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After Price Swings, Co-op Sells

By JOSH BARBANEL | **MAY 28, 2011**

Kevin Wendle, a high-tech investor and former television producer, had big dreams when bought a two-bedroom apartment at 812 Fifth Ave. for $6.4 million, and spent millions more renovating it.

A few years ago, when a sleek, modern renovation was being completed, he quietly offered it for sale for about $17 million. But the ups and downs of the market have played havoc with many would-be flippers across the country, and Mr. Wendle was caught in a downdraft.

French architect Joseph Dirand gave a two-bedroom apartment at 812 Fifth Ave. a contemporary look.

At one point amid the downturn, he cut the asking price to under $10 million, before taking it off the market entirely when no one showed up to see it.

Now, after relisting the apartment, he has sold the five-room co-op on the 17th floor at Fifth Avenue and East 63rd Street for $10.6 million.

The buyer is Marc Lasry, a billionaire hedge-fund manager, according to property records. Mr. Lasry is a founder of Avenue Capital, a $13.7 billion fund that specializes in distressed debt and undervalued securities.

Mr. Lasry said he was attracted to the space by the price and the detailed finishes. He and his wife, Cathy, also own a townhouse on East 74th Street just off Fifth Avenue and plan to keep both spaces for the time being.

"It was a great price for all the work somebody had done on it," Mr. Lasry said. "It was really nice. Sooner or later when all our kids go to college, we may not need the townhouse."



Mr. Wendle bought the apartment for "its potential investment value" in 2006 a time when he said "the market was exploding."

Mr. Wendle was part of the management team that created Fox Broadcasting Co. in the 1980s. Fox and The Wall Street Journal are units of News Corp.

He also was a co-founder of technology news and reviews provider CNET, now part of CBS Corp., and has been involved in other tech startups. He lives mostly in Paris, and also has homes in

Los Angeles and Miami.

The 2,250-square-foot apartment at 812 Fifth had challenges. Mr. Wendle said the outdated apartment had dropped ceilings and subdivided rooms in a white-brick co-op built in 1963 when he acquired the unit as part of an estate sale. But it had potential: large windows and about 150 linear feet of terraces facing in all directions, including a panoramic view of Central Park.

Mr. Wendle brought in a business partner, French architect and interior designer Joseph Dirand, who created a contemporary look for the space, including what turned out to be many expensive details.

After offering it for about $17 million without success in what is called a "whisper listing," he officially listed the apartment for $14.85 million in January 2009.

Interest was scant. "The market crashed and the buyers wouldn't come to see it," he said. "The only showings I had were other brokers coming to look."

But as the market picked it up, it was put back on the market with Emily Beare of CORE, at $12 million in November. There was a rush of interest, including, a broker party filmed for real-estate reality television, HGTV's "Selling New York," and it sold within about three months, Ms. Beare said. Mr. Wendle said he just about broke even on the transaction.