.

"Around 20 years ago, I completed my first ever restoration project, which I then lived in before I sold it a few years later. It wasn't until after I completed a number of projects that I decided it might be wise to start creating the Morgan Restoration brand," comments Barry Morgan, chief executive.

Morgan Restoration works in conjunction with developers to restore beautiful buildings

to their former glory which otherwise would be just flattened with a bulldozer.

"Developers buy land on brownfield sites and tear down the buildings to create a greenfield site on which they can build new properties. This is all well and good but those beautiful buildings steeped in history have been lost forever. I work in conjunction with the developers to restore those buildings so they can be enjoyed by the general public for years to come," comments Morgan.



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The first project for Morgan Restoration took place in conjunction with Laing Homes, purely through chance.

"Laing had purchased all but one building on the site of an Edwardian Anglo American laundry in Wandsworth. They tore down most of the buildings on the site to create new properties with the exception of just one listed building which the council wanted to retain. I bought this building directly from the laundry and was then working side by side with Laing. During that time Laing saw the dedication I gave to the project and the quality of my workmanship. So, when over a year later they were faced with another building, which needed to be restored they didn't think twice about employing me to work with them," explains Morgan.

Naturally, there are other restoration companies around, but what makes Morgan Restoration unique is their ability to blend classic with modern architecture.

"I like the mix of old and new styles. If a building needs minor alterations then I try to

complete them within the style of the building as it stands, but it is nicer with larger alterations to mix modern and past architecture," says Morgan.

Morgan's dedication to all of his projects is one reason he gives for major developers choosing to work with the company.

"Restoration work needs quick decisions from someone who is on site day in day out. Because of the dedication I put in to every project, I can be on site every day and make those snap decisions," he explains.

He also views the fact that he is not money orientated as another of the unique selling points of the company. "On many projects I could have earned more money but I'd rather create an excellent well built property which will stand the test of time and encourage other developers to use the business in their projects," he adds.

One of the key projects undertaken by Morgan Restoration was the former Langley Court Estate in Beckenham, Kent. The estate, which was owned by the Wellcome

Foundation from 1924 until the end of the 20th century when it was acquired by Laing Homes, included a 19th century chateau style mansion, a dairy, a coach house and a unique timber framed Grade II listed chapel. The chapel, which dates from the 18th century, was considered the most important building on the estate from a historical viewpoint.

Morgan Restoration worked in conjunction with Laing in 1998 to convert the mansion into six large apartments and a spacious 6,000 square foot house. "We added a second floor with a mansard style extension, which allowed us to mix the old and new styles of architecture," comments Morgan.

The company then went on to restore the chapel by removing the external walls and roof to install weather proofing membranes before re-cladding and rethatching. Floor insulation was also installed to allow for the provision of underfloor heating so radiators would not be required.

OPPOSITE: The mansion at Langley Park restored by Morgan Restoration

BELOW: The Pond Garden at Langley Park and Barry Morgan (inset)





ABOVE: The Baldwyns Mansion at the Bexley Hospital site
RIGHT: A bathroom in the apartments at the Baldwyns Mansion



The dairy was then transformed into three new homes each of which had two storeys and the coach house which was once used as a photographic studio became a contemporary family home complete with swimming pool.

According to Morgan restraints both architecturally and design-led in the restoration work are very few and far between. "Because I like to keep properties in the style of the period they were built in, we don't come up against too many restraints," explains Morgan.

Baldwyns Mansion which stands on the site of the former Bexley Hospital is considered to be one of Morgan Restorations most prestigious projects.

"The Grade II listed building was in fact on the 'at risk' register. We renovated the site into 14 luxurious apartments without any public money, to create a beautiful building which will be admired by the public and certainly stand for at least another 100 years," he says.

Archaeological records showed that the mansion which lies in five acres of woodland most probably stood on the site since medieval times in one shape or another although not a great deal is known about the building until 1531 when it was passed to the crown from the monasteries. The house was then owned by a number of prestigious families until 1894 when the house and estate was bought by London County Council and later opened as Bexley

Hospital in 1898 until its eventual closure in the early 1990's.

Laing Homes acquired the site in early 2001 and Morgan Restoration was their natural first choice to restore the mansion after the work they completed on the Langley Park site.

The restored building was divided into two parts; the main front section accessed via the front door which comprises three Loft apartments and four Regency apartments. The Lofts feature double and triple height galleried living spaces carved out of the principal ground floor rooms. The Regency apartments are situated on the first and second floor of the building, with the second floor apartments even featuring a secret roof garden.

The rear of the mansion is made up of five Victorian apartments and two houses built in corners of the mansion, each with a private entrance and garden backing onto woodland.

All of the apartments are built in a contemporary, high specification style with stainless steel appliances and granite worktops in the kitchen alongside fully tiled bathrooms with Philippe Starck taps.

The years of neglect and vandalism had caused extensive damage to both the interior and exterior so the project involved a great deal of work. All of the internal structural timber had to be replaced along with the main internal staircase which had been destroyed by fire.

At sometime the original pitched roof had been replaced with a flat roof, so a new appropriate roof featuring natural slate and traditional lead clad dormer with Georgian sliding sash windows was given to the mansion. The entrance hall was also restored with new plaster corning taken from moulds of the remaining parts in the mansion, new skirtings and new architraves.

Morgan Restoration hopes to continue expanding the brand name that it has created, after all Morgan sees its reputation as the main factor in securing regeneration projects. "I haven't as of yet had someone buy a second property from me but I'd like to continue my reputation so that a constant stream of new clients reach me," he comments.

With several new projects in the pipeline Morgan also identifies expanding the staff as a way forward for the company. "I'd also like to bring in a young developer and get him started on some projects under the Morgan brand name," stresses Morgan.

"Regeneration allows us to take a building which has fallen into disrepair and disuse and put it back into use, preserving it for the future. This sustainability is not only valuable to developers but valuable to the general public too," he comments.

CONTACTS

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