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REAL ESTATE

New Neighbors From Far Away

Euros and rubles and loonies are fueling a lot of deals right now.



(Photo: Courtesy of the broker)

Not one apartment sold at 40 East 66th Street during the first nine months of 2009, says sales director Barbara Russo. As at nearly every other condominium project in the city, converting the abundant lookers into buyers has been tough. But this fall brought a change; seven units in the building (picture) went into contract—six of them to foreigners. “After the crash, they stopped buying. They were very insecure,” says Russo. “[Now] they’re looking at New York as a bargain.”

Yes, the British—and the Italians, Brazilians, French, Australians, Russians, and Canadians—are coming once more, shopping again with gusto after a year of buying very little. Gea Elika, who brokered a \$13.75 million sale at the Superior Ink condos to a British family,

experienced a similar pullback to Russo—“the downturn made everyone pause”—but adds that overseas buyers are now returning by the planeload. He recently went through a stretch where he had four foreign buyers in one month, and has been busy all fall. Prudential Douglas Elliman’s Tristan Harper, who had a \$7.35 million Canadian client purchase at 15 Central Park West, says almost three-quarters of his buyers this year have been foreigners; in 2008, they constituted a fifth.

Recalibrated prices and favorable exchange rates are apparently the key. French nutritionist Dr. Jean-Michel Cohen says he and his wife had been pied-à-terre-hunting for some time, but prices were “too high and the parity of the dollar against the euro was not good for us.” (In June, the euro was worth \$1.38; in November, it reached \$1.51.) The Cohens bought an Upper East Side two-bedroom, two-bath after searching for just two days, and their decisiveness is not uncommon among overseas buyers, says Cohen’s broker, Corcoran’s Karin Posvar-Picket. “If you’re in town for a limited amount of time, you act quicker. You’re determined.” And best of all, they tend to be wealthy second-home buyers—who often pay cash.