



4 EAST 80TH STREET:
the living room.

HISTORIC Townhomes

*The lure, the beauty and the value
of landmarked properties*

Alice Riley-Smith

HISTORIC NEW YORK TOWNHOUSES are integral to the structure of the city. They make up a central part of its history, as they continue to stand among us, architectural legacies of their various residents over the course of many years. It is unsurprising, then, that such townhouses make popular homes not only for expanding families in need of extra space, but for those simply prepared to pay for a piece of history. As many feature original

stoops and Greek revival railings and cornices, they are archetypal New York residences.

Many of these are protected by New York's Landmark Preservation Committee, whose "beauty and benefit" is that it makes us "able to hold on to ... New York City's history and [that of] the people that erected the buildings that we now call home," explained Douglas Elliman real estate agent Talin Sarraf to *Townhouse*.



4 EAST 80TH STREET: the entrance foyer.

For example, Ms. Sarraff has dated a protected townhouse at 116 West 71st Street back to 1883; it was built by architects Thom and Wilson “who are responsible for the majority of Manhattan’s townhouses,” and owned by George W. Hamilton, “a prominent speculative developer of the Upper West Side.” After changing hands several times, the house was converted into single-room occupancy in the 1940s, and has finally been restored to its former glory, with renovations finishing up this year.

Renovations of historic townhouses from single-room occupancies to full-building homes certainly seem to be trending. “With condo prices soaring in the luxury sector, townhouse developers have been very actively buying properties to reimagine,” explained CORE senior vice president and associate broker Doug Bowen, “and it is not just the developers that are after these properties, but savvy buyers are also pursuing townhouses like never before. Sarah Jessica Parker and Mathew Broderick and Keifer Sutherland

are recent examples of some of the stars that have benefited greatly from their townhouse purchases, subsequent renovations and sales.”

Douglas Elliman managing director Michael Bolla is one such townhouse developer taking advantage of the increasing trend. “I have been restoring and selling townhouses since I started in the business 24 years ago,” he said. Currently, he is dealing with the sale of 436 West 20th Street, the Chelsea Mansion. “It is a very rare Federal building.”



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—Doug Bowen, CORE

As *Townhouse* delved into the trend of historic New York townhouse purchases, the West Village appeared to triumph. “Greenwich Village is the greatest embodiment of early New York residential architecture in all five boroughs and contains the largest intact concentra-

tion of architecturally significant residences, many of them townhouses,” said Mr. Bowen. He puts this down to the “original and irregular street patterns” of the Village.

Its popularity has steadily increased since “Edgar Allen Poe, Henry James, Mark Twain and many other celebrities of the artistic and literary communities ... called The Village home,” he said. “This spirit continues today in this well-preserved architecturally and culturally significant enclave.”

Mr. Bowen told *Townhouse* about five historical townhouse properties he owns, including 114 West 13th Street, one of six built by John Hanrahan in 1848.

Brooklyn is another area of dense historical townhouses. “Brooklyn is having its moment, and the great thing for

the townhouse market is that the abundance of townhouses in Brooklyn is phenomenal ... the restaurants and cafes and streetscapes have improved so dramatically in the last eight years that people are seeing townhouses as a great alternative to area condos that can reach \$1,000 per square foot and above,” said Mr. Bowen, who is on the committee that created the most recent landmark district in Brooklyn, Wallabout. The area sits north of Myrtle Avenue in Clinton Hill and Fort Greene and contains one of the largest collections of extant wood-framed townhouses in New York. The process, lasting four years, landmarked just one block on Vanderbilt Avenue but “this is still a victory, as it creates a foothold of preservation that can be expanded on in the future,” Mr. Bowen assured us.

Joan Goldberg, vice president at Brown Harris Stevens, told *Townhouse* of two properties she currently has on the market in Brooklyn, both of which are in historic districts and landmarked: 132 Kane Street/6-8 Cheever Place in Cobble Hill and a 25-foot-wide brownstone on Monroe Place in Brooklyn Heights.

Brown Harris Stevens also lists the Woolworth Mansion at 4 East 80th Street, which is asking \$90 million, the Ellen Biddle Shipman Residence at 21 Beekman Place, asking \$48.75 million, and the John Bowers Mansion at 45 East 65th Street, asking \$24.5 million. These are listed under Paula Del Nunzio, a senior vice president and managing director for the firm and a townhouse superstar.

The trend is allowing certain parts of New York, and New Yorkers themselves, to reconnect with their history, as well as improving the sense of community in these areas. “Townhouses have an aura and romance that dates back to the original inhabitants’ desire for an ‘on the block’ lifestyle. The draw is and always has been a true neighborhood feeling and strong sense of community,” explained Mr. Bowen.

The Landmark Preservation Committee works to protect this tradition. “Landmarks has been so successful in protecting the townhouse stock in Manhattan and Brooklyn and the beneficiaries are today’s townhouse dwellers. Townhouses are experiencing a true revival, and this is evidenced block after block in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Townhouses are not for everyone, but those who catch ‘Townhouse fever’ have a love affair that lasts a lifetime.” Mr. Bowen included, we believe. ■



21 BEEKMAN PLACE: clockwise from left, the façade, the living room and the dining room.