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Best Places to live in NY

JASON SHEFTELL



WILLIAM WALDRON; PAUL COSTELLO



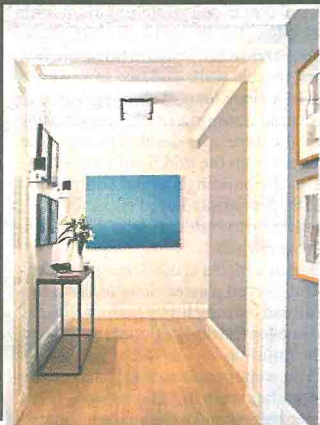
Philip House makes its mark one apartment at a time

Hand-carved marble by the fireplace adds vigor to the room.



Kitchen banquettes are built into wall where maids' room once was.

HIT IT BIG ON EAST SIDE



Hallways, says Hagan, are central to a New York City home.



Interiors at the Philip House are imagined and executed by designer Victoria Hagan.

If you don't think it's the little things that make the big differences in New York real estate, ask designer Victoria Hagan. The nationally known design force fought hard for three more inches of floor space in the master bedrooms at Philip House, a development at 88th St. and Lexington Ave. From the Cheshire Group, the group that built Devonshire House on E. 10th St. and University in the Village, Philip House is a conversion of 100-plus rental apartments where layouts and floor plans were conceived to house a new form of upper East Side resident, the kind who wants to stay in the city and live in big homes.

Hagan thought the inches could make a world of difference. "Those three inches mean whom-ever lives here can have side tables of a proper length, width and height," said Hagan, who had a product line at Target and designed director Barry Sonnenfeld's Hamptons house years back. "It might look fine, but when you put a king-size bed in these rooms, you'll want proportion. Those three inches make the entire space feel bigger." A rental project built in the 1920s for upper class families by a New York real estate concern led by Philip Rhineland (hence Philip House), the building, then called 141 East

88th St., had a main entrance on Lexington Ave. between 88th and 89th Sts. and apartments with maid rooms and service entrances. "It was pretty swank stuff for a rental, even back then," said Susan Hewitt, a principal at Cheshire, a development company that specializes in converting older rentals with good bones into high-end condominiums. "When you walk in this building, you felt the history. That lobby was grand but a little institutional. Giving it more of a residential feel would allow
Continued on next page

Retail includes a bike shop and running store. Both will remain on this stretch of Lexington Ave.



PAUL COSTELLO

Hagan fought hard for extra space in the master bedrooms.



SUSAN WATTS/DAILY NEWS

Continued from previous page us to please our demographic."

A full block long stretching from 88th to 89th Sts., the Philip House lobby has a black-and-white squared floor, brass doors, marble walls and two sets of elevators. In a move toward creating a quieter residential atmosphere with condo-style class, the developer decided to move the entrance from the middle of Lexington Ave. to the building's actual address on 88th St. A separate keyed entrance will be available to residents who wish to enter from 89th St.

Hagan added a crucial design stroke—a hand-carved plaster element that gives the already-strong lobby texture. It sets the tone for the design details in the rest of the building.

"You want people to feel welcome the second they walk in," Hagan said. "That plaster helped make the space intimate and grand at the same time."

Upstairs, apartments range in size from one-bedrooms for just over \$800,000 to five-bedrooms for over \$8 million, one of which is already in contract. Already 16 homes are taken, all at full asking price.

Cheshire Group purchased the building with 25 rent-stabilized tenants still living in the building. Because the attorney general can't approve a condo plan until 15% of a building is in contract, Cheshire cannot offer buyouts to existing tenants until the plan is approved. They have offered rental tenants the ability to buy their homes. None has done so. All leases for tenants paying market rate prices were not renewed, allowing Cheshire to begin converting over 70% of the building.

"We know how to build with people

The spacious dining room accommodates a large table.



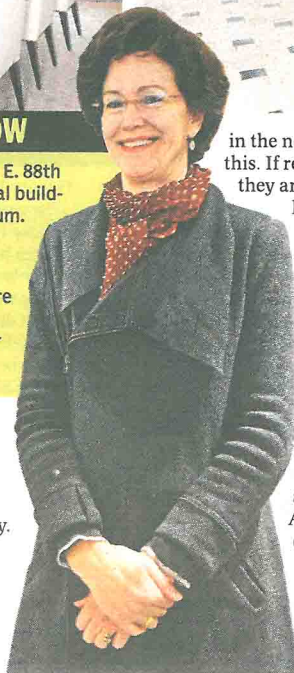
PAUL COSTELLO

YOU SHOULD KNOW

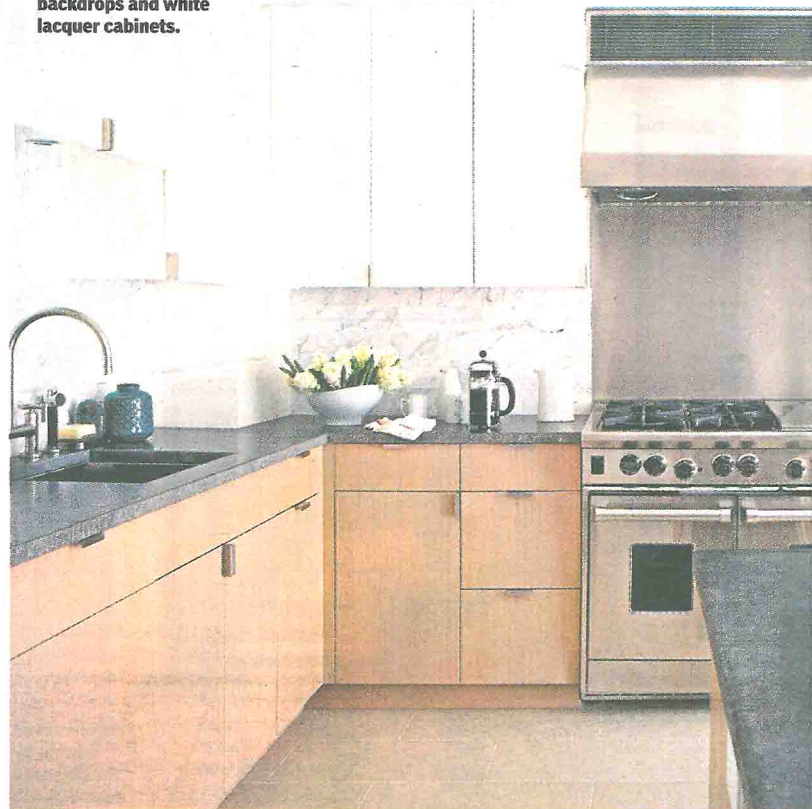
WHAT: Philip House at 141 E. 88th St., a conversion of a rental building to a luxury condominium. Philipousenyc.com.

WHY: Designer Victoria Hagan teams with Cheshire Group to deliver elegant homes. Two-bedrooms for \$3.12 million.

living in the building," said Hewitt, who works with partner Jenifer Stieg. "We stopped renewing leases while we were in negotiations to acquire the property. We're not keeping any of this a secret. We're working closely with the tenant group to make the construction seamless. We know it's a miserable pain



Kitchens have two dishwashers, marble backdrops and white lacquer cabinets.



The lobby stretches a full block. The brass accents are original. Four maisonettes and a garden will be built. Below, Susan Hewitt of Cheshire Group.



in the neck to live through this. If regulated tenants stay, they are welcome to buy their home at a discounted price or enjoy the improved building."

The tenant association at the building declined comment.

Not allowed to discuss tenant buyout options until after attorney general approval, Hewitt and Cheshire do have a history of buying tenants out at fair prices. At Devonshire House on 10th St., no renter complained about the scenario. Cheshire also has a history of turning an older underperforming

asset into a first-rate residential condominium with modern amenities and building performance systems.

"Essentially we're putting a brand-new building into a prewar shell," said Stribling Associates Robert McCain, whose group is in charge of selling the units. "All the pipes, systems, everything inside the building will be brand new. That's a big selling point."

Hewitt, who never seems in a rush, did extensive market research before deciding upon floor plans and certain details.

"There is this huge demand for big apartments again on the upper East Side," she said. "More people are staying in the city, and they're looking at these properties as strong investments where they can live and raise their families."

Working with Hagan and Alan Rose's downtown-based ARCT Architecture, the team decided to build large homes mixing traditional upper East Side staples with modern accents. Strong moldings,



PAUL COSTELLO

nickel hardware from Waterworks, heavy interior doors and large kitchens with two dishwashers blend with natural light oak flooring, Belgian bluestone kitchen countertops and lacquered built-in eating nooks. The results feel like a combination of a country house with an urban edge, or the opposite.

I design spaces that make people feel good," said Hagan. "They look good, too, but I try to give the space an energy. I think constantly about what makes a great kitchen for today. It's all I do, design – 365 days per year.

"A hallway, for instance, is key in a New York apartment. We wanted these hallways to have some dignity. Nothing about these homes was meant to feel slick, but they have a low-key luxury and quiet elegance that my clients like."

Hewitt and Hagan worked together on Devonshire, where not one of the 70-plus buyers altered a kitchen or a bathroom.

"That's unheard of in new developments," said Hewitt. "Victoria is a genius in making people feel at home. To live in one of her spaces without paying a fee is a gift."

Most homes are being sold after they are released. Unlike other new developments selling off floor plans and construction sites, Cheshire and Stribling felt it more appropriate given the price and level of detail at Philip House to show homes that were immediately available. Closings should occur in the summer.

"We feel people can appreciate these homes when they can see a finished apartment," said Hewitt. "These are upper East Side homes where people will spend a good portion of their lives. We want them to be able to spend time here and understand what they're buying."

CONVERTS

These older buildings got new beginnings in historic conversions



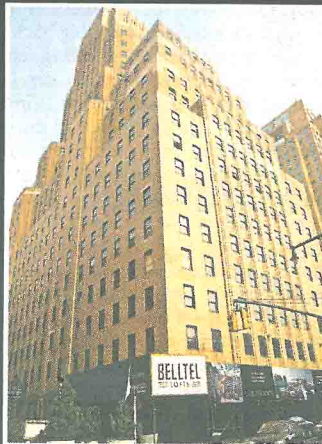
JEFFERSON SIGEL

The Apthorp, a full-block building on the upper West Side. One of the top residential addresses in the world, the building has an inner courtyard (above). Four-bedrooms list at \$7.75 million. The Apthorp was built by the Astor family.



BRYAN SMITH

Devonshire House was reconceived by the same team as Philip House. Actors Alec Baldwin and Amanda Seyfried both bought there. It has an inner garden area off the lobby and spacious layouts.



JULIA XANTHOS/DAILY NEWS

In downtown Brooklyn, the conversion of Bell Telephone labs to condominiums provided large lofts and a grand Art Deco lobby in this strong building which was for a time one of the tallest buildings in Brooklyn. It's almost sold out.