

LOWER EAST SIDE

7 Essex Street

Two-bedroom, two-bathroom condo.

Asking: \$900,000. Selling: \$845,000.

Time on market: eight weeks.

Essex House With the glossy obelisk known as Surface: The Hotel rising above Rivington Street, and Keith McNally's latest celebrity-addled restaurant, Schiller's Liquor Bar, attracting hip noshers one block east, it's no wonder that chic boutiques and fashionable little boîtes open up daily on the once-bedraggled stretch. But more farsighted, perhaps, were the real-estate mavens who began constructing luxury lofts ages ago to create patrons for all this conspicuous consumption. Patrons like Emily Thall, a corporate lawyer with Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer in her late 20's. Recently, Ms. Thall relocated back to New York from London and fell hard for a 1,584-square-foot loft in this recently completed development on Essex Street. "Before I bought, I spent some time walking around all of the nearby streets—every week there seemed to be a new bar or restaurant opening up," Ms. Thall said. "Just after I moved in, Les Enfants Terribles opened up on my block." Hunie Kwon, a broker with J.C. DeNiro and Associates who represented Ms. Thall, said that his client wanted a lot of space—inside and outside the apartment. "With all the new restaurants and shops in the neighborhood, it's a perfect place to explore," he said. Daniel Doern of the Vesta Development Group was the sponsor broker on the apartment. A far cry from the surrounding gritty 19th-century buildings, Ms. Thall's loft features such modish amenities as a video intercom, a built-in washer-dryer, open views of Seward Park and access to the building's common roof deck, which comes complete with gas grill. But some of the oldest neighborhood attractions played a part in her decision as well. "Sealing the deal for me was the chocolate shop around the corner on Hester Street. My best friend used to bring me gifts from there," Ms. Thall said. "Finally, I can be a regular for their hand-dipped chocolates!" And if she's lucky, she may have a celebrity neighbor in the near future: The unoccupied penthouse is currently listing for \$2.2 million after electro-rocker Moby had come close to signing a contract on the apartment, which would have made for a convenient commute—Teany, his vegan-minimalist tea shop, is on nearby

Belgian-born model Ingrid Seynhaeve, who has posed for Victoria's Secret, Ralph Lauren and Guess? and was reportedly considered for a role in Jude Law's womanizing chronicle *Alfie*, recently purchased a loft in the \$15 million development at 7 Essex Street, city records show.

According to transfer records, Ms. Seynhaeve purchased an apartment in the building abutting Seward Park for \$1.07 million in August. The raw-space condo covers some 3,000 square feet; since Ms. Seynhaeve's purchase, she has finished out the space as a two-bedroom apartment with a stainless-steel kitchen.

Tamir Shemesh of Douglas Elliman, who sold the apartment, declined to comment. Ms. Seynhaeve was traveling and unavailable for comment.

The influx of the fashion crowd that would seem more at home in the meatpacking district than the Lower East Side is just the latest indicator of the rapid transformation of the once rough-hewn neighborhood. With the tables at Schiller's overflowing and the Hotel on Rivington now taking reservations, the Lower East Side—as *The New York Times* seems to document weekly—has become downtown's newest nocturnal playground.

Vesta Development Group built 7 Essex in 2002 on the site of three walk-up buildings, which it transformed into a 40,000-square-foot, 11-story tower comprising 22 lofts that were delivered as raw space. According to a real-estate source close to the building, along with Ms. Seynhaeve, a world-class photographer has also bought a loft in the development.

Ms. Seynhaeve brings her successful modeling career to the narrow lanes south of Houston Street. After growing up in a rural Belgian town, the flaxen-haired siren began modeling at the age of 15, after a local hairdresser noticed her. In 1991, she won Elite's Look of the Year Award and scored her big break in 1995 when Guess? tapped her for their worldwide print campaign. She has also done shoots for Ralph Lauren and Victoria's Secret, and in 2002, Super Bowl fans got to view Ms. Seynhaeve's acting debut in a Killian's beer commercial directed by Michael Bay.