

# The New York Times

August 1, 2014

## **The Townhouse, Minus the Past**

*New Brooklyn Townhouses in Williamsburg, Dumbo, Cobble Hill*



*The rowhouses on State Street in Boerum Hill are credited for starting the wave of new townhouse building. Credit Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times*

In response to surging demand for larger spaces, developers in Brooklyn are going back to the classic townhouse, but building new variations with contemporary families in mind.

From the leafy streets of Cobble Hill to the warehouse districts of Dumbo and Williamsburg, at least a dozen townhouse projects are in various stages of planning or construction. With prices as high as \$4.8 million for a four-bedroom, the projects are aimed squarely at the gilded-stroller set.

“The demand for larger spaces in Brooklyn continues to grow,” said Ari Harkov, a broker with Halstead Property, who along with his business partner, Warner Lewis, is leading

sales for Wythe Lane Townhouses, an upcoming development in Williamsburg by KUB Capital. “More and more of our clients are trying to extend their tenure in the city rather than move to the suburbs for the house and the yard and the driveway,” Mr. Harkov said.

But little is available for growing, affluent families, he said, because of a “finite number” of prewar brownstones.



*Townhouses on Strong Place in Cobble Hill. CreditBrennan Realty Services*

Roger Bittenbender, a principal of KUB who is developing Wythe Lane with his business partner, Shawn Katz, noted the shortage in inventory as well. “It was this huge gaping hole in the market,” he said.

The idea to build more townhouses was born partly out of their talks with friends with expanding families who had outgrown Williamsburg apartments. “They have nowhere to go,” Mr. Bittenbender said. “They don’t want to go to another part of Brooklyn. They’re definitely not going back to Manhattan.”

He and Mr. Katz are catering to this niche with six four-story houses at the corner of Wythe Avenue and South Fourth Street, near the Domino Sugar redevelopment project. Each house will measure nearly 17 feet wide with about 3,800 square feet of interior space that

will contain four bedrooms, three baths, two half-baths and a finished basement, along with a roof deck, garage parking and a landscaped yard that opens onto a private walkway.

Demolition of a scrap yard on the site is set to begin in a few weeks, and sales could start as early as the fall. Mr. Bittenbender said he expects the first house to be offered for “just shy of \$4 million.”

The project was partly inspired by Dumbo Townhouses, a group of five starkly contemporary, 3,050-square-foot townhouses going up at Pearl and Water Streets in Dumbo that quickly sold out. The first four-bedroom three-bathroom houses, which have parking, a rooftop garden and a terrace off the parlor level, and prices from \$4.1 million to \$4.5 million, went into contract 26 days after sales began in June 2013. A fourth went for \$4.8 million last October. “We sold them one at a time, raising prices each time,” said A. J. Pires of Alloy, the developer. “We are holding the last, corner townhouse.”

The listing broker, Karen Heyman of Sotheby’s International Realty, said she still gets inquiries nearly every day. “I wish I had 20 more of them,” she said.



*Wythe Lane Townhouses on Wythe Avenue and South Fourth Street in Williamsburg. Credit Noë & Associates*

For decades, new residential construction in Brooklyn was made up mostly of low-rise apartments and two- and three-family houses with a garden apartment for the buyer and a rental unit or two on top to help defray the cost of ownership. Over the last several years, glass-and-steel condominiums and rentals have sprouted along Williamsburg’s waterfront

and in Downtown Brooklyn with myriad amenities. Mostly studios, one- and two-bedrooms, they are aimed at hip young singles.

But as those hipsters mingled, married and multiplied, little was built to suit their needs. A recent search for four-bedrooms in Williamsburg on Streeteasy.com yielded five listings, including a 2,200-square-foot penthouse at Northside Piers for \$3.495 million and a remodeled semidetached single-family house for \$2.5 million.

Demand for older townhouses in Brooklyn, including those in need of renovation, has been intense. A Fort Greene fixer-upper at 252 Carlton Avenue, listed by Doug Bowen of CORE for \$2.595 million in March, drew 110 visitors and 22 offers in five days, before closing for \$3.2 million in June.

Over all, the average price of a townhouse in northwest Brooklyn jumped 25 percent to \$2.39 million in the second quarter from a year ago, according to a report by the appraiser Jonathan J. Miller for Douglas Elliman Real Estate.

The brand-new townhouses tend to command a premium over their prewar counterparts, and don't require the time and hassle involved in bringing a 100-year-old building up to date. Many hint at the historic with brick exteriors or traditional stoops, but on the inside are contemporary. While the prewar houses were built with formal dining rooms, parlors and closed-off kitchens, the new ones have open floor plans, en-suite baths and high-end appliances.

The Townhouses of Cobble Hill, a mixture of four historic and five new townhouses on Congress Street in Cobble Hill, have marble bathrooms with steam showers and eat-in kitchens with Ernestomeda custom Italian cabinetry, Sub-Zero refrigerators, Wolf ranges and wine coolers. The houses, designed by the architectural firm Adjmi & Andreoli and developed by JMH Development, were sold in phases, with the first three released last summer. Only a four-bedroom five-bath house, with a \$3.9 million price tag, remains unsold.



*Dumbo Townhouses at Pearl and Water Streets in Dumbo. Creditby-Encore*

The catalyst for the recent wave of townhouse building, brokers and developers say, was the success of 23 rowhouses developed by Abby C. Hamlin, the president of Hamlin Ventures, with Francis J. Greenburger, the chairman of Time Equities, on State Street in Boerum Hill at the edge of Downtown Brooklyn. The rowhouses, designed by Rogers Marvel Architects and built in two phases, set the bar for the townhouses popping up today. But being among the first collections of speculative rowhouses since, well, the early 20th century wasn't easy. "It was a hard sell at first," Ms. Hamlin said, noting that banks were initially reluctant to lend.

But the houses sold quickly. The first 14, completed in 2007, each sold for an average of \$2.6 million; the last nine, finished a few months ago, for about \$3.6 million apiece.

Some developers are marketing larger Brooklyn condos as "townhouse-style" apartments. A five-story building at 709 Sackett Street in Park Slope, developed by Greenstone, is being sold as two units — a \$6 million, 3,200-square-foot four-bedroom triplex with a garage and multiple outdoor spaces, and a \$2.995 million, 1,750-square-foot four-bedroom duplex with a deck and rooftop terrace.

“It’s zoned as a two-unit condominium,” said Lyon Porter, a sales and leasing director of Town Residential, “but it’s really two townhouses in one.” In Brooklyn Heights, the Stahl Organization is converting the upper floors of the York & Sawyer-designed Brooklyn Trust Company Building into 12 three- to five-bedroom condos offering “townhouse-style living,” according to a publicist, with “high ceilings, oversize double-hung wood windows, generous entry foyers and architectural detail” like crown moldings in living rooms.

Others are taking a more traditional tack. Aiming for buyers who want to offset their mortgage with rental income, Douglas Elliman is marketing Heights Park, a row of four townhouses in Prospect Lefferts Gardens that come with built-in investment units. Each house, by the Residential Development Group, has an owner’s triplex with a private backyard and curbside parking on the bottom, topped by two rental units — a second-floor one-bedroom apartment and a third-floor three-bedroom. The price tag for the first house, which is expected to begin showing this month, is \$1.875 million. Some buyers want “the amenities of a single-family home in terms of space and flexibility,” but can’t afford a \$3 million townhouse in Park Slope, said Evan DUBY of Douglas Elliman.

The rental units, he estimates, could bring in as much as \$5,000 a month.

Sackett Union, 11 townhouses and 32 condos developed by Alchemy Properties in Carroll Gardens, included four two-family townhouses. Rather than rent them out, Kenneth S. Horn, Alchemy’s president, said some people have used one unit as a home office or mother-in-law unit. Another buyer combined the two to make it a single-family home. “One family is putting the teenage child down there,” Mr. Horn said. “That’s a win-win.”