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NY REAL ESTATE RESIDENTIAL

Upper West Side Eyesore Sells for Millions

Owner of Once Elegant Brownstone, Beseeched to Fix Up the Place, Paid \$5,000 in 1976



The home at 118 W. 76th St. ADRIENNE GRUNWALD FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By *Josh Barbanel*

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For decades along West 76th Street, neighbors watched with mounting alarm as a vacated brownstone, traces of its 19th-century glory still etched into in its facade, fell into deeper and deeper disrepair.

The front stoop's brownstone banisters crumbled, floors collapsed and stonework cracked

Now the Upper West Side property has been sold by \$6.6 million to a developer who plans to restore it as a single-family mansion, brokers say.

City records show that the seller, Diane Haslett Rudiano, paid \$5,000 for the home in 1976 in a government-supervised estate sale. The sale follows years of complaints by neighbors, preservationists and elected officials.

Ms. Rudiano said she didn't sell the house for many years because she had an emotional attachment to it. She said her late husband, Jean, had "a lot of plans of trying to do something with the house" and dreamed of living there and renting out part of the space.

"It is a very emotional thing for me," said Ms. Rudiano, the chief clerk of the Board of Elections in Brooklyn. "Life doesn't always turn out the way you wish. I am satisfied that the buyer is going to do a very fine job of renovation."

Mike Sieger, a broker at Fenwick Keats Real Estate who handled the sale, said Ms. Rudiano sold the property in a private transaction without listing it after he approached her with a recent offer.

He said he had been trying to reach out to Ms. Rudiano year after year ever since he became a broker 20 years ago.



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"Everybody has been trying to get this lady to sell because the building is falling apart," he said. "I was successful in getting her to say yes."

The four-story house at 118 West 76th St. is at an end of a row of five Renaissance Revival row houses built in 1890 between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues. The homes are now part of the Upper West Side / Central Park West Historic District.



A rear view of the structure RACHEL LEVY/LANDMARK WEST!

The house has a large bay window on the second floor and a curved window and entry way on the ground floor. A sculpted head looks out over a doorway under the front stoop.

By the early 1940s, the house was converted to a rooming house. City records show it was vacant by February 1978.

The the building had tens of thousands of dollars of unpaid violations, including two for failure to maintain a building in a landmark district, one for failure to properly seal the building, and another for an unsafe building. Over the years, neighbors complained about graffiti, garbage, and rats. The house is adjacent to a synagogue and a preschool.

Judith Samuels, a teacher who has lived in a brownstone next door since 1984, said the rodent problem

was once so bad that she put up a "rat crossing" sign.

She said she had to spend \$3,000 to repair a wall damaged by water seeping into her third floor apartment from snow accumulated in the vacant building through an open skylight. She said she was excited by prospect of seeing the building restored. "It is such a beautiful building," she said.

Judith Bronfman, who has lived across the street since the 1960s, said neighbors had long been pressing Ms. Rudiano to either fix up or sell the building. "It simply deteriorated ever since, it has become an eyesore," she said.

Gale Brewer, the Manhattan Borough President who previously represented the neighborhood in the council, was among those who complained. In the end, but Ms. Rudiano, it was Ms. Brewer who persuaded her to sell.

After speaking with Ms. Brewer, she said she decided that "it would be a better thing for my husband's memory to give it to somebody who could enjoy it," she said.

The buyer of the property was an investment group, Holliswood 76 LLC, headed by Dana Lowey Luttway, a developer and daughter of U.S. Rep. Nita Lowey (D, N.Y.).

Ms. Luttway said that while the home's exterior "was a disaster," its shell was structurally sound. "We have plans drawn up and are ready to go," she said. "We want to make it a gorgeous new addition to the neighborhood."

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