

June 29, 2013

Native Italians Gone, but Little Italy Buzzes

Lower Manhattan District Keeps Feel of Old, Pedestrian-Friendly Neighborhood

If you're browsing for a home in Little Italy...

<p>\$3.175 million 138 Mulberry St., No. 3A</p> <p>This 4,008-square-foot loft is currently subdivided into two commercial spaces. It has three bathrooms, an updated kitchenette and could be converted into five bedrooms. Features include exposed brick archways, sliding glass doors, wood beams and oak-strip floors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listing History: On the market for about 11 weeks • Property Plus: Freight elevator connects the loft with the street • Property Minus: Would require conversion if used as residence • Listing Agents: Win Brown and Ivana Nikolic of CORE • Open House: By appointment 	<p>\$3.25 million 241 Centre St., No. 2G</p> <p>This 1,910-square-foot duplex loft in the Police building has three bedrooms, three bathrooms, an open kitchen, a home office, 15-foot ceilings, 10-foot-tall windows and two exposures. The building has storage, a full-time concierge and doorman and live-in super.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listing History: On the market for about a week • Property Plus: Master wing with en-suite dressing area and bath • Property Minus: None of the bathrooms have windows • Listing Agents: Josh Rubin and Daniel O'Connell of Douglas Elliman • Open House: By appointment 	<p>\$2.595 million 354 Broome St., No. 61</p> <p>This 1,600-square-foot duplex condo loft in the Ice House has two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a living/dining area with marble floors and two skylights. There is a 24-hour doorman and bicycle storage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listing History: On the market for about eight weeks, with a reduction of \$300,000 five weeks ago • Property Plus: Corner top-floor unit with 17-foot ceilings • Property Minus: No washer/dryer in unit • Listing Agents: Gerald Germany and Susan Sears of Corcoran • Open House: By appointment
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The thousands of Italian immigrants who filled Little Italy's narrow streets and tenement buildings in Lower Manhattan a century ago are long gone.

Fewer immigrants from Italy arrived over the decades and those living in the neighborhood dwindled over time. Recent Census data didn't find any Italian-born residents in the main tract for Little Italy, down from 44 in 2000. The area has long been squeezed by Chinatown to the south and, more recently, the gentrified and pricey SoHo and Nolita to the north. In 2010, the National Park Service designated Chinatown and Little Italy a single historic district.

But as its hold on Italian-American culture has receded, some vestiges of its history remain: strips of long-standing Italian restaurants and shops along Grand and Mulberry streets draw plenty of tourists,

and the annual, 11-day Feast of San Gennaro—now in its 87th year—brings an estimated one million people to its streets, according to festival organizers.

And current residents say it retains a vital, neighborhood feel, whatever the predominant ethnicity. "It's the ambience—we all know each other. Not everybody's Italian, there are very few old-days Italians left, but it's a real community, we're closely knit," says Sante Scardillo of the Little Italy Neighbors Association, which supports reasonable rents and responsible development to preserve the neighborhood's character.

"We look out for the neighborhood," said Mr. Scardillo, who was born and raised in Little Italy. "There really is this sense that you're in a very human-sized place."

Special zoning regulations dating back to 1977 limit building demolitions and high-rise development in the neighborhood, and are aimed at preserving Little Italy's historic, pedestrian-friendly feel. The cafe-lined Mulberry Street is closed to traffic on summer weekends, allowing restaurants to spread tables onto the sidewalk.

Area condominiums and cooperatives include the Brewster Carriage House, at Broome and Mott streets, a century-old building where updated 2,000-square-foot condos sold last year for around \$4 million, StreetEasy.com says. The Police Building at 240 Centre St., which served as police headquarters from 1909 to 1973, now contains cooperative apartments with a median listing price of \$1,536 a square foot, according to StreetEasy.

Most of the residences within the neighborhood are rentals, says Glenn Schiller of Corcoran Group, and the existing condominiums, cooperatives and townhouses tend to offer lower prices compared with neighboring SoHo and Nolita. The median listing price for 19 listings in Little Italy last week was \$3.25 million, StreetEasy.com says, compared with a median of \$3.95 million in SoHo.

"It's convenient to transportation, a convenient walk to all downtown neighborhoods, with a little bit of a better price point because you're off the beaten path by a block or two," Mr. Schiller says.

The area has its share of new restaurants and boutiques, but a handful of the Italian establishments on Grand or Mulberry are more than 100 years old. Ralph Tramontana, president of the Little Italy Merchants Association and owner of Sambuca's Cafe on Mulberry, says that soaring rents are threatening some the remaining businesses.

"It may not have as many Italians as it had in its heyday, but the buildings and restaurants have a meaning to so many millions of Americans who started their life in New York," he says. "I see it on a daily basis—a grandfather walking with grandchildren telling them, this is where my grandpa lived when he came here. It's like a living history in my eyes."

Parks: Mulberry Street is a pedestrian mall on summer weekends. Columbus Park, at Baxter, Mulberry and Bayard streets, with basketball courts and playground, is a few blocks away, as is the 8-acre Sara D. Roosevelt Park, bordered by Canal, East Houston, Forsyth and Chrystie streets, with a turf soccer field, a senior center, ball courts, playgrounds and a roller-skating rink.

Schools: The neighborhood is part of District 2, and local schools include Public School 130, the Hernando de Soto School, an elementary school that has an enrollment of around 1,000 students and received an A rating from the city for the 2011-12 school year.

Dining: Restaurants on Mulberry Street include Grotta Azzurra, founded in 1908; Angelo's of Mulberry Street, which dates back to 1902; and Umberto's Clam House. Ferrara Bakery and Cafe is on Grand Street. Newer restaurants include Brinkley's Broome Street, a gastro pub on the corner of Broome and Centre streets.

Shopping: Di Palo's and Alleva Dairy are both cheese and food shops on Grand Street.

Entertainment: Bars and lounges include GoldBar, on Broome Street, and the Mulberry Project.