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The Secret Code to a Changing New York: Its Dogs

Downtown poodles. Uptown pit bulls. A Xoloitzcuintli on the block. To understand New York real estate, follow Fido.



Julia Rothman

Consider the poodle: the fluffy stalwart of the Upper East Side, the pooch par excellence of fancy white-glove co-ops. Lately, it's been roughing it downtown.

From 2012 to 2016, the breed's registrations nearly doubled in Hell's Kitchen and nearby Chelsea, from 113 to 208, the biggest surge for the breed in all five boroughs. Except these poodles answered to names like Duke and Nacho, not Bentley or Valentino, like some of their uptown kin. And while the Upper East Side still had the most poodles in that period, with 369 registrations in 2016, the breed's downtown migration hasn't gone unnoticed.

“It’s almost as if the idea of the Upper East Side has relocated,” said Jason Saft, an agent with Compass, commenting on the number of poodles that have flooded the West Village, a longtime bastion of the bohemian set in downtown Manhattan.

MOST POPULAR NAMES, MALES



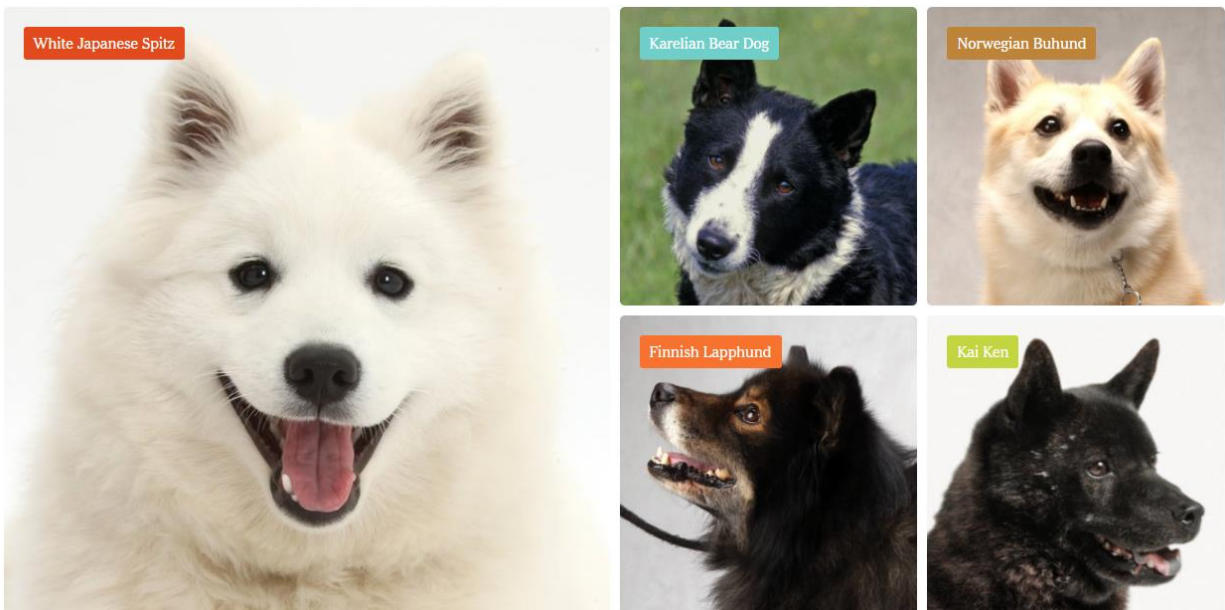
Real estate prices suggest a similar shift. Boosted by a wave of new development, homes in the West Village sold for a median \$1.3 million in 2017, about 5 percent higher than on the Upper East Side. And the West Village surpassed the Upper East Side in sales price in 2013, according to the real estate data site StreetEasy.

New York’s dogs are as varied as its people, and their numbers can be just as telling. They can be a cipher for understanding gentrification, and sometimes predicting it — when the designer pups arrive, rising home prices may not be far behind. They become part of the identity of a neighborhood, and their shifting numbers, rising or falling, can say much about its future. Most of all, they say something about the humans who take them home.

As housing prices rise in an area, dog breeds tend to skew smaller and more expensive. But certain breeds maintain their dominance, like the pit bull in certain parts of Brooklyn and the Rottweiler in the Bronx.

To track the city's changing dog preferences, The New York Times analyzed the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's dog license registrations from 2012 to 2016, the most recent full year data were available. We used the health department's definition of neighborhood boundaries, and the data set, which covered the five boroughs, included the dog breed, sex, name and the owner's home ZIP code.

NEWCOMERS



Photos, clockwise from top left: Mark Taylor/NPL — Minden Pictures; Gerard Lacz/FLPA — Minden Pictures; Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times; Getty Images; Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times.

As with the human census, the picture is imperfect. There were 583,841 registrations from 2012 to 2016, but the data set also included some dogs that appeared more than once. We removed some duplicates by omitting expired registrations, leaving a total of 371,402 licenses, but other duplicates remained, because the health department declined to give home addresses, citing privacy issues.

Other registrations were missing information, like the breed or name. Registrants are asked to identify a dog's dominant breed, and there is no stand-alone category for mixed breeds, which account for many rescued dogs. There were 12,463 registrations for dogs of "unknown" lineage in 2016, which likely included mixed and rare breeds that were not listed.

There are roughly 80,000 unique dogs registered in a given year, said Julien Martinez, a spokesman for the department. Based on a 2008 Community Health Survey, the department estimates that there are about 500,000 dogs in the city.

Citywide, the top dog in 2016 was the Yorkshire terrier, or Yorkie, the well-coifed lap dog that grows to about seven pounds, followed by the Shih Tzu, another small dog, and the

much larger Labrador retriever (up to 80 pounds). The Chihuahua came in fourth, followed by the muscular pit bull, which includes a number of terrier breeds. Next came the tiny Maltese and the brawny German shepherd (up to about 90 pounds). The beagle, poodle and Pomeranian rounded out the list.

New York dogs had names like Max (the most popular), Bella, Coco, Charlie, Rocky and Lola. There was also a Biggie in every borough — 156 registrations in all, ranging from a Rottweiler in Queens to a French bulldog in Staten Island — perhaps in honor of the Brooklyn-born rapper Biggie Smalls.

By and large, cramped city living means smaller dogs. Overall, one-third of registrations, the most of any group, were toy dogs, the smallest type recognized by the American Kennel Club, ranging from about five to 20 pounds. But there were exceptions: SoHo, one of the most expensive neighborhoods in the city, tied blue-collar Stapleton on Staten Island for the biggest share of dogs over 50 pounds — roughly 19 percent overall.

Some of the most telling numbers were on the local level. As New York changes — in the midst of rising prices and shifting demographics — so, too, does its pooch population. Here is its changing furry face.



Julia Rothman

Newcomers in Brooklyn

In Williamsburg, “you used to get a lot of mixed-breed dogs coming and going,” said Vinny Spinola, the owner of the Brooklyn Animal Resource Coalition, or BARC, a no-kill pet

shelter that opened in the neighborhood in 1987, long before the recent wave of development and gentrification.

“With the new people, now there are more pedigrees, like French bulldogs, Jack Russells, Labradoodles,” he said. “It’s changed an awful lot.”

The United States Census Bureau’s 2009-2016 American Community Survey estimated the area’s population as 87.5 percent white, 3.7 percent black, 8.1 percent Hispanic and 0.3 percent Asian. The 2010 census showed a 21.6 percent increase in white residents since 2000, according to an analysis by the data site Social Explorer. Deal seekers from more expensive parts of the city have flocked to the area, increasing demand and raising prices in the process, agents said. The median sales price in Williamsburg rose from \$615,000 in 2012 to \$995,000 in 2017, an almost 62 percent jump, according to StreetEasy.

Dog adoptions cost \$150 at Mr. Spinola’s shelter, regardless of breed. In recent years, the usual mix of Chihuahuas and pit bulls has been joined by more expensive breeds, like the Afghan hound, the large, elegant standout at dog shows, which has a flowing coat that requires frequent combing. A puppy can cost more than \$1,500 when purchased from a breeder.

But no matter the dog’s pedigree, Mr. Spinola said, “sometimes people buy dogs, then realize it’s a lot of work and surrender them.”

MOST POPULAR DOGS

Yorkshire terrier



Shih Tzu



Labrador retriever



Chihuahua



Pit bull



Photos, clockwise from top left: Getty Images; Fiona McAllister/Getty Images; Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times; Getty Images; Chris Stein/Getty.

In spite of gentrification, or perhaps because of it, parts of Brooklyn with some of the fastest rising prices still favor a New York mainstay: the pit bull. In Clinton Hill, where the

median sales price rose 66 percent from 2012 to 2016, according to StreetEasy, residents preferred the pit bull over any other dog. The Labrador retriever and Chihuahua followed, while the petite French bulldog, a relative newcomer, jumped 90 percent, the biggest surge among the neighborhood's top 10 breeds. (The Southeast Bronx had the most pit bulls overall, with more than 1,500 registrations.)

The pit bull's resilience is, in part, thanks to the growing popularity of adoption. Animal Care Centers of NYC, the nonprofit that runs the city's animal shelters, reported its highest ever rate of placement for dogs in 2017, with 91.2 percent placed in new homes or other shelters. There are also many private shelter services that rescue dogs from Southern states, where there are far fewer no-kill shelters.

"Some of our wealthier clients tend toward the rescues," said Andrea Arden, a dog trainer who gives classes in Manhattan and Brooklyn. "There's such a cachet to it now that people would say their dog is a rescue even if it isn't." She credits social media with the ebb and flow of certain breeds — some pups in her classes have thousands of followers on Instagram.

John Votta, an office manager with the New York Bully Crew, a shelter based on Long Island that is primarily for pit bulls, said the adoption trend is encouraging. "They're put down more than any other breed, tenfold," he said of pit bulls, because they are overbred and often the victims of dogfighting rings. But in the last year, he said, adoptions have been up between 10 and 20 percent.



Julia Rothman

New Tricks Downtown

With its many parks and large stock of spacious prewar apartments, Uptown Manhattan has long been known as doggy heaven. But dog-friendly developments below Central Park, many geared toward luxury buyers and renters, are luring a new generation of pet owners.

Darshan Patel, 29, and his wife, Chandni, 28, live with their 2-year-old miniature poodle, Miles, at 555TEN, a new 600-unit luxury rental tower in Hudson Yards, on the Far West Side of Midtown. Mr. Patel, who owns the pharmacy Manhattan Apothecary, said they moved from New Jersey to rent a one-bedroom apartment in the 56-story tower, where studios were going for \$4,050 a month.

MOST POPULAR NAMES, FEMALES



“There’s definitely a younger community here,” Mr. Patel said. It was the amenities, especially the dog-related ones, he added, that sealed the deal.

The developer, Extell, teamed with Throw Me A Bone, a dog-services company, to bring in-house veterinary care, grooming and other perks to residents. For a fee, a dog-care provider will visit an apartment and care for a pet while the owner is away. And there is also a covered dog walk with waterfront views on the 12th floor of the tower.

“He’ll jump up on one of the planks and stare at the cruise ships on the Hudson,” Mr. Patel said of Miles, his contemplative mini-poodle. “When you’re doing your business, you can’t ask for a better bathroom.”

With expensive housing come more expensive dogs. An area that the Department of Health describes as Clinton/Chelsea, which includes several ZIP codes, had the biggest surge in poodles of any neighborhood between 2012 and 2016.

Other pricey breeds are also thriving downtown. “It feels like, when you move into the West Village, they give you a free French bulldog,” said Steve Snider, an agent with CORE who has a Great Dane named Stella. The downtown area that includes the Village and SoHo ranked third overall for French bulldogs; Hell’s Kitchen was first.

RISING BREEDS



Photos: Adriano Bacchella/NPL – Minden Pictures; Getty Images; Getty Images; Getty Images.

The city also welcomed some new and rare breeds in recent years. There was Silas, the Norwegian Buhund in Greenpoint, the only one of his kind registered in the city through 2016 (the American Kennel Club estimated that there are about 50 in the country); Freddie the Finnish Lapphund in Washington Heights (one of 52 nationwide); and Venus the Xoloitzcuintli in Greenwich Village (one of 162). We might expect to see more Xolos after the breed’s star turn in the Pixar animated film “Coco.”

“I thought I knew dogs pretty well, but now I’ll stop and say, ‘What sort of breed is that?’” said Summaiya D’Adamo, 49, a stay-at-home mother in the West Village who lives with her son, Tristan, and Casper the Kooikerhondje, a spaniel-like dog with floppy ears that was originally bred for duck hunting in the Netherlands.

Part of the reason so many rare and expensive breeds are popping up downtown and in other growing markets is because of the changing housing stock in these areas, said Jonathan Miller, a New York real estate appraiser. The Upper West Side, a bastion for dog lovers thanks to its proximity to Central Park and Riverside Park, may be losing out to neighborhoods with a higher concentration of new condos.

“One of the softer submarkets is the prewar co-ops on Central Park West,” he said, because they have to compete with a wave of new condo projects in emerging markets. Roughly 80

percent of Manhattan apartments allow dogs, but co-ops are four times as likely to restrict dog ownership, he said.

“The center of gravity of the city is shifting south and west,” said Jessica Scaperotti, a spokeswoman for the developer Related, which has several pet-focused rental buildings, including MiMa, a 600-plus-unit rental in Hell’s Kitchen that has more than 200 dogs. “There are more dogs than children that live in the building.”



Julia Rothman

A Loyal Breed

Not all dogs have seen their numbers grow. The burly Rottweiler, a lovable tank with a sports-car engine, saw its numbers dwindle at a faster rate than that of any other dog in the top 100 breeds. Registrations fell 18 percent from 2012 to 2016, behind posh dogs like the Australian Shepherd and the Labradoodle mix.

Things are different in the Southeast Bronx. An area that includes parts of Morris Park, Throgs Neck and Sound View had the most Rottweiler registrations in the city every year, for five straight years.

“It starts with choosing a dog that matches your personality,” said Manuel Pantiga, the owner of Pantiga Group realty in the Bronx. “Rottweilers are loyal. Even when there was a mass exodus in the 1970s, these homeowners were also loyal,” he said, referring to the borough’s spike in crime and sinking real estate prices a generation ago.

The breed is commonly banned from co-ops and rentals with pet restrictions, agents said, because of its reputation, which some say is unfounded, of being dangerous. But it has a long history in the area.

“A dog is a Rottweiler, or a black lab — those are dogs,” said Joseph Milone, the owner of Joseph Milone Realty in Morris Park, who has lived in the area since 1979. (For the record, he has a 65-pound bloodhound named Groot.) Lately, though, many of his clients are bringing smaller dogs to the area, which has seen a sharp rise in prices. The top dog in the neighborhood was the Shih Tzu.

“It seems now everyone wants to put their dog in their pocket book,” said Marie D’Angelo, 45, a Morris Park homeowner who works in law enforcement. She lives with Flash, a 100-pound German shepherd-Labrador mix, who turns 10 in April.

Her father, Al D’Angelo, who lives below her in their two-family home, can appreciate why local dogs are getting smaller. “They’re cuddly,” he said. “And they do all the things a big dog would do.”

But if his daughter followed the trend and bought a smaller dog, would he walk a Shih Tzu on the block? That gave him pause.