

The Boston Globe

Cambridge's newest condo building moved to town from Maine



URBAN SPACES LLC

Located next to the Porter Square stop on the MBTA Red Line, the project includes 20 residential units with off-street parking and 5,000 sf of prime retail space.

By **Tim Logan** GLOBE STAFF NOVEMBER 11, 2016

The new condominium building in Porter Square looks a lot like many other new condo buildings: Three floors of units above retail storefronts. And the prices - starting at \$600,000 for a one-bedroom - are pretty typical for new construction in Cambridge.

But the way the Rand at Porter was put together is something different.

The building's 20 units were constructed individually at a factory in Maine, trucked to a church parking lot in Arlington, and then stacked atop a base podium along Massachusetts Avenue over the course of one busy weekend in March.

“If you went away for the weekend, you came back and there was a building there,” said Paul Ognibene, chief executive of developer Urban Spaces LLC.

So-called “modular” construction has long been common for single-family tract homes in the suburbs, but less used on condos and apartments in a dense place like the core of Greater Boston. Urban Spaces used the same technique on a building in Reading, and projects in Chelsea and West Cambridge have been modular-built in recent years. But they are still relatively rare, for a number of reasons, including the false perception that prefab buildings are poorly made, a shortage of factories in New England that build modular apartments, and pushback from construction unions.

But for the Rand, it made sense, Ognibene said.



PRELLWITZ CHILINSKI

From the first box to the last, the building was set in just four days.

The development sits on a tight site between residential blocks and a busy stretch of Mass. Ave. Doing much of the work off-site minimized the complications of getting equipment and materials in and out of close quarters, and shaved months off the construction schedule. In the end, it’s not actually much cheaper to go modular, Ognibene said. But it’s a lot faster, in part because work could be done on the foundation - in Cambridge - and the units themselves - in Maine - at the same time.

“We just had to get them down here,” Ognibene said. “That took very precise planning.”

Once the units were on site, the finishing work took a few more months. It included installing electrical wiring, plumbing, and other systems, as well as installing the exterior façade. Then it was time for the sales pitches. Once would-be buyers got over their “I don’t want a tract home” feelings, Ognibene said, the condos went fast. With the building set to open in December, 18 of the 20 units already are sold.

Time-lapse: The building process

Watch: A modular build

Tim Logan can be reached at tim.logan@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter at [@bytimlogan](https://twitter.com/bytimlogan).