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Predictor's Predictions Miss Close to Home

By ELIZABETH LESLY STEVENS

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita has been dubbed “the next Nostradamus,” after the 16th-century French apothecary whom some have credited with the ability to predict coming world events.

“You’ve developed computer models that allow us to view the future with a greater predictive rate of success than the [C.I.A.](#),” [Jon Stewart](#) said last September when Mr. Bueno de Mesquita appeared as a guest on “The Daily Show” to promote his book, “The Predictioneer’s Game: Using the Logic of Brazen Self-Interest to See and Shape the Future.”

But Mr. Bueno de Mesquita, a political science professor at [New York University](#) and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at [Stanford University](#), did not foresee one thing: the inadvisability of spending \$2.75 million on a 1913 Edwardian house in San Francisco in early 2007 and then spending \$400,000 more renovating it.

He and his wife needed to move back to New York, so since March Mr. Bueno de Mesquita has been trying to sell their home in the Richmond district amid one of the worst housing crises the state has seen.

He has lowered the price four times (from \$3.15 million to \$2.6 million), but to no avail.

Clement Street, San Francisco’s informal Chinatown, is a few blocks away. Kevin Ho, the real estate agent trying to sell the house, realized that its street number, 104, translates into “You Will Die” in Chinese numerology. After paying a \$270 fee to City Hall, Mr. Ho won the right to rechristen the house a less-ominous 102.

Then Erika Burke, Mr. Ho’s partner, envisioned an elegant cocktail party to be held at the house, with local politicians extolling the virtues of living in San Francisco, and local high-net-worth bankers and accountants on hand. The event took place Sept. 11.

Mr. Ho first called José Cisneros, the city treasurer, who demurred. Eric Mar, the member of the Board of Supervisors who represents the Richmond district, was happy to oblige.

“It was an unusual ask to come to a beautiful mansion like this,” said Mr. Mar, who spent eight years on the school board before being elected supervisor. He then spoke briefly about his work and the attractions of the neighborhood.

As might be expected, Mr. Bueno de Mesquita has a nuanced understanding of the forces that are conspiring against the selling of his house.

“The credit market, especially for people hoping to buy at the higher end of the market, is nearly moribund,” he said. “Until the credit markets loosen up more and people with means find it easier to convert an excellent credit rating into purchasing power, I do not see a turn around in the housing market.”