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Habitats/632 Hudson Street; Restuffing the Sausage

By TRACIE ROZHON

THERE are traces still of the sausage factory: the gritty, peeling orange sign, the giant walk-in refrigerators, the iron poles hanging from the ceiling, once part of a vast assembly that sent sausages from the stuffing machine to the smokehouse to the drying room.

For 40 years the building at 632 Hudson Street housed the Esteve Packing Corporation, where the specialties were sobrasada, butifarra and longoniza -- types of chorizo, or spicy Spanish-style sausage. In those days, a Department of Agriculture inspector stood watch every day, a Federal requirement wherever meat is packed.

The inspector's office is bleak, a sad little step-down into a windowless cubicle, but no bleaker than the rest of the unheated building. A rusty metal shutter hangs off one hinge outside a window sash with broken panes. Large plastic barrels catch drips from leaks in the roof. An elevator shaft is a dark and open pit.

Yet the new owner hopes that within a year the elevator shaft will become a skylighted atrium, the derelict windows French doors leading onto a narrow balcony and the shutters restored reminders of a brick building that started life as a house -- and will be one again.

"This fireplace will become the focaccia oven," said Karen Lashinsky, an actress and real estate agent, who bought the building with her 83-year-old mother, Dr. Bertha Lashinsky, for "slightly less than half a million dollars."

Dr. Lashinsky emigrated from Germany in 1939 and practiced psychiatry until six months ago.

"There'll be apartments for both of us," said Ms. Lashinsky.

Ms. Lashinsky, who will live in the top two floors, has asked her architect, Alexandr Neratoff, and her designer, Michael Hord, to preserve every trace of the past.

"The old tin ceilings downstairs and the beamed ceiling with the crossbraces on the top floor -- they stay," Ms. Lashinsky said. "The old plaster -- people pay a fortune to duplicate the effect -- and I've got the real thing. No sheetrock. I want the textures, the brick and plaster of an old ruin."

She will furnish the bathrooms with old porcelain lamps she bought on a Parisian acting jaunt. "I want to get those shiny old milky white tiles with the tiny cracks in them," she said, "and the mosaics they have in the subways."

Ms. Lashinsky and her mother are the fourth owners of the four-story, 8,000-square-foot building erected in 1847 between Jane and Horatio Streets by the heirs of Richard Tawning.

A CAST-IRON cornice bearing the name of the produce merchant Hugh King was placed across 632 and its twin, 630 Hudson, in 1881.

The Esteve family bought the building during World War II to make candy, according to Edward V. Esteve, a Long Island lawyer. "You couldn't get torrone, a Spanish nougat, during the war, so we started making it," he said.

The family switched to sausage in the mid-1950's, Mr. Esteve said. His mother, Maria, ran the sausage factory, while his father, Edward, concentrated on other import-export goods. By the 1960's the canned chorizo was carried all over the world by Grace Lines.

Although his mother closed the sausage business in 1983, she refused to sell the building, hoping to launch another business, possibly a restaurant, Mr. Esteve said.

"It wasn't until her death last March, at 97, that we were able to finally sell," he said.

"I was very sad to see the sausage business go," the lawyer concluded, "but the funny thing is that I've just taken an interest in a tortilla manufacturing business, so that really isn't that far off."