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Photos: Old Ropewalk Factory in Charlestown Finally Reopens as Apartments

Unique building has remained empty for five decades but will welcome residents in August

By [Jon Chesto](#) Globe Staff, Updated June 30, 2021, 6:06 p.m.



A view of a finished unit in the old ropewalk factory in Charlestown. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

The old Ropewalk complex in the Charlestown Navy Yard is more than a quarter-mile long but only 45 feet wide in most sections, making it one of the most challenging structures in Boston to redevelop.

Finally, though, there is light at the end of this granite tunnel: Vision Properties and the Boston Planning & Development Agency on Wednesday celebrated the completion of 97 apartments in the old rope factory with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.



An exterior view of the project. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

The roughly 150,000-square-foot complex dates back to 1838, and was used to make rope for the US Navy until about 50 years ago. It's been empty since the Navy decommissioned that part of the Navy Yard and turned it over to the Boston Redevelopment Authority (now known as the BPDA) in 1974.



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Many potential uses have been floated over the years: offices, labs, a museum. Finally, developer Joe Timilty, the former state senator, found the right formula. But he died in 2017, and the following year Pennsylvania-based Vision Properties was roped in to help complete the \$40 million-plus project.

The developers will pay the BPDA \$45 million for the site under a long-term lease that runs until 2089. Last year, the BPDA agreed to defer the first several years of rent payments to help the project through financial challenges. In return, the number of affordable units is rising from 20 to 24, although it will open with 13 such units and grow over the next seven years.



A painter does some finish work along the long hallways that once were used for making rope. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

Now, Vision is putting the finishing touches on the apartment complex, with the first residents set to arrive in August. The project was designed by The Architectural Team in Chelsea, led by Bob Verrier.

“This completion of this project is a major achievement,” said Devin Quirk, the BPDA’s director of real estate. “The activation of this property, along with preserving 25 percent of the new apartments as affordable housing, are important wins for residents of Charlestown.”



Ray Senices, a painter at the project, takes a break sitting in a windowsill. He has walked 18,000 steps down the long hallways once used to make rope. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF
