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Facelift for Gracie

Bloomy may use own money, decorator

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Mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg may plow some of his own fortune into renovating Gracie Mansion and has tapped his personal interior decorator for the project, the Daily News has learned.

DAILY NEWS EXCLUSIVE

"I'm thrilled that we are going to be involved in the renovation and restoration of one of New York's treasures," said Jamie Drake, a Manhattan-based interior designer who redid Bloomberg's upper East Side townhouse.

Drake declined to discuss details of the Gracie Mansion project or outline the scope of the work.

But when he designed the inside of Bloomberg's E. 79th St. townhouse, Drake was given carte blanche. In the foyer, he used porphyry, an Egyptian marble, to cover the floor, then filled the room with 19th century English hall furniture.

Drake redid the library using dark wood and comfortable furniture, envisioning the room as a "bottle of cognac held up to the light."

In a 1999 CNN interview, he described Bloomberg's master bedroom as "comfortable and feminine in its shapes," but without a definitive pattern.

Bloomberg likes his home so much that he won't move into Gracie Mansion, the official mayoral residence. He plans to use Gracie to house visiting dignitaries and for dinners and other events.

Donna Hanover, Mayor Giuliani's estranged wife and chairwoman of the Gracie Mansion Conservancy, had invited Bloomberg for a tour. She said yesterday through a spokeswoman that the new mayor has "wonderful taste and very good judgment."

"She enthusiastically applauds Mayor-elect Bloomberg for his interest in continuing to renovate Gracie Mansion," said Joannie Danielides, Hanover's spokeswoman. "The house definitely gets a lot of wear and tear."

The mansion's condition became an issue in the ongoing divorce war between Giuliani and Hanover. A Giuliani aide said in July that Hanover had "made every effort to stay there except to maintain it," neglecting her "responsibility as First Lady."

The mayor was barred from inviting his girlfriend, Judith Nathan, to the mansion. Giuliani later moved out of the home, while Hanover and their two children remain.

Danielides praised Hanover's work on the mansion, saying she raised nearly $1 million over the past eight years for the conservancy. Hanover oversaw the refurbishment of the dining room, which included new carpeting, draperies and a painting, as well as the guest bedroom.

Evasive answer

Team Bloomberg has been trying to keep the initial stages of the project hush-hush.

On Tuesday, when first asked about restoring the mansion, Bloomberg spokesman Jerry Russo said bluntly: "There are currently no plans to renovate Gracie Mansion."

Asked yesterday why he had given a false answer, Russo borrowed a line from former President Bill Clinton, saying it depends on what the definition of "is" is.

Russo eventually conceded that the transition team has started consulting with experts, such as Drake, about renovating the Federal-style home overlooking the East River. He also confirmed that Bloomberg may contribute his own money to the renovation.

"It's an option," Russo said. "No decisions — as to what, if anything, should be done — will be made until after Jan. 1."

Any significant changes to the exterior would require approval by the city Landmarks Preservation Commission.

But with paint peeling and the balcony railings rotting, the mansion, built in 1799, definitely needs work.

Diane Coffey, a member of Bloomberg's transition team and a former chief of staff to Mayor Ed Koch, said the mansion's "exterior desperately needs to be repainted."

Joan Davidson, the founding chairwoman of the conservancy, said it was a shame that Bloomberg won't live at Gracie, and hoped he would reconsider.

"It really needs to be a lived-in place," she said.

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