

# NYP Home

Real Estate Guide

**HOT BLANDI**  
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shows off his  
stylish lake house

# MODERN *art*

**Far West Chelsea  
turns into city's most  
eye-catching area**

By **KATHERINE DYKSTRA**

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See **WEST SIDE** p. 49

# MODERN ART

FAR WEST CHELSEA TURNS INTO CITY'S MOST EYE-CATCHING AREA



By KATHERINE DYKSTRA  
Published on January 11, 2007

Between the velvet ropes of the Meatpacking District and the landmark buildings in upper Chelsea, among the galleries and warehouses on the far West Side, something very big is happening on one very tiny block.

West 19th Street between 10th Avenue and the West Side Highway has become a playground for a handful of the world's most renowned architects.

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Facing the West Side Highway and serving as anchor for the area, is the billowing glass IAC InterActive Corp headquarters - the Pritzker Prize-winning Frank Gehry's first contribution to the Manhattan skyline. Next door, 520 West Chelsea, an 11-story condo by It architect Annabelle Selldorf, is under construction. And directly across the street from that, ground has been broken on a 21-story, 72-unit residential building designed by internationally acclaimed French architect Jean Nouvel.

That's more starchitecture per square foot than anywhere else in Manhattan now, and - due to zoning - probably ever. And the creative spark is spreading. A residential project by 15 Central Park West designer Robert A.M. Stern is planned for 18th Street, across from the IAC building.

To get an idea of the caliber of these projects and their proximity, imagine 40 Mercer (the Andres Balazs building that was Nouvel's first Manhattan project), Urban Glass House (Selldorf and Philip Johnson's Spring Street masterpiece) and 15 CPW rising simultaneously within a block of one another.

"I think 19th Street will be the most architecturally distinct block in Manhattan," says Shaun Osher of Core Group Marketing, which is selling 520 West Chelsea.

The 26 units there are 1,580 to 4,232 square feet and selling for \$1.7 million to more than \$8 million. That's comparable to other luxury buildings, but it's also a rarer buying opportunity. Most developers can only afford major architects when they stand to sell tons of units; 520 West Chelsea is a boutique building.

A block away, Audrey Matlock's newest building, The Chelsea Modern (which has won the Excellence in Architecture Award), is rising on 18th Street between Ninth and 10th Avenues. Adjacent to it is the site of 459 West 18th St., a boutique condo by up-and-coming architectural firm DB, recently tapped by the Architectural League of New York for 2007's Emerging Voices series.

That's a lot of new housing stock, but far West Chelsea seems ready and able to absorb it. (According to Related Companies Vice Chairman David Wine, The Caledonia, a new condo rising on 17th Street between Ninth and 10th avenues, has sold 75 percent of its 190 units, which start at 531 square feet and \$720,000. The offering plan was just approved in August.)

So why now? There are multiple reasons for Far West Chelsea's architectural rise.

First, there's the artistic climate of the neighborhood. With more than 200 galleries, West Chelsea is one of the densest art communities in the world. And art begets creative architecture

"This specific neighborhood has become the leading place in the world for modern art," says Robert Gladstone of Madison Equities, developer of the Chelsea Modern. "And we're embracing that movement."

"We were inspired by the area ... . The residences are large and there are great walls for art collecting," says Sara Lopercolo, a partner at Selldorf Architects, which is responsible for the design of 520 West Chelsea as well as the Zwirner Gallery directly across the street. The facade of 520 West Chelsea unites modern-day and yesteryear with its bands of terracotta, popular in prewar structures.

Then there's the city's support of the redevelopment of the High Line and the bestowing of the project on acclaimed architecture firm Field Operations.

"At the same time Field Operations won the competition for the design of the High Line, [IAC CEO] Barry Diller chose Frank Gehry for his building," says Amanda Burden, who oversaw the rezoning of Chelsea. "Suddenly every great designer wanted to build there."

And most of this area's projects have been inspired by the modernity and creativity of one another.

"We thought our choice of architect was appropriate, given the location," says Alf Naman, a developer of the Jean Nouvel project, a mix of one-, two- and three-bedrooms due at the end of 2008, with sales starting in two to three months. "The building was designed with the Gehry building in mind."

While the area has inspired the tried and true of the architecture world, it's also fertile ground for innovative up-and-comers.

"We're not altering the skyline, but it's a building in a location where people who appreciate art and architecture will see it," says Jared Della Valle of DB Architects, designer and developer of 459 West 18th St. "There's Frank Gehry, Annabelle Selldorf, Jean Nouvel and then, there'll be us. We're hoping to get discovered like a new artist would."



All of this would never have been possible without Chelsea's rezoning. Until two years ago, the area was zoned for manufacturing, but in order to protect the gallery district, preserve the High Line and allow for housing on 10th and 11th avenues, a mix of industrial and residential buildings was approved. One change was the allowance of mid-block housing on streets like this stretch of 19th Street, where developers have already grabbed almost every available site.

"This untapped pocket feels the way SoHo felt before it really took off, the way TriBeCa felt before it took off," Osher says.

Adding to the residential feel is the fact that car traffic is sparse, despite the proximity of Chelsea Market, Chelsea Piers and the Meatpacking district. Residents can, at least for the time being, live quietly and have hot spots like Lotus and Del Posto a short walk away.

This part of 19th Street is becoming "one of those streets like you see on West 12th or off Fifth Avenue," says Louise Phillips Forbes, senior vice president at Halstead Property. "All beautifully appointed buildings with the potential to have an elite address."

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