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REALTY CHECK

Spotted Pig owners opening rooftop locale atop 70 Pine St.

BY STEVE CUOZZO

Pigs are flying to the top of 70 Pine St.!

Celebrated Spotted Pig restaurateurs April Bloomfield and Ken Friedman are planning to launch a glamorous, four-level restaurant/lounge atop the landmarked former AIG tower, sources revealed to Realty Check.

In the biggest downtown dining news since Nobu's decision to move to 195 Broadway, the unnamed 70 Pine venue will be on floors 62-66 of the tower, which Rose Associates is converting to luxury rental apartments.

(Floor 65 is for mechanical uses).

Michelin-starred and James Beard Award-winning chef Bloomfield and her partner Friedman run The Spotted Pig, The Breslin and The John Dory in Manhattan.

Reps for developer Adam Rose declined to comment. Friedman, who was traveling, e-mailed us, "We hope we are doing this extraordinary project. This is one of New York's most beautiful buildings and the top floors are breathtaking. I'll let you know as soon as we are definitely doing it."

But sources said the deal is all but done, pending only loose ends and formalities, after a year of complicated negotiation and planning.

Rose has long planned to use the floors — including an octagonal former observatory with eye-popping views — as a dining/drinking venue, possibly as a private club for residents only.

But the space will be an open-to-the-public restaurant/lounge with perhaps 150 to 200 seats, although building residents will enjoy priority reservations.

Bloomfield and Friedman won't lease the 70 Pine space, but will manage it for the building owners.

One of the floors would be a true fine-dining restaurant, while the others will offer small plates along with wine and cocktails, sources said.

The restaurant should be ready to open in about a year, sources said.



It looks like Nordstrom Rack will fill the last large piece of the retail puzzle at Jeff Sutton's 100 W. 125th St., aka 291 Lenox Ave.

A full-page ad in the Sunday Post for debt broker Meridian Capital Group showed an image of the six-story building now rising with "Nordstrom Rack" on the second floor of the game-changing project by Sutton's Wharton Realty.

A Nordstrom rep denied a lease had been signed. She even asked us to send a photo of the ad so the company could "get to the bottom of this."

But since the image also accurately depicted well-reported signed tenants Whole Foods, American Eagle Outfitters, Burlington Coat Factory, Olive Garden and TD Bank, we assume Meridian didn't just make it up.

Meridian brokered a \$95 million construction loan for the project from Natixis Real Estate Capital.

The foundation has been built up to grade and steel is now rising.

With around 200,000 square feet on six levels, the building will represent Harlem's new center of commercial gravity on what was long a vacant lot.

Douglas Elliman retail whiz Faith Consolo is not involved at the site — but she said Nordstrom has "been on the street looking" for a Rack outlet, and a signed lease would "give the community a welcome line into a larger department store inventory" than it now has.

With new retailers in place or on the way, including Bed, Bath & Beyond, H&M, US Polo Association and Banana Republic and Gap factory stores, 125th Street between Fifth Avenue and Frederick Douglass Boulevard is becoming the "new 34th Street of Harlem."

Reps for Meridian Capital and for Sutton didn't get back to us.

In fact, 125th Street is retail-hot as far east as Park Avenue, said Lee & Associates' Stan Lindenfeld, who with his firm's Vice Chairman Henry Goldfarb is the retail agent for 55 W. 125th St. — where Bill Clinton formerly had his office.

The 5,200-square-foot store space, with 19-foot ceilings, epitomizes the street's transition. It was previously an IRS office, but now, Lindenfeld said, the owners are asking in the \$125-a-square-foot range for retail tenants.

Meanwhile, legendary critic Gael Greene reported on her Insatiable Critic blog that restaurateur Richie Notar had given up trying to open a jazz club at the former Lenox Lounge site on Lenox Avenue — but was instead searching for a space on 125th Street.