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Crossing Delancey

by Gabriel Sherman

The 22-apartment loft building at 7 Essex Street was always fashioned to be a luxury residence. But the roster developing there is now banishing late-stage skepticism whether people with real money—not just trendsters with a \$1,000 rent allowance from their parents—would actually be willing to live on the still-gritty thoroughfare.

The most recent émigré to the narrow lanes of the Lower East Side is the French photographer Brigitte Lacombe, who closed on a \$1.06 million loft in the 11-story building abutting Seward Park two months ago. Ms. Lacombe—most famous for her celebrity portraits and photographs, which have appeared in such image-focused titles as *The New York Times Magazine* and *GQ*—now joins Belgian supermodel Ingrid Seynhaeve in the imposing brick structure.

Exclusive broker Tamir Shemesh of Douglas Elliman declined to comment on the sale.

Like the luxurious 21-loft development at 285 Lafayette Street some years ago that pulled in David Bowie and Iman, Lachlan and Sarah Murdoch, Patrick McEnroe, theater scion Eric Nederlander and hotelier Ian Schrager—or the Police Building at 240 Centre Street, which once was home to supermodels Cindy Crawford, Christy Turlington and Linda Evangelista—7 Essex Street has become



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—L.E.S.
blogger
Lockhart
Steele.**

an upper-crust outpost in a neighborhood of historically bohemian sensibility. Along with Ms. Seynhaeve, the two-year-old building now counts the television actress Amy Carlson, who has appeared on NBC's *Third Watch* and will soon appear on *Law and Order: Trial by Jury*, as well as an entertainment executive and a troupe of Wall Street bankers as residents.

Ms. Lacombe's loft covers 2,000 square feet, and according to a real-estate source close to the building, the photographer, celebrated for her snaps of Hollywood's biggest names (including Woody Allen, Warren Beatty, Nicole Kidman, Jude Law and Martin Scorsese) intends to configure the raw space as a two-bedroom loft.

Developed in 2002 for \$15 million by the Vesta Development Group, 7 Essex Street is well south of the throbbing crowds spilling over from Keith McNally's Schiller's Liquor Bar and the towering glass-and-aluminum mass of the 20-story Hotel on Rivington (now taking reservations). Well south of Delancey Street, it occupies a different psychic territory from trendy Clinton Street or rowdy Ludlow: More Fine Fare than Fairway, the espresso is cheap around here—and likely to come from a Dominican family restaurant.

"We're seeing a number of things happen indicating the neighborhood is becoming more attractive," said Joseph Cunin, executive director of the Lower East Side Business Improvement District.

"That part of Essex Street is coming up in the world," confirmed Lower East Side blogger Lockhart Steele, who has closely monitored every new neighborhood arrival, from Les Enfants Terribles to Sasha Petraske's East Side Company Bar.

But are he and other Loisaïda enthusiasts being naïve when they insist that what happened in fashion-victim neighborhoods like the meatpacking district can't happen in their own 'hood?

"I don't think there's enough luxe housing stock on the Lower East Side to get worried yet," Mr. Steele said.

"The neighborhood is not like Tribeca or the meatpacking district, where every apartment is new and high-end," Mr. Cunin said. "Essex Street is pretty much Chinatown. I think this neighborhood is still kind of a 'real New York.' You still have local retailers and shops that haven't gotten pushed out. We won't see a bunch of Starbucks here in five years." Mr. Cunin pointed to the 19th-century tenements that still comprise much of the neighborhood's residential mosaic. As he put it: "You can renovate the hell out of them—they're still tiny apartments."
