

West Village Mansion in the Rough

By ROBIN FINN APRIL 3, 2014

A formidable limestone-and-brick building on a historic West Village corner that had been used as a Catholic elementary school, as a nursing school affiliated with St. Vincent's Hospital, and most recently as a locus for child-abuse and protection services administered by the New York Foundling, one of the city's oldest charities, is about to enter the market at \$47.5 million.

In its 21st-century incarnation, 27 Christopher Street, after more than a century of public service, will face an internal gut renovation — the facade has landmark status — and will likely morph into one of the private downtown mansions in vogue with the wealthy new Bohemians who might previously have settled themselves and their important art collections farther uptown. Billionaires have discovered Greenwich Village, and its residential evolution is reflecting their imprint, prompting a reluctant decision by the New York Foundling to monetize an increasingly valuable asset and part with its Vincent J. Fontana Center for Child Protection, acquired in 2002 from St. Vincent's.

According to Bethany Lampland, the chief operating officer of the New York Foundling, which was established in 1869 to assist abandoned children, the board of the organization "made the difficult decision to list this incredible property to generate greater resources for the disadvantaged children and families we serve."

Once a sale is negotiated, the programs offered by New York Foundling at 27 Christopher will be relocated to its headquarters at 590 Avenue of the Americas. Dolly Lenz, the listing broker for the property, said that because it is zoned R-6, its transformation to a single-family residence seemed more plausible than a conversion to condominiums, retail, or a boutique hotel; the primary marketing plan is targeted to prospective buyers in search of a stand-alone West Village mansion.

"My gut instinct is that it will become a mansion," Ms. Lenz said. "This is a really beautiful building. The facade is to die for, the floor plates and the views are big, the ceilings are high, and the zoning is such that "as of right" it can be converted to a one-family house. The property has many potential uses — as a boutique hotel, as a private club — but we're showing it as a fabulous mansion at a unique and irreplaceable location."

Although a total interior renovation is inevitable, Ms. Lenz said that pricey prospect was unlikely to dissuade clients with the means to buy an entire building to call home. "Most of my purchasers of properties in this price range tend to customize their homes even if they buy them fully finished," she said. "With this being almost a blank canvas ready to receive a buyer's vision, it's actually a plus."

The four-story structure, built in 1911 on the still-charming corner of Christopher Street and Waverly Place, has 19,000 square feet of usable interior space distributed among four above-grade floors and a basement level. It sits on a prime 60-by-70-foot lot. There is a small terrace at the rear of the second story and 3,000 square feet of roof space with views in four directions. Its neo-Classical facade is accented by large arched windows on the second story overlooking Christopher Street, Waverly Place and Christopher Park.

Richard Kronick, a founding principal of Gerner Kronick & Valcarcel Architects, was retained to provide blueprints and renderings for two possible interior themes. "One version is totally modern, and the other is more classically inspired," he said. "Either way, this is an amazing opportunity: there are great bones and the potential to create a spectacular home."

Both versions emphasize luxury on an unapologetically grand scale: a glass elevator serving all levels; a sweeping staircase to the parlor gallery, reception rooms and his-and-hers powder rooms; a sprawling second-floor master suite with his-and-hers baths, two dressing rooms, separate studies, a yoga room, a linen room (because a mere closet would not suffice), and a romantic breakfast nook with an adjoining pantry. The amenities on the lower level include a sauna, gym, home theater, and wine room; on the roof there is a terraced garden with an outdoor kitchen, a Jacuzzi, a dog run and, yes, a canine spa.

"Whoever buys the building is buying a piece of history," Ms. Lenz said.

Her target is not limited to billionaires: folks in the \$300 million-and-up bracket with downtown mansion envy and an affinity for gut renovations qualify, too. They know who they are.

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