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Hudson Heights: A Hidden Gem, Gaining Popularity



Stefano Ukmar for The New York Times

Set on hilly terrain above the Hudson River, the Upper Manhattan neighborhood of Hudson Heights lives up to its name geographically. Rents and sale prices, however, are relatively low, attractive to budget-conscious residents, including young actors, musicians and artists, and also to young families seeking spacious apartments. Water views and other amenities, along with fast subway rides to Midtown, are a bonus.

“I’ve never lived this far uptown, but it’s my favorite neighborhood so far,” said Gabriella Marzetta, 22, who came to New York from Illinois four years ago to pursue an acting career and has gradually been apartment-hopping her way north to West 189th Street. “It’s so homey, perfectly away from the madness of the city.”

Ms. Marzetta is currently playing Victor Frankenstein’s fiancée in “Frankenstein: A New Musical” at St. Luke’s Theater on West 46th Street and working as a professional nanny all

over town. It rarely takes her more than 40 minutes to get anywhere, she said, even the financial district. She often visits the tranquil 67-acre Fort Tyron Park, and she also enjoys her neighborhood's wide variety of ethnic restaurants: "There are so many cultures, it's awesome."

Many of Ms. Marzetta's immediate neighbors are Dominican families who have lived there for decades, she said, and some have told her they worry about higher rents as the area fills with newcomers. She and her roommate, Kait Turner, an opera singer, pay \$1,150 each for a renovated two-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment.



120 CABRINI BOULEVARD, No. 86/87 A four-bedroom, four-bathroom corner co-op with river views in the 1939 Castle Village complex with doormen, gardens and a garage, listed at \$1,895,000. 212-606-7772 Stefano Ukmar for *The New York Times*

Ms. Marzetta found her apartment, and her roommate, through Christian Chambers, a CORE Real Estate agent who moved to Hudson Heights a few years ago when he was an actor, too.

"It's affordable to live here and chase that dream," he said. "It's very quiet and pocketed. In some areas, you don't even know you're in New York."

Mr. Chambers's friends and clients, he said, "feel safe, and they don't have to worry about getting home." His commute to Chelsea, he added, is 25 minutes.

Among the new homeowners in the neighborhood are Zack Elias and his wife, Jenna, both 37, who moved into a two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment with "a nice view" three years ago, after the birth of their daughter, Zoe, who just turned 4.

"I was born and raised on the Upper West Side, and I wanted a neighborhood with the same feel," Mr. Elias said. He and his wife, an audiologist, lived in a one-bedroom in the West 80s, where they couldn't afford the kind of spacious two-bedroom with a separate dining room that they bought for \$775,000 near Fort Tryon Park, said Mr. Elias, a rental manager and associate broker at DJK, a real estate and relocation firm.



By The New York Times

Since then, prices have gone up, he said. "But where else can you get a nice two-bedroom in a nice neighborhood, that's not a subway desert, in Manhattan, and safe and clean? There's not a ton of choices."

Sandy Edry discovered the neighborhood 19 years ago, when he was a journalist and lived on the Upper West Side. "I decided to take a very long walk up Riverside Park toward the bridge," he said, referring to the George Washington Bridge. "When I got close to the bridge, I saw something that looked like a mirage: a tiny red lighthouse. I kind of fell in love with it, and came out of the park. I started walking around the area and was shocked to find a beautiful neighborhood."

Mr. Edry, now 50 and a real estate agent with Keller Williams NYC, first rented and then bought an apartment. He has seen gradual changes. Starting around 2004, he said, better restaurants, a gourmet market and more upscale shops came in. The area was “historically a German-Jewish enclave,” he said, but many of the younger people left. “Now they are returning.”

What You’ll Find

Set on a bluff somewhat apart from the rest of the city, Hudson Heights stretches from West 173rd Street to the top of Fort Tryon Park (home to the Cloisters, a branch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art), and from Broadway to the Hudson River. A park beside the water is unusually wild in some parts and conducive to picnics in others, including the area around the historic Little Red Lighthouse, subject of a popular children’s book. Other green spots are J. Hood Wright Park, which includes a recreation center, and Bennett Park, which occupies the highest point of land in Manhattan, 265 feet above sea level. A paved outline near the center marks part of the footprint of a fort built there in 1776 by American troops.

Residential areas are lined with handsome apartment buildings, many built in the 1920s, '30s and '40s in an Art Deco style. Two complexes are particularly distinctive. Castle Village, a string of five co-op towers, each with four wings, was completed in 1939 and is set on 7.5 acres of parklike grounds with play areas and benches overlooking the river. Hudson View Gardens is a 1924 enclave of 15 Tudor-Style buildings on a winding private street with gardens, a playground and other amenities, meant to resemble a medieval English village. In 2016, it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.



116 PINEHURST AVENUE, No. M11 A two-bedroom, one-bathroom co-op with a river view in the Tudor-style Hudson View Gardens complex, listed at \$719,000. 646-561-4686 Stefano Ukmar for *The New York Times*

West 181st Street is a lively commercial thoroughfare, lined with small stores and restaurants representing many cultures, including Italian, Chinese, Russian, Irish and Mediterranean. An area around West 187th Street is less busy but also has shops and restaurants, among them Cafe Buunni, a hip coffeehouse that serves Ethiopian blends. New to the shopping scene is a retail section of the George Washington Bridge Bus Station, which reopened last year following a four-year renovation. It now includes a Marshalls and a Gap outlet, with more businesses scheduled to open.

What You'll Pay

Apartment prices in the area have been steadily rising in recent years, said Steven Kopstein, an associate broker for Triplemint. But they still remain comparatively low for those seeking an attractive neighborhood with green spaces, river views and a “sense of a little village,” he said.

The median sale price for an apartment in 2012 was \$390,000, he said, based on Triplemint calculations. By 2017, it was \$568,074, a 46 percent increase — and an 8 percent increase from the 2016 median of \$525,000.

Of the 48 homes listed for sale on StreetEasy on March 22, the lowest asking price was \$275,000 for a studio on Bennett Avenue in a co-op building with a laundry room and a live-in super. The most expensive were two new attached four-story townhouses on Cabrini Boulevard, each listed at \$3.85 million.

Of 99 apartments for rent, the most expensive was \$4,300 a month for a three-bedroom, two-bathroom duplex on Fort Washington Avenue with an in-unit washer-dryer. The least expensive was \$1,395 a month for a studio on Cabrini Boulevard in a building with a live-in super and a laundry room.

The Vibe

Stores and restaurants in the neighborhood are mostly small; they include service establishments like barber shops and specialized emporiums like Moscow on the Hudson, a Russian grocery store, and Frank's Market, a gourmet grocery established in 1948. Green space abounds, most notably Fort Tryon Park, which includes a popular dog run, a heather garden where free fitness programs are offered and the New Leaf restaurant, in a building rescued from neglect in 1995 by Bette Midler and friends. The park was given to the city in 1935 by John D. Rockefeller Jr., who hired the Olmsted Brothers to design it and even bought part of the New Jersey shore, now Palisades Park, to preserve the view.

The annual Uptown Arts Stroll, scheduled this year for the month of June, takes in the area from West 135th to West 220th Streets and includes art exhibitions, performances, concerts and literary readings. “It's very much a thriving community event,” said Joanna Castro, the executive director of the Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance, which organizes the event.

In just one day in Hudson Heights, she said, “You could hear a concert, visit a family-friendly art-making workshop, then have a lovely meal at a restaurant and see artwork by a local visual artist.”

The Schools

The public elementary and middle school on Cabrini Boulevard called P.S./I.S. 187 Hudson Cliffs is a draw for many families considering a move to Hudson Heights. It has about 800 students in prekindergarten through eighth grade. In the 2016-2017 School Quality Snapshot, 51 percent of students met state standards in both English and math, compared to 41 percent in English citywide and 38 percent in math citywide.

Another school, P.S. 173 on Fort Washington Avenue, has about 500 students in prekindergarten through fifth grade. On the state tests, 34 percent met standards in English versus 40 percent citywide and 37 percent met the standards in math, compared to 42 percent citywide.

The Commute

The A train makes three stops in the neighborhood and two more just outside. The ride to Midtown, express much of the way, can take as little as 20 or 25 minutes. The 1 subway line makes stops east of Broadway and is a good alternative for some residents.

The History

Margaret Corbin, who is commemorated by a traffic circle, a drive and a plaque in Fort Tryon Park, and another marker near the George Washington Bridge, is often said to be the first woman to fight as a soldier in the Revolutionary War. During the British attack on Fort Washington in 1776, when she was 25, she took over the cannon her husband, John, had been firing after he was shot and killed. She was wounded, and received a military pension.