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NoMad: A Rapidly Evolving Neighborhood With a Storied Past

In the last five years, the once-commercial area around Madison Square Park has seen a rush of new restaurants, hotels and condominiums.



Emon Hassan for The New York Times

Although the term NoMad has been used intermittently for about two decades to refer to the area immediately north of Madison Square Park, many New Yorkers remain unfamiliar with it and the location.

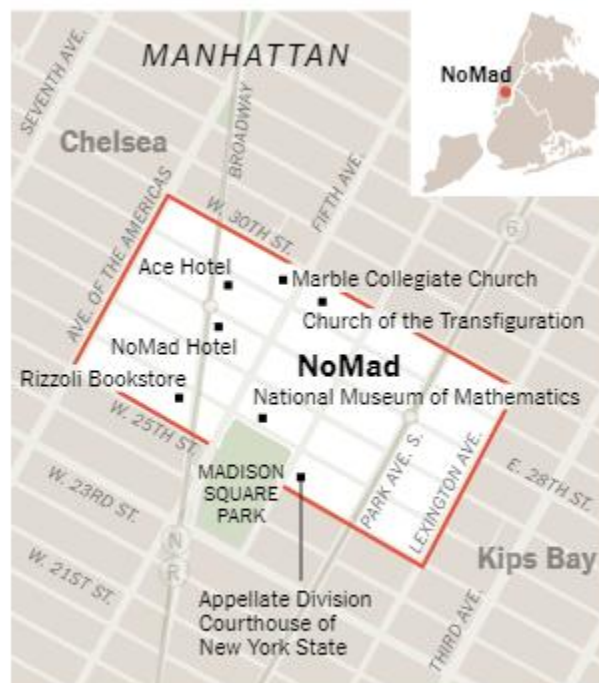
Nicole Risener wasn't among them, however, when she and her husband, Edward, both 31, began looking for an apartment in a family-friendly neighborhood close to Penn Station. They found it in 2014, at the northern edge of NoMad. "I knew it was an up-and-coming neighborhood," Ms. Risener said.

Recently married, they were living in a one-bedroom rental in Chelsea and planning to have children. In addition to a family-friendly area, they wanted easy access to trains to Long Island, where Mr. Risener teaches history at a middle school in Nassau County.

The two-bedroom, two-bathroom condo they bought for \$2.14 million “was the largest apartment we saw,” Ms. Risener said, and they found everything they wanted in their new neighborhood.

“It was a little less formed then,” she said, noting that even now it isn’t fully settled. “I’m looking at two major construction sites out my window,” she said, with a third down the block.

She is happy, though, that historic buildings in the area are being refurbished, that new hotels and condos are going up and more restaurants are opening — and that Madison Square Park is in peak condition, especially after the arrival of her son a little over a year ago.



By The New York Times

“We go there every day when it’s nice out,” said Ms. Risener, who worked for a nonprofit before leaving to stay home with her son. “It’s a really interesting neighborhood to be in, and a central location for all our friends to visit and congregate in our apartment.”

Also, she said, “I see strollers everywhere and young families everywhere.”

Doron Zwickel, 44, a broker with CORE, can confirm that NoMad is conducive to family life. Mr. Zwickel moved there in 2014 when he was single and interested in the many trendy restaurants, after he became director of marketing for a new condominium. He bought a three-bedroom loft in an older building for \$1.8 million and renovated it.

“It seemed like the perfect neighborhood for a single guy,” Mr. Zwickel said.

Four years later, he and his wife Kimberly, 35, a special-education teacher, have a son who is nearly 2 and a daughter a few weeks old. “Now I’m finding it’s great for young families,” he said of the area, calling the park “the gym of the neighborhood.”



A playground in Madison Square Park offers a gathering place for young families who have recently moved into the area, attracted by the central location, renovated historic buildings and new condominiums. Emon Hassan for The New York Times

Mario G. Messina, 73, is an advertising executive who has lived in a large one-bedroom co-op in a converted 1920s office building with his wife, Geraldine, for 38 years. They paid \$74,000 at a time when the area was largely commercial, before it was known as NoMad.

“Somehow,” he said, “our neighborhood has become very desirable.”

Mr. Messina is president of the 29th Street Neighborhood Association, which champions historic preservation and quality-of-life issues for NoMad and the surrounding area. His group wants more buildings to be given landmark status, he said, even as the population grows: “Young couples come here and have children, and instead of moving to the suburbs, they buy the apartment next to theirs.”

What You’ll Find

Keats Myer recently noticed a placard blown over in Madison Square Park and ran to get one of the 25 people on the park’s winter staff to secure it properly. As executive director of the Madison Square Park Conservancy, keeping the grounds pristine is part of her job, but it’s also a source of satisfaction. The 6.2-acre park is “the pride of the City of New York,” she said. “We view ourselves as a town square.”

With year-round art exhibitions, summer concerts, events for children, a horticulture program and numerous benches, the park — or at least the northern part of it, bordered by Madison and Fifth Avenues and East 26th Street — is an anchor for NoMad, which stretches from 25th to 30th Street between Lexington and Sixth Avenues (although definitions differ).

After a period of decline, when the park was considered dangerous, a refurbishment began in the late 1990s and continued into the early 2000s. But the surrounding neighborhood didn't really start to blossom until around 2013, Ms. Myer said.



*Yung Kee Wholesale Center, on West 28th Street, is one of several surviving wholesale stores in a once-commercial area.
Emon Hassan for The New York Times*

Older stores endure, including wholesalers offering T-shirts, socks and beauty products, as well as spiritual advice, especially on Broadway and Sixth Avenue, and the streets in between. Intermixed are sleek new cafes, well-known restaurants like Scarpetta and Blue Smoke (part of the group founded by Danny Meyer), and trendsetting hotels like the Ace and the NoMad.

The irregularly shaped Madison Square North Historic District, created in 2001, protects the exteriors of 96 structures, including hotels, apartment buildings, high-rise offices, rowhouses and lofts that once were used as showrooms. But that hasn't stopped new construction from rising around them.

At least four new high-rise hotels are under construction, including one from AC Hotels by Marriott, at 842 Sixth Avenue; one from Virgin Hotels, at 1225 Broadway; a Ritz-Carlton, at 1185 Broadway; and one at 250 Fifth Avenue from a new chain called Flaneur Hospitality, combining a renovated historic building with a 23-story addition.



39 EAST 29TH STREET, NO. 17A | A 1,695-square-foot condominium with three bedrooms and three bathrooms, in a doorman building with a fitness center, a garage and a roof terrace, listed for \$2.995 million. 646-603-6868 Emon Hassan for The New York Times

On the residential side, a different kind of old-new combination recently opened: Known as 88 & 90 Lex, it combines a restored prewar exterior (88 Lexington) with a modern, postwar one (90 Lexington) to create a single condominium. Other condominiums in the works or just opened include Rose Hill, a 45-story building at 30 East 29th Street; the 24-story NOMA, at 50 West 30th Street; and a 55-story building at 277 Fifth Avenue.

What You'll Pay

In early January, there were 79 homes listed for sale on StreetEasy, ranging from a first-floor studio in a Madison Avenue co-op for \$475,000 to a 20-room penthouse in a Fifth Avenue condo for \$62.8 million. The median asking price for a one-bedroom was nearly \$1.5 million.



*45 EAST 25TH STREET, NO. 25B | A 1,100-square-foot condominium with two bedrooms, two bathrooms and two balconies overlooking Madison Square Park, in a building with a gym and an outdoor courtyard, listed for \$2 million. 212-418-2003
Emon Hassan for The New York Times*

But prices have been dropping here, as elsewhere in the city, said Mr. Zwickel of CORE: “There are some solid deals out there.”

The 83 rentals available included a studio on East 30th Street for \$2,175 a month and a duplex penthouse in a Broadway condo for \$16,500 a month. The median asking price for a one-bedroom rental was \$4,615 a month.

The Vibe

Hip as NoMad is becoming, it resonates with echoes of its past.

West 28th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues was once known as Tin Pan Alley, where songs like “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” and “Give My Regards to Broadway” were published as sheet music. There is not much left of the music business there, apart from a commemorative sidewalk plaque, but a [group](#) is trying to get landmark status for the remaining historic buildings.



241 FIFTH AVENUE, NO. 9A | A 566-square-foot condominium with one bedroom and one bathroom, in a doorman building with a rooftop terrace and a fitness center, listed for \$1.275 million. 347-385-2699 Emon Hassan for The New York Times

The venerable Rizzoli Bookstore, which resided for many years on West 57th Street, moved into the Gilded Age St. James Building, at 1133 Broadway, in 2015, creating an elegant interior to match the handsome facade. That building and several others in the neighborhood belong to Kew Management, headed by Leslie Spira Lopez, who lives in NoMad and heads the nonprofit NoMad Alliance, which she said works to shape the community's identity.

"It's a wonderful live-work neighborhood," she said. "There are great places to go to lunch and for a drink in the evening."

There are several significant historic churches in the neighborhood, including the Church of the Transfiguration, at 1 East 29th Street. It's been known as the Little Church Around the Corner since 1870, after officials permitted an actor to be buried there when other nearby churches refused. Across Fifth Avenue, at 1 West 29th Street, is the Colonial-era Marble Collegiate Church, where Norman Vincent Peale, author of "The Power of Positive Thinking," was the senior minister for 52 years. Both churches offer public tours.



407 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NO. 24E / A one-bedroom, one-bathroom co-op with a balcony, in a doorman building with a gym and a rooftop deck, listed for \$798,000. 678-665-9291 Emon Hassan for The New York Times

The National Museum of Mathematics, at 11 East 26th Street (or 11 Madison Square North), is a hands-on museum that attracts thousands of visitors annually. And the Appellate Division Courthouse of New York State, at Madison and 25th Street, is a Beaux-Arts building with landmark status that has marble statues outside and handsome murals in the entrance hall and courtroom.

The Schools

Students in NoMad are zoned for three elementary schools. P.S. 11 William T. Harris has 888 students in prekindergarten through fifth grade. In the 2017-18 School Quality Snapshot, 72 percent met state standards in English, compared with 46 percent citywide, and 74 percent met math standards, versus 47 percent citywide. At P.S. 33 Chelsea Prep, which has 638 students in prekindergarten through fifth grade, 67 percent met state standards in English and 65 percent met state standards in math. P.S. 116 Mary Lindley Murray has 503 students, 65 percent of whom met standards in English, and 66 percent in math.



The Rizzoli Bookstore moved into the St. James Building, at 1133 Broadway, in 2015. The 1896 building is part of the Madison Square North Historic District. Emon Hassan for The New York Times

There are two zoned middle schools. At J.H.S. 104 Simon Baruch, 73 percent of the 1,117 students in sixth through eighth grades met state English standards, compared with 47 percent citywide; 70 percent met standards in math, compared with 38 percent citywide. M.S. 297, a new school that does not yet have a School Quality Snapshot, has 562 students in sixth and seventh grades.

The Commute

Many residents walk to work or have short subway rides. The W and R trains make local stops at West 28th Street, and 6 trains stop at East 28th Street. Other lines are nearby.



The New York Life Building was constructed in 1928 on the northeast corner of East 26th Street and Madison Avenue, the site of the first two Madison Square Garden buildings. Emon Hassan for The New York Times

The History

The original Madison Square Garden (1879-1890), named for James Madison, was at Madison Avenue and East 26th Street, as was the second (1890-1926), designed by Stanford White. The latter building had a rooftop theater where, in a notorious 1906 incident, Harry Kendall Thaw killed Mr. White for having an affair with his wife, Evelyn Nesbit.

After the second building was demolished, it was replaced by the New York Life Building at 51 Madison Avenue.