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BIG DEAL

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The Buyer Who Aimed High

IT seems fitting that Shayne McQuade, who makes a living selling backpacks and bags that generate solar power, should have a place in the sun: a garden with 1,650 square feet of space.

But his new garden will be in the middle of Greenwich Village, with views of the Empire State Building, rather than in the Gobi Desert or on the Appalachian Trail. And it will be planted 14 stories in the air, at the doorstep of his new home in the base of a turreted rooftop tower designed in 1928 by Emery Roth to hide a wooden water tank at the Devonshire House, on East 10th Street and University Place.

Earlier this month, Mr. McQuade signed a contract to pay just under \$2.5 million for the tower apartment, after a bidding war and before the apartment was ever listed on the market.

Devonshire House, a 130-unit building, was sold to a group of developers in December 2007, and is being converted to a condominium. The new owners are renovating and restoring the building, working around 52 rent-regulated tenants who still live there. The remaining apartments have been combined into 49 larger ones. With large units in short supply in Greenwich Village, buyers have signed contracts on 14 of them since marketing began in September.

Mr. McQuade is the chief executive of Voltaic Systems, a company that manufactures bags with solar panels on the outside, and storage batteries on the inside with enough juice to charge everything from an iPod to a personal computer, depending on the model. Peace Corps volunteers and staff members at the United Nations are big buyers, he said.



HIROKO MASUIKE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Devonshire House

Despite the exotic product, with its scent of the sun-swept wilderness, Mr. McQuade, a former management consultant and high-tech executive, has lived in Manhattan since the early 1990s, when he came to New York from Australia to study business at Columbia. He lives down the street from the Devonshire House and learned about the tower space when he wandered into the building one day.

The tower is roughly 20 by 20 feet on the outside, with a 15-foot-high ceiling. An extension built some years ago adds a bedroom and bath to create an 1,100-square-foot space with an open kitchen, a full bath and a powder room. The turret room is dominated by four 9-foot-high arched windows.

The developers planned to hold the tower unit off the market until after the apartments downstairs had sold, but Mr. McQuade pressed them to act sooner. The developers at Devonshire House agreed to negotiate. "He was relentless in wanting that apartment," said Susan Hewitt, the project's lead developer.

But while Mr. McQuade was discussing the details of the renovation, another buyer offered to buy the tower as raw space, as is, without a \$400,000 renovation.

Mr. McQuade won the apartment after he, too, agreed to take the space raw, for close to the asking price. He is still in negotiations to have the developers carry out the renovation as well, at an additional charge.

Although the roof can't support an environmentally fashionable planted green roof, Mr. McQuade said he would install a garden in pots, a pergola, and space for testing new solar devices as well. And reaching the unit will require a bit of backpacking: it is up a flight of stairs from the last stop on the elevator.