

The New York Times

The West 70s: The Sweet Spot of the Upper West Side

November 29, 2017



Winnie Au for The New York Times

The sidewalks in the West 70s are wide. But whether that generosity of concrete preceded the multigenerational throngs that move along the streets or was poured to accommodate them is an urban chicken-and-egg question.

As residential neighborhoods in Manhattan go, this part of the Upper West Side seems more expansive — and busier — than most. The blocks that make up the West 70s, particularly along Broadway, the commercial artery that runs through it, pulse day and night with people hurrying to shop for groceries in the chaotic aisles of Fairway or Citarella or Zabar's (just above 80th Street); pushing wide-bed double strollers; walking a gaggle of apartment-dwelling dogs midday; slalom-scooting through the crowds after school lets out; and shuffling, bent but undaunted, supported by walker or cane.

"It's more crowded now, and super-gentrified," Lisa K. Lippman, an agent with Brown Harris Stevens, said of the neighborhood.

“The 70s are the sweet spot of the Upper West Side,” she continued. “People who’d go higher are the true West Siders, but empty nesters moving from the suburbs love the 60s or 70s. They want to walk to Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall. A lot of them are still working, and when they move in from the suburbs they can finally walk to work.”

Many gravitate to the new construction, where they find more space, more closets and double sinks in the bathrooms, she said — they’re moving out of large houses in the suburbs, and they want space for grandchildren. “And they’re looking ahead,” she added. “New York is a great city to age in.”



135 WEST 70th STREET, 2K A two-bedroom, two-bathroom duplex co-op listed at \$2.125 million, with monthly common charges of \$1,294 and monthly taxes of \$949. 646-613-2758 MW Studio

Young professionals are also drawn to the neighborhood. Bernard Chang, 41, and his fiancée, Anisa Heravian, 32, both emergency room doctors, are starry-eyed about the neighborhood, and about the apartment they bought for \$1.328 million and are now renovating after losing out on three or four others in a competitive market. The unit, a two-bedroom, two-bathroom, third-floor walk-up duplex with a terrace and fireplace, in a small co-op building on West 71st Street, is where they hope to start a family. They have both lived in other neighborhoods in New York, but always wanted to be on the Upper West Side.

As Dr. Heravian said, they longed for “a place that’s tranquil and a home that we can retreat to that doesn’t feel like it’s right smack in the heart of the city, and the Upper West Side provides that in a very beautiful, accessible and charming way.”

Both love the outdoors; Dr. Chang is a member of a sailing club whose mission is teaching math and science through sailing, and he looks forward to hopping on a Citi Bike and heading to the boats, which are docked on the Hudson in Chelsea. Besides the terrace, which looks out over shaded backyard gardens, their building is across from the exquisite vest-pocket park Septuagesimo Uno (given its Latin name by the Parks Commissioner Henry J. Stern, who thought it deserved a fancier moniker than 71st Street Plot).

“I know some people love a full-service building, but I’m more of a brownstone guy,” Dr. Chang said. “I like my own privacy and I like the kooky neighbors you have in a small co-op.” Other residents in the building include an aspiring actor, two professional musicians and a couple more doctors.

“The awesome thing about the West Side is that you have such very different personalities all coming together,” he said. “We may not completely get along, but you learn their quirks — it’s a quintessential cooperative living experience.”



By The New York Times

He and Dr. Heravian look forward to making the neighborhood their own, he said, and especially to seeking out that unicorn of the Upper West Side: a good thin-crust pizza.

What You’ll Find

The Ansonia, Apthorp, San Remo and Dakota remain the gracious dowagers of the neighborhood, along with other prewar residential buildings on West End Avenue,

Riverside and Central Park West, but new construction has significantly increased the number of high-end apartments here. Four buildings have gone up in recent years: the Laureate; two buildings on West 77th Street; and the Harrison, a brick-and-sandstone, 132-condominium designed by Robert A.M. Stern.

Prices, of course, have gone up as well. The young families who gravitate to the neighborhood for its good public schools and proximity to Central and Riverside Parks tend to be more affluent than in the past. Dozens of small businesses have closed, replaced by chains. And no article about the West 70s would be complete without a line bemoaning the demise of H & H Bagels, now the site of a Verizon store.

Longtime residents also lament the mall-ification of Broadway, which now has a Bloomingdale's Outlet, a Barney's, a Lululemon and a Trader Joe's. Gyms abound, too: Equinox and Soul Cycle are never more than a few blocks away wherever you are on the Upper West Side.

Poke around a bit, though, and you can still find plenty of mom-and-pop operations, including dry cleaners, shoe-repair shops and restaurants that deliver, between the shiny stores and tucked away on the side streets, which are lined with picturesque brownstones and smaller apartment buildings, some of them walk-ups.



161 WEST 76th STREET, GR A one-bedroom, one-bathroom ground-floor apartment with a backyard in a townhouse co-op, listed at \$895,000, with monthly maintenance of \$1,218. 212-381-3264 Zagphoto.com

Lisa Garey, a veteran agent in the neighborhood who works for CORE, said the market is tight, with multiple offers on many apartments, although the highest-end spaces often linger for a while. Along with new construction offering amenities like playrooms, parking, roof gardens and gyms, there are still Classic Six and Seven apartments to be had in prewar buildings, and at the lower end, rentals with bathrooms down the hall.

What You'll Pay

If you want to live among the rich and famous, and you happen to have \$24 million, there is an apartment for you at the San Remo on Central Park West. The news for those with more modest aspirations: According to statistics compiled by Brown Harris Stevens, the year-to-date median price for a one-bedroom apartment in the neighborhood is \$820,000.

In late November, Trulia and StreetEasy showed upward of 200 homes for sale in the area, from \$425,000 studios to \$16 million penthouses and park-view apartments for \$20 million and up. Those willing to take on gut renovations can occasionally find sponsor units in buildings like the Apthorp, where old-style apartments go for more than \$2 million.

The Vibe

Think John Lennon, Nora Ephron, Jerry Seinfeld: Everyone knows this part of town.

The area draws an untold number of visitors from elsewhere in the city, the country and the world, with Lincoln Center and two movie theater complexes immediately to the south, and with the lavishly restored Art Deco Beacon Theater, a city landmark (and a favorite of grizzled rockers — Bob Dylan played there in late November — and their grizzled fans); the Museum of Natural History; and the New-York Historical Society within blocks of each other. And don't forget Central and Riverside Parks.

It's a big area, though, and tourists mix among the residents: bun-headed dancers heading to Steps on Broadway, upstairs from Fairway, for warm-ups; writers nabbing prime spots in coffee shops; parents and babysitters shepherding children to and from school, activities and the parks; musicians carrying their instruments in black cases on their backs.

Residents also tend to be fiercely protective of their home. The West Side Spirit and the West Side Rag, among other local news sources, keep a sharp eye on politics, development, schools, food and culture.

The Schools

Some blocks in the West 70s are zoned for P.S. 87, which has 877 prekindergarten through fifth grade students. In the 2016-17 school year, 80 percent met state standards in English and 78 percent in math, compared with 40 and 42 percent citywide.

At P.S. 199, where there are 884 students in kindergarten through fifth grade, the scores were 79 percent in English and 84 percent in math.

A relatively new elementary school, P.S. 452, is at 210 West 61st Street, with 319 students; 85 percent met state standards in English and 81 percent met standards in math. Until this fall, the school was at 100 West 77th Street, where it shared space with the Anderson School (P.S. 334), a competitive kindergarten through eighth grade public school, and the Computer School (M.S. M245), a middle school where the percentages of students meeting state standards in English and math were 78 and 66, compared with citywide scores of 41 and 33 percent.

Private schools include Collegiate, which is all boys, K-12, and the Calhoun School, known in the neighborhood for distinctive architecture, which looks like an old-style television set.

The Commute

One big draw of the West 70s is convenience. The 1, 2 and 3 trains run along Broadway; 72nd Street is an express stop, and the 1 also stops at 79th. The B and C stop at 72nd Street and run along Central Park West. Citi Bikes have been in place since 2015; bicycle lanes run uptown on Amsterdam and downtown on Columbus.

The History

Music has long threaded through Upper West Side history. Decades before Lincoln Center was built, a monument to Giuseppe Verdi was erected in the triangle now known as Verdi Square, between Amsterdam and Broadway at 73rd Street, showing the composer surrounded by his most familiar operatic protagonists: Falstaff, Leonora, Aida and Otello. It is also an example of Italian-American pride, one of several such monuments that Carlo Barsotti, founder and editor of a newspaper for Italian Americans, found the wherewithal to have established around the city in the early 20th century.

More recently, a swath of West 77th Street where Miles Davis lived and made music for some 25 years — and did a lot of stoop-sitting with fellow jazz and blues luminaries — was named Miles Davis Way. But there is no plaque on the brownstone where he lived. And as with much else that happens, or doesn't happen, on the Upper West Side, the street was renamed only after lengthy and contentious discussion.