

Green restoration

Driving past the trees and vast fields on County Road, it's easy to glide by the New England Biolabs driveway, marked only by a small sign hanging from a post.

But the subtle entrance belies the magnificent estate inside, where visitors are enveloped by the marriage of past and present, history and technology, and art and science.

Once the estate of a wealthy leather merchant, the grand mansion, stables and gatehouse are now the headquarters of New England Biolabs, which moved there in 2005.

Company founder Don Comb's passion for art and the environment are evident at every

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The main lobby inside the front door of the new building at New England Biolabs is an airy, glass-enclosed space with seating for visitors.



The grand staircase in Mostly Hall at New England Biolabs has been restored to its former glory. Legend has it that the house got its name when Mrs. Proctor first viewed it and declared, "It's mostly hall."



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turn. A three-story tropical garden and art galleries usher employees and visitors through the front of the building. Across the way, beside a small pond with a sculpture of a man wading through its waters, is a squat building that conceals a water treatment plant – a plant that uses a greenhouse filled with plants, not chemicals, to biofiltrate the property’s sewage.

“It comes in as sludge and comes out clean water,” facilities manager Bob Triggilio said. “We border wetlands, so we didn’t want to put chemicals out there.”

Even the property’s hidden features highlight a dedication to environmental and aesthetic preservation. Take the underground parking garages that house close to 170 cars, leaving the landscape around the buildings open and pristine. Underground tunnels connect the new and old buildings.

And for the nearly 300 employees working for Biolabs, there are many perks. The former stables/carriage house contains an employee gym with equipment, daily exercise classes, locker rooms and a massage room.

A community garden provides plots for workers to grow plants and vegetables, and the company hosts weekly barbecues in the warm weather, when employees enjoy grilled food at picnic tables on the large patio.

A day-care facility in the old stone pump house is utilized by some workers who are parents. Marketing communications managers Deana Martin and Tanya Bhatia both bring their children there.

“It’s a wonderful place to work,” Bhatia said.

The Proctor Estate, then and now

Leather merchant James Howe Proctor developed this estate along the Miles River and built the mansion, known as Mostly Hall, in 1894.

Legend has it that when Proctor brought his wife, Mattina, there for the first time, she looked around and said, “It’s mostly hall.” Proctor got a kick out of it, and the name stuck.

After World War I, Proctor and Richard T. Crane, the plumbing magnate who built a mansion at Castle Hill, pooled money to buy one of the first motorized ambulances in the area, which was garaged at then-Cable Memorial Hospital.

The Oblate Fathers for Missions Among the Poor purchased the estate in 1946, followed by the Salesian order of Catholic priests, which used it as a

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The new building at New England Biolabs houses offices and laboratories for its scientists, who range from Nobel Prize winners to interns.



The dining room in the old mansion, now used for conferences and administrative offices, has been painstakingly restored. Even the chandelier and wall sconces were taken down and shipped out for repair and restoration.



The stable at the Proctor estate, shown in this historic photo, now houses an employee gym, with exercise equipment, daily classes and a massage room.



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ABOVE: The rear of Mostly Hall, the former Proctor family home, faces New England Biolabs' new glass building.

BELOW: The fireplaced music room in the mansion features a huge bay window, sofas and an antique phonograph. In the corner is a grand piano. "Quite a few people play piano," Deana Martin, a Biolabs communication manager, says. "From our offices, you can often hear piano playing."



ARCHITECTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD VIED TO DESIGN THE NEW FACILITY.

seminary and retreat house for years. They called the site Don Bosco, after the saint who founded the Salesian order.

New England Biolabs bought the property in 1998. Today, Proctor's old mansion has been restored to its former glory and serves as office space for administrators, as well as conference rooms.

Many residents of the North Shore and beyond remember Don Bosco as a place where company picnics were often held in the summer.

Five main rooms in Mostly Hall underwent extensive restorations, according to Trigilio, who oversaw the years-long renovation and construction.

Trigilio describes in detail how the massive Tudor chandeliers were taken down and shipped out for repair and restoration, as were many other wall sconces and fixtures from rooms including the library, the dining room, and the oak-paneled reading room, which has a deer head mounted on the wall.

"We kept all the original lighting in the front hall," Trigilio said. "The wood floors were refinished and we repaired some of the woodwork. It was a lot."

From ceilings and moldings, to paneling and bannisters, Mostly Hall was painstakingly restored, and adorned with art purchased by Comb and his wife. The ground floor looks as it might have over 100 years ago, while the top floors were gutted and refurbished into light and airy office spaces for Biolabs administrators. The old dining room features an ornate mantel hugged by two carved lions. A mural around the top of the room depicts the mansion and grounds in their heyday.

A grand piano anchors one corner of the music room downstairs, which has a huge bay window, a fireplace, sofas, paintings and a fetching antique phonograph.

"Quite a few people play piano," Martin said. "From our offices, you can often hear piano playing."

Keeping it green

Construction of the new laboratory and office spaces was no small undertaking either. Architects from around the world vied to design the facility.

"We received 300 applicants and there were five judges," Trigilio said. "It took six to nine months to narrow it down."



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Designs ran the gamut from funny to odd, including renderings that resembled a spaceship and an amusement park.

"The idea was to try to blend into the scenery here," he said.

Once the design, by Weston Williamson architects in England, was selected, crews went to great ends to minimize impact on the landscape.

The footprint was altered to save two mighty copper beech trees, one on either side of the new building, and huge, underground retaining walls were constructed to preserve their root systems.

"We spent to the tune of \$1 million to save the trees," Trigilio said.

The company attained official green building status, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification, a marker of sustainable design.

"It's LEED certified," Trigilio said, "which, again, is very rare for a true lab building."

What happens there now

Formerly in Beverly, Biolabs' \$45 million campus in Ipswich was the first project completed under Ipswich's Great Estates Bylaw.

New England Biolabs was founded in 1974 and is the world's leading producer of restriction enzymes. The enzymes are

basically chemical "scissors" that allow scientists to "snip" a strand of DNA and insert a recombined gene.

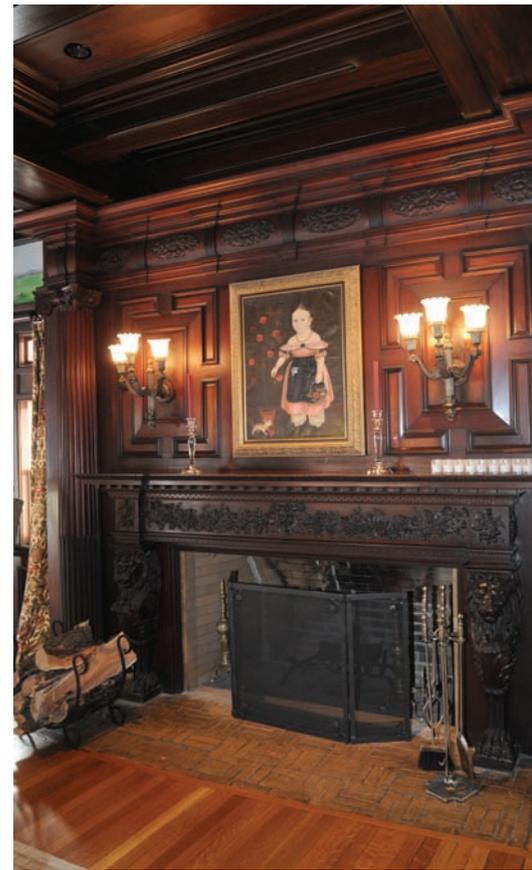
The enzymes are used in gene research, including gene mapping of plants and animals. Biolabs holds a patent for this technology. The property is also home to a nonprofit marine research institute founded by Comb, called the Ocean Genome Legacy.

The scientists who work here range from Nobel Prize winners to high-school interns. Biolabs CEO James Ellard was one of those interns in 1983. The former gatehouse has been refurbished to accommodate up to 12 visiting scientists and students, who come from all over the world.

As part of its permitting process, the company pledged that nearly all of the undeveloped land on the property will remain so, permanently.

Although it is private property, the company welcomes visitors, who frequently walk the grounds, explore the wooded paths and use the horse trails.

"You can hear the guinea hens squawking," Martin said as she walked toward the carriage house on a recent morning. "We have peacocks, too. ... (This property) combines old and new so beautifully." ■



The dining room fireplace features an ornate mantel hugged by two carved lions.



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