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Photographs by Raeanne Giovanni-Inoue for The New York Times

Kips Bay, Where Everything Glitters

By PENELOPE GREEN

Avenue last week, on that stretch of the Upper East Side that makes a kind of decorator's gulch, and that serves as a barometer of the rarefied neighborhood's consumer confidence.

The Kips Bay Decorator Show House, the interior design world's yearly coming-out party, was having its unofficial curtain-raising, which coincided with a few others.

At 63rd Street, Wall Streeter-turned-decorator Charlotte Moss threw open the doors of her new store, a five-story town house emporium laid out, as it happens, like a decorator's show house in lush, high-'80s style with lots of silk taffeta. The Colony Club set bottlenecked in the trompe l'oeil limestone foyer, while the door man, a burly and affable guy, kept his back to the door frame, hiding the fresh paint that had smeared his suit jacket.

On the Upper East Side, a shiny disco ball of a show house.

A few blocks north, at 70th Street and within shooting distance of the Gucci store across the street, Tom Ford was "at home" in his new men's store to a select group of reporters (though not this one; the three politely thuggish bouncers outside made sure of that).

Peering through the windows, you could hardly see through the gloom cast by the gray suede walls, the beaver fur rugs, the macassar ebony staircase. Women in black-and-white maid's outfits wandered about, amping up the "Eyes Wide Shut" decadence of the place, which has been designed as a copy of Mr. Ford's

own home in London. It was clear that that there was a party going on — a party that felt, even to the uninvited hovering outside, a bit sexual, a bit pharmaceutical and utterly financial (men in suits doing nasty things).

There were no bouncers at the Kips Bay show house, held this year, its 35th, in a 1904 Beaux-Arts town house at 14 East 82nd Street (and open to the public for four weeks starting Tuesday). But nonetheless a raucous party atmosphere dominated that afternoon, as decorators, assistants and artisans tweaked the rooms amid the aural stew of competing soundtracks. There was world music, disco, jazz, opera, the Bloomberg Report on three screens hung like paintings over the fireplace in Noel Jeffrey's elegant "power room," and the thunderous soundtrack of "The Fifth Element," a truly terrible Bruce Willis movie that came with the Sony plasma television and DVD player in the architect Stephen Miller Siegel's pale gold silk media

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Townhouse to Show House

Developer Janna Bullock, who bought the East Side plot after a divorced doctor blew up his house, teams with designers for a good cause



wner of four upper East Side townhouses, real estate developer Janna Bullock (pictured left) is no stranger to decorator show houses. This is the second home she has lent to the Kips Bay Boys and Girls Club Decorator Show House in the past three years.

"It's a great way to bring notorlety to the house and give something back to a good cause," says Bullock, who has put her 14 E. 82nd St. mansion on the market for \$25 million.

The top design show house in the world, Kips Bay Decorator Show House highlights the work of the leading

interior designers charged by making over an empty townhouse on an annual basis. (See our six choices above.)

Owner Bullock gets a thrill seeing her house come alive at the hands of such talented designers. It's been a long road for the Russian woman who came to America 17 years ago without a job.

Bullock's story, in fact, reads like an "I am woman" episode of Oprah.

A high school literature teacher in St. Petersburg, Russia, Bullock was frustrated with the lack of opportunity. She came to New York City in her early 20s, finding work as a baby-sitter on Avenue J in Brooklyn. She learned English, got a job with a lawyer and secured a seven-year work visa.

ealizing this was her only chance to escape Russia's stifling economy, she got her MBA at Duke University. specializing in real estate. Bullock returned to Russia to develop shopping centers, apartment buildings and gated housing communities.

Three years later, in 2003, she returned to New York and bought dilapidated upper East Side townhouses for over \$8 million dollars. She renovated the townhouses to their original turnof-the-century splendor with marble

foyers, expansive staircases, detailed crown moldings and restore facades.

Two years later, she flipped them to three to four times what she paid.

The story is hard to believe. But sitting with Bullock on the top-floor terrace of the Kips Bay Show House, you know it's true. The budding tycoon also owns the house next door. When renovation is complete, she'll put that one on the market for \$30 million.

"This is the American dream," says Bullock, president of the real estate development company RiGroup. "I was a small Russian woman with no connections or money when I first came



Dramatic pictures of the blast at E. 62nd St. Bullock now owns the property.

here. My mother was a music teacher who raised me by herself. I built this business myself."

How?

"I buy things no one else wants that are in terrible condition and I restore them," she says with a strong Russian accent. "I love architecture and history and art, and I bring all those things together in everything I buy and develop."

In addition to the two homes on E. 82nd St., Bullock owns 34 E. 62nd St. - which you may remember as the townhouse blown up by a crazed doctor who did not want his wife to get the property in a divorce settlement. She bought the property for \$8 million.

Once completed, the new 8,000square-foot, five-floor townhouse will be certified as a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) building by the United States Green Building Council, the national builders board for environmentally constructed property.

"I bought the doctor's townhouse because it gives me the opportunity to do new construction," she says. "You never get the chance to build a townhouse from scratch.

"Because of the history of the site. building it 'green' is a good way to give it karma."

This summer, Bullock's restoring a South Hampton home originally designed by 1970s architect Norman Jaffe. She's turning it into an "Art House" with a party next month, hosted by internationally acclaimed photographer Peter Beard.

She also recently acquired a large hotel in the South of France. She's in talks with Chinese architect I.M. Pei about transforming it into a business retreat for corporate conferences.

"I want to be a world leader in fusing architectural design and art with restored properties," she says.

"I'm not about to do anything small."

Kips Bay Decorator Show House is the top designer showcase in the world.

This year's house is at 14 E. 82nd St., between Fifth and Madison Aves.

Tickets cost 530 per person.

The house is open until Tuesday, May 22.

Check www.kipsbay.org_ info.html for detailed hours of opening.