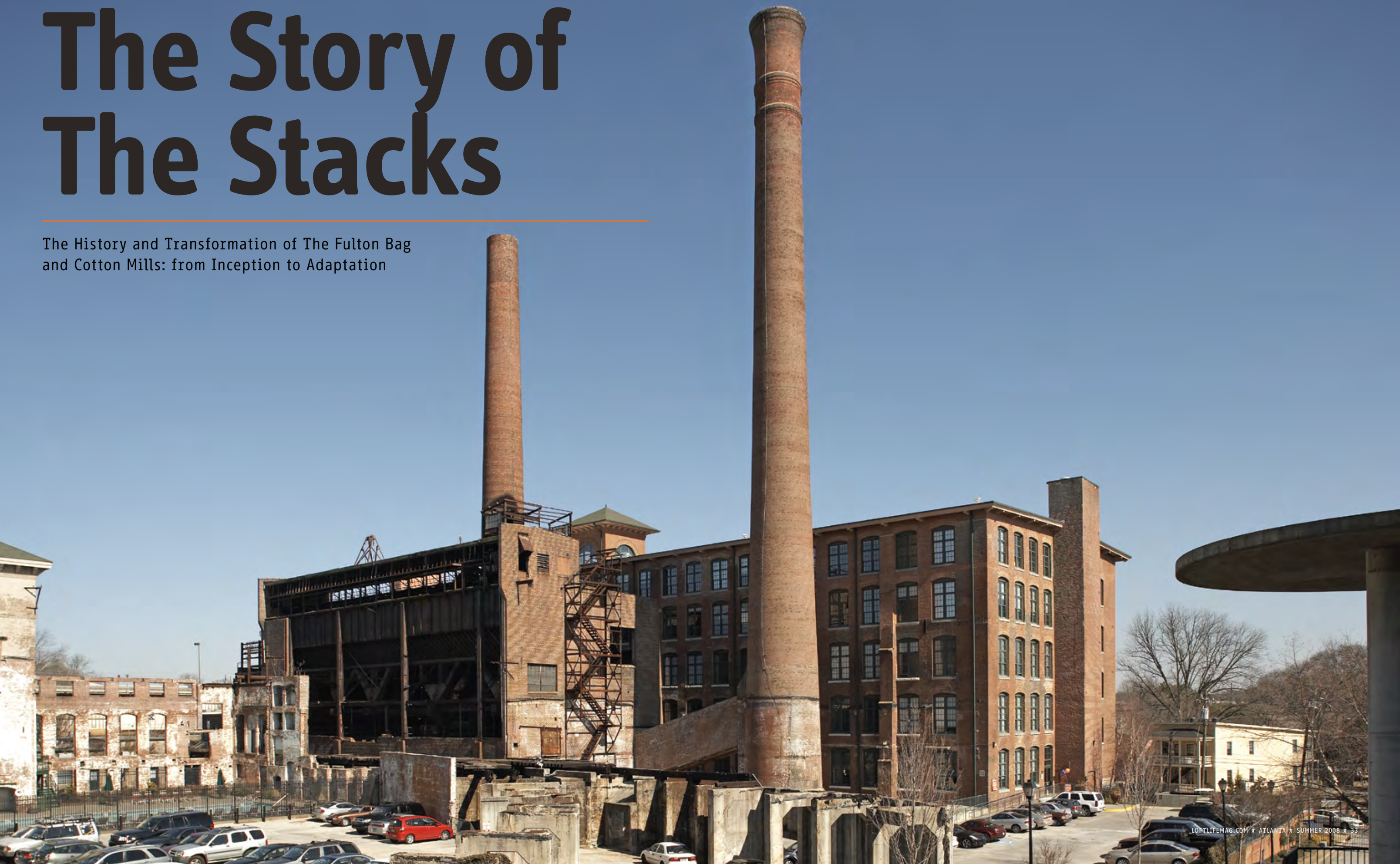


The Story of The Stacks

The History and Transformation of The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills: from Inception to Adaptation





Story by Katie Black
 Photography by Jeff Herr

As the late 1800s merge into the twentieth century, the constant roar of America's Machine Age echoes against walls of brick. Bales of cotton are unloaded from railroad cars while almost 3,000 workers (many of them women and children) spin, weave, bleach, dye, and print the cotton, creating bags and tents. Thick plumes pour from tall, brick smokestacks and mingle with the aroma of cabbage cooking in the shotgun style wood houses lining the surrounding streets. A hot Atlanta sun shines overhead, illuminating The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills.

One hundred years certainly changes things.

Today, the buildings of The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills, purchased by Aderhold Properties in 1996 for conversion to lofts, are now commonly known as "The Stacks at Fulton Cotton Mill," and according to Tom Aderhold, President of Aderhold Properties, the ongoing conversion has been the "challenge of all challenges."

From landmark to lofts

Nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976, the buildings of the former mill had already started to deteriorate

when they were closed for business in 1977. Surrounding Cabbagetown was subsequently declared a Landmark District, but the neighborhood was dwarfed by the hulking presence of The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills.

In the early 1990s the Cabbagetown Neighborhood Improvement Association approached Louis Brown, then President of Winter Properties, and asked if he would be willing to purchase the buildings and adapt them for reuse. Brown subsequently left Winter and formed a partnership with Tom Aderhold and his father, John Aderhold, to accomplish this Herculean task. "It started off slowly," Tom Aderhold reminisces. "We bought the Mill in 1996, moved on-site in a trailer, and we're still here."

Brown (who died five years ago) was the one who "figured out how to make all this work," Aderhold says. "We had good architects and good engineers," but it was a daunting and expensive task. Historic guidelines dictate what must be saved, and as a result, elevated support trestles, the two mammoth smokestacks,

Originally the entryway to the tower, the Deardorffs' loft mixes antiques from their former home with larger scale pieces to fit the space. The view from the kitchen to the living room. Their bedroom, once the Mill's storage room, has 16-inch deep walls.



the water tower, and the old boilers are still standing. Current residents of The Stacks see them as a kind of art. Marae Simone, a “condo stylist” by trade, bought her loft partly because of the way the ghostly water tower’s metal stairways cast shadows on the old brick at night, framed by the tall windows in her living room. She likes to call The Stacks, “Industrial Chic.”

Rising from the ashes of war

The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills complex was founded by a German orphan immigrant named Jacob Elsas, who came to America to seek his fortune when he was 18. Elsas soon found himself in a Union Army unit stationed in Cartersville to guard General Sherman’s supply lines. Once the war ended, he opened a general store and quickly discovered the region’s need for cotton bags. A smart businessman who seized opportunities in the resurrecting South, Elsas soon made his way to Atlanta and, in 1867, purchased a charter to build a cotton mill from hotelier H.I. Kimball. He then acquired a 16-acre tract of

↑ The wall behind Simone’s bed has a “reptile” faux-finish by Bridgit Taylor. Beside it: an installation crafted from a found tree trunk. → With help from Le Corbusier, van der Rohe, and a prized mirror too heavy to hang on the wall, Simone’s living-room reflects her signature style: minimalist drama.



land east of downtown Atlanta that had once been a Civil War foundry known as “The Rolling Mill,” Atlanta’s largest manufacturing plant before being destroyed during the war.

Elsas and his partner, Isaac May, began construction on the “Fulton Cotton Spinning Company” in the late 1870s. As was common practice at the turn of the century, the initial mill building was constructed with bricks made from clay found on-site. The Old Bleachery, the first mill building, was completed in 1881, just in time for the conclusion of Atlanta’s International Cotton Exposition and the subsequent rebuilding of the Southern textile industry.

According to an 1886 Sanborn map, originally created to help fire insurance companies with risk assessment, the complex consisted of the original Old Bleachery, a picking room, the engine room, plus a large cotton warehouse, waste house, lumber shed, water tank, and well and pump building.

In 1889, Elsas dissolved his partnership with May and rechartered his growing business as The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills, Inc., which eventually included operations in New Orleans, St. Louis, Dallas, Minneapolis, Kansas City, Los Angeles, and Denver.

In 1895, Elsas expanded even further with Mill #1, a building that housed 40,000-spindles. He also added one of the largest steam engines in the South. After a final mill addition (c. 1904), the Atlanta property’s configuration was similar to the way it stands today. A 1911 Sanborn map shows Mill #1, Mill #2, Warehouse #6, the Bag Factory, Office Building, Machine Shop, and water tower. The last significant building in use today, the New

Bleachery, was constructed in 1953.

At the time, it was a common textile mill practice for the owners to erect company housing for some of their employees. Records show that there were homes in the area as early as 1878, predating the Old Bleachery. However, Elsas and other owners constructed additional housing in the adjacent neighborhood which came to be known as Cabbagetown.

Enter the residents

Once completed, “Phase I” of the transformation of The Stacks (the restoration of the New Bleachery, Warehouse #6, and the Bag Factory) was a \$50 million project. To fund the restoration, Aderhold Properties applied for a Section 42 Low Income Housing Credit. A requirement for acceptance was that 40% of the 206 Phase I units be set aside for low- to moderate-income renters. “We needed 82 units in the low income housing component,” Aderhold explains. “We have 84.” Section 42 is a 15-year project. “We started in 1998 so all of Phase I must remain rental units through 2013.”

Ben Morgan has been at The Stacks for 2-1/2 years, in two different apartments. “I really like living here,” he says. “The apartment I’m living in is wide open, with really cool, big win-

☑ This two-bedroom model loft features birdcages suspended from the ceiling and a painting by artist and Stacks resident, Dagmar Bruehmueller. ☑ Many newer units in The Stacks have spiral staircases; here, one leads from the living area to the upstairs bedroom.



dows and lots of brick,” Morgan says.

The unusual windows are a focal point—no two are exactly the same size. “We kept the window company busy for a year,” says Aderhold. Another draw is the large community pool framed by the ruins of the Old Bleachery. When they were trying to figure out where to put the pool, an architect suggested putting it *in* the building. “Everyone said yes!” says Aderhold. It is a stroke of genius: a sleek, modern pool within an old, brick façade.

Phase II of The Stacks began in 1999. On April 12th of that year a raging fire broke out in Mill #1. Flames leapt over the five-story structure and trapped a crane operator on top of his machine. A daring, televised rescue ensued as a helicopter plucked the operator off his perch. Aderhold says he was standing next to then-Atlanta Mayor Bill Campbell when he asked the operator through a radio how he was doing: “He said he was fine but a little hot . . . That was a fairly long day.”

Historic guidelines dictated that 60% of the interior must be intact in order to qualify for rebuild. Fortunately Aderhold Properties was allowed to proceed with its restoration. Due to the high combustibility of cotton, Mill #1 and its companion structures were built to withstand fire, in what was commonly known as “slow burning construction.”

The restoration of Mill #1 proceeded, and Aderhold’s Phase

The ongoing conversion of The Stacks at Fulton Mill has been the “challenge of all challenges.”

II was complete with the rentals of lofts in four other buildings. In April of 2006, Aderhold Properties teamed up with Jennings Partners Inc. and the Condo Store to market and sell new units. According to Wayne Anderson, Sales Manager at The Stacks, it took “barely over a year” to sell the 165 available lofts. They are now marketing Phase II of the condominium project, starting with Mill #2. Available lofts range in price from the high \$100,000s to the mid-\$300,000s.

Brandon Sutton was a renter in Mill #1 (known today as “Building H”), and moved into The Stacks in March of 2001. “I was one of the first to move in,” he says. “I had a one-bedroom loft on the first floor. In November 2002, I moved into the Tow-

➤ Sutton’s tower loft features a streamlined kitchen, seemingly suitable for roller skating. The height of his ceiling gives new meaning to “loft.” ➤ An abundance of headroom in Sutton’s bedroom doesn’t detract from its intimacy.



er. I had an increase in rent but it was worth it.”

Sutton loves the history of The Stacks, adding, “Aderhold Properties has done a phenomenal job of preserving it.” He comments that wandering the halls is like a treasure hunt: old photographs line the walls and original machinery is on display in the corners.

When the building turned condo, Sutton jumped at the chance to purchase his unit. He loves most that his loft is “unlike all the others.” In fact, many of the lofts at The Stacks are unique. Tom Aderhold reports that there are 90 different floor plans in the 165 converted units.

Most residents agree with Sutton when he says, “the people are great.” Aderhold adds, “This kind of living draws people from every walk of life. We rejoice in the diversity.” There are parties around the pool, movies shown on big screens, and other events to bring residents together. Unless you’re here, Aderhold says, you just don’t know “how much fun it really is.”

The Stacks residents also agree that the location is ideal. “I’ve seen Cabbagetown change so much,” says Sutton. “I’ve watched Carroll Street come alive.” And indeed, there are now numerous restaurants and watering holes within walking distance. Downtown is one mile to the west, plus more loft build-

ings and restaurants are transforming the adjacent Memorial Drive corridor. I-20, I-75, and I-85 are easily accessible.

Lyn and Tom Deardorff, semi-retired, moved from Decatur to their loft at The Stacks, where they helped start The Stacks Artist, Architect & Loft Tour in December of last year to “showcase artists and showcase the lofts.”

The Deardorffs knew The Stacks was “not the same as the other places; the diversity appealed to us.”

“We had ‘Empty Nest syndrome,’” they explain, joking that they bought a loft with only one bedroom, “so no kids could move back in.”

Marae Simone says the things that sold her were “the high ceilings, concrete floor, and exposed brick.” She is proud that her loft is “the first home I’ve owned. I have more friends in this building than in all my other homes combined.” Simply put, she says, “I love coming home.”

EXIT

Brandon Sutton’s living room features an impressive collection of artwork, complemented by a black leather Natuzzi sofa and sidechair from Italia furniture.



Amazing Grace

EDITOR’S NOTE: *The Story of The Stacks* was completed two weeks before the evening of March 14th, when an EF-2 tornado tracked through the heart of Atlanta, knocking windows out of skyscrapers, turning the Georgia World Congress and CNN Centers into public fountains, toppling hundred-year-old oaks onto many homes in Cabbagetown, and touching down at The Stacks. Katie Black revisited the scene ten days later for an update.

MARAE SIMONE: There’s no place like home—it’s a cliché, but true. I have always loved this place but I appreciate it so much more now. I’m lucky: I could have been in Building E. I feel so badly for them.

LYN & TOM DEARDORFF: We’ve shared several home disasters in the past: trees that fell on our roof, a hurricane; but we’ve never shared one with a community of neighbors like this one. We were home that evening but the strength of our building masked the severity of the tornado. It was only when we went outside that we witnessed its full impact.

MARAE: I had just gotten home 10 minutes before (the storm hit). I was at a friend’s on (floor) 5 and thought, “it sounds like hail, I should move my car,” but when we looked out the window, it looked like a tornado. We hid in the bathroom for a very short time, like 2 minutes. It was very loud and then it was over. When I went to check on my car I saw a neighbor bleeding from the head and I stayed with him until the firemen arrived.

TOM ADERHOLD: It’s like divine intervention that no one was killed. We lost the top to the water tower. Building D is still closed—its roof was lifted up and set back down. Building C

is damaged as well but Building E was hurt the most. Thankfully, most of those units had just been placed on the market, so they were unoccupied at the time. Aside from the roof and top floors, there’s varying degrees of water damage. All-in-all, the total structure is very stable except for a few areas. The Atlanta Fire Department did an incredible job. The assistant fire chief commented that any other building would have been flattened—that’s how well-constructed (Building E) was. The site was cleared of all debris sixty hours after the event. (Buildings) A, B, and H are back up and people moved back in one week later. We appreciate all the owners and residents being so patient.

BRANDON SUTTON: One of the most difficult things to absorb was the loss of the ruins by the pool. All our neighbors felt the same. I was one of the first to find out we could move back in. I was gathering things from my place and Tom Aderhold said, “You guys can come back home.” The whole experience brought people together. I already knew we had a strong community here but that strong connection has been amplified.

LYN & TOM: We take heart in the fact that we’ve built such a community in only a year, which has served us well as we begin the healing process. We’re extremely fortunate to have Tom Aderhold and his highly professional team on-site from the first night, committed to restoring our home—again! We know the Stacks will be here for another hundred years.

MARAE: When Donna in the sales center said, “You can go home,” we hugged. (Once I was back in my loft) it felt different because I was afraid to leave. I thought they wouldn’t let me back in—I didn’t want them to change their minds. I wanted to be home!

Photo of Building E taken March 17, 2008, by Stacks resident Terrell Clark.