

NEW YORK

REAL ESTATE



Sold! Maybe.

If your apartment won't sell, how about auctioning it off?

BY S. JHOANNA ROBLEDO

IN APRIL, BidontheCity.com made its debut as Manhattan's first real-time real-estate auction site—just in time for apartment sales in general to sink to new lows. The company's held a handful of auctions since then, each giving us a look at what the free market has to say at a moment like this. And what is that exactly? First, that those foreign buyers said to be propping up our sales

prices are still out there. (The site gets hundreds of international hits daily, mostly from Europe.) Second, and more important, "the market wants a bargain," says co-founder Albert Feinstein. We asked him to show us his recent auction results, and had two observers—both of whom sell apartments through more conventional means—judge how the sellers did.



**80 Park Avenue,
Apartment 2C**

A 394-square-foot studio in a full-service building with a roof deck.

AT THE AUCTION

Pre-auction asking price: \$545,000 (late 2008)

Starting bid: \$299,000

This particular property proved popular among the nineteen registered bidders, who volleyed back and forth 26 times before the gavel fell at \$394,000. The seller's on the fence about accepting the bid, which fell slightly below the (undisclosed) reserve price.

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Noah Rosenblatt, publisher of the real-estate blog Urban digs.com, says \$394,000 is "a good bid." He notes that an apartment in the same line on a higher floor sold for \$420,000 in early 2008—more or less at the peak of the market, and adds that, if he were selling, he'd make the deal at this price.



**325 Fifth Avenue,
Apartment 10D**

An 899-square-foot, one-bedroom, one-bath condo a few blocks up from Madison Square Park.

AT THE AUCTION

Pre-auction asking price: \$1.095 million (early 2009)

Starting bid: \$895,000

No bids tendered.

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Broker Thomas Demsker, who also counsels FSBO sellers through a website called No Brokers Please! (nbpny.com), thinks the starting price wasn't low enough, and says he would've picked \$795,000 instead. "People want something for nothing," he adds, and the opening bid was too close to what the seller paid for the property in late 2006.



137 Avenue C

A 4,000-square-foot, four-story brick building with six apartments and a ground-floor restaurant. The rentals and commercial space generate an annual rent of \$151,594.

AT THE AUCTION

Pre-auction asking price: \$3.2 million (summer 2008)

Starting bid: \$1.45 million

Not much action, with the highest bid tipping slightly over \$1.6 million, much less than the \$2.5 million reserve.

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

"Generally speaking, with income-producing properties, [the price] is at ten or twelve times the rent roll," explains Rosenblatt. Translation: \$1.6 million is a decent offer.



**516 West 47th Street,
Apartment S6H**

An 861-square-foot, two-bedroom, two-bath condo in a full-service postwar.

AT THE AUCTION

Pre-auction asking price: \$945,000 (summer 2008)

Starting bid: \$699,000

The highest bid was \$729,000, just \$30,000 shy of the reserve. BidontheCity.com's reps say the seller's still deciding whether to accept the offer.

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Demsker says he'd tell the seller to let go any hard feelings over that last 30 grand. "There's no guarantee prices will go up anytime soon," he says. "Of course there's a little loss, but that's not much of a trade-off."



**555 West 23rd Street,
Apartment N10C**

A 462-square-foot studio in a new building near the High Line, with a fitness center, outdoor space, and garage.

AT THE AUCTION

Pre-auction asking price: \$595,000 (summer 2008)

Starting bid: \$299,000

BidontheCity.com's founders declare this auction "a success," with 26 bids. It went for \$494,000.

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

"The buyer didn't get the steal of the century, but they got a good price," says Demsker. Rosenblatt says the auction was a winner for two simple reasons: "Trendy location, low starting price."