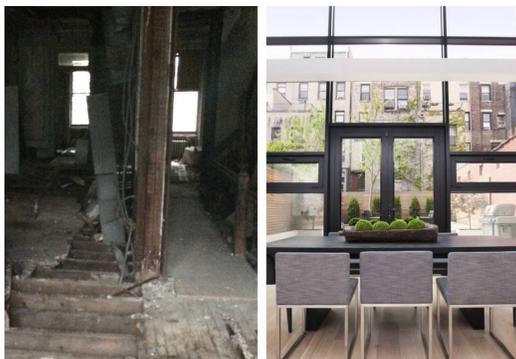


NEW YORK

Once a Vacant Shell, a Restored Brownstone Lists for More Than \$16 Million

This 1891 Renaissance Revival brownstone on West Side was once a neighborhood eyesore



Before and after views of the dining space at 118 West 76th Street. Traditional townhouses often are dark inside. But this house now has a three-story glass wall at the rear. PHOTO: SOTHEBY

By Josh Barbanel

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For decades, the neighbors on West 76th Street in Manhattan watched as an unoccupied 1891 Renaissance Revival brownstone gradually crumbled before their eyes.

The roof collapsed, the front stoop cracked and the property was covered in graffiti. Rats roamed freely, neighbors said. The building even had its own Facebook page.

Now, after being enlarged and modernized by a developer who specializes in restoring townhouses, the property at 118 West 76th St. is on the market for \$16.6 million.

The turnaround reflects the fruits of community protest as well market forces that have created a niche for developers who can buy and renovate such wrecks and sell them at a profit.

As townhouse prices rose on the West Side, said Michael Sieger, a broker at Sotheby's International Realty, fewer buyers were interested in putting in the sweat equity to fix up houses on their own.

"It is a total nightmare to go through the Department of Building and Landmarks," he said. "At this price point most people want it delivered in beautiful condition, but they have to like the renovation."

The brownstone's previous owner, Diane Haslett Rudiano, a former chief clerk at the Board of Elections in Brooklyn, paid \$5,000 for it in 1976 at a government supervised estate sale but did little with it. City records show the building, a rooming house, was vacant by 1978.

For two decades, Mr. Sieger called her at regular intervals and asked her if she was interested in selling. But Ms. Rudiano said she had an emotional attachment to the house because her late husband had talked about restoring it and living there while



The house, between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues, has seven bedrooms, six full bathrooms and three half bathrooms, and 8,507 square feet of space, including the cellar, plus 1,800 square feet of outdoor space. PHOTO: ELIZABETH SHAFIROFF FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

renting part of it.

In 2014, following community protests, including repeated personal appeals to Ms. Rudiano from Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, she finally agreed to sell it for \$6.5 million.

“I spent almost 12 years, day in and day out, trying to get the building cleaned up,” said Ms. Brewer, who previously represented the area in the city council.

The buyer was Dana Lowey Luttway, president of Holliswood Development LLC and a daughter of U.S. Rep. Nita Lowey (D, N.Y.). She found a shell of a 20-foot wide building with collapsed interior walls and joists. It was a disaster, but structurally sound, she said.

“I could look up and see pigeons perched on the edge of a hole in the roof and see the sky behind them,” Ms. Luttway said.

Working with the Landmarks Preservation Commission, she restored the facade of the building, rebuilding ornamental details like a lion over the garden level entrance and creating new curved mahogany windows.

But inside everything was new, with a modern light-filled, loft-like feel. She got permission from the Landmarks Commission to extend several floors in the back, add two terraces and build a penthouse level on top of the four-story building.

Traditional townhouses often are dark inside. But this house now has a three-story glass wall at the rear, including a double height space that rises up from the large open kitchen on the garden level.

“My playbook is all about big open flowing modern spaces,” Ms. Luttway said. “The people who buy my houses have been families, and families don’t want small rooms.”

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cellar, plus 1,800 square feet of outdoor space.

Townhouse prices have risen sharply over the last decade but have plateaued in the last few years, Mr. Sieger said. In 2014, Ms. Luttway sold a newly renovated house on West 70th Street, a block closer to Central Park, for \$19.3 million, property records show.

Ms. Luttway said developers doing construction often face resistance and complaints from neighbors. But that didn't happen on West 76th Street. She said neighbors, who were pleased that the house was being cleaned up, were "beyond amazing."

"This has been the most wonderful development experience of my life," she said.

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