

Greenwich Village Gets More New Meaning

Luxury Condo Projects, New Eateries Define More of Village

By RICHARD MORGAN



When the final episode of “Sex and the City” airing in 2004 used Commerce Street as a stand-in for Paris, it was an echo of Greenwich Village’s pure bohemian splendor. Who needs Paris?

Of course, the peak of the neighborhood’s funky nature had long faded by then and is less and less present today. Village dining spots these days include the Waverly Inn with its off-menu macaroni and cheese—which sells for about \$115 a serving, depending on the market price of white truffles.

In contrast to the neighborhood’s 19th-century building stock, there also are the curvy glass ribbons of One Jackson Square, three waterfront glass condo towers by architect Richard Meier at the end of Perry Street, as well as 150 Charles St., another condo project that sold out in April after 12 weeks on the market.

And with sales beginning Friday, there is Greenwich Lane, a 10-building mega-project on the site of the demolished St. Vincent’s Hospital built in 1849.

Rudin Management Co., the developer of Greenwich Lane, which is still under construction, is quick to note the neighboring O’Toole Building is being turned into a medical center, albeit without inpatient care. But the firm also boasts cites Greenwich Lane’s couture interiors, its townhomes’ elevators and wood-fired pizza ovens, and the complex’s golf course simulator, private garden and 82-foot swimming pool.

Its lowest-price unit, a one-bedroom in the largest of its buildings, will list at about \$2 million. Its most-expensive listing—not including the townhomes, for which final listing prices haven’t been set—is a five-bedroom penthouse for about \$20 million.

Such luxury befits the neighborhood's allure. A five-borough, 5,000-person poll conducted by New York magazine in 2010 found 31% of New Yorkers, or roughly 2.5 million residents, would move to the West Village if money were no object.

In addition to Greenwich Lane, new high-end residences also are in the pipeline at 12 E. 13th St., which will get a four-story glass addition on top, and 215 Sullivan St., the former site of the Children's Aid Society.

"The Village is the second choice, but only after Central Park," according to Raphael De Niro, a Douglas Elliman broker who grew up on Leroy Street and has been selling in the Village for 10 years.

"It was always for people who want stop signs instead of stop lights, almost a vacation from the city. But now we're seeing the Masters of the Universe, and that is new, the last three or five years. Jackson Square wasn't big enough to affect things, but Greenwich Lane is so massive that it will reshape the whole neighborhood," he said.

"We're thrilled to create a development with distinct character appropriate to the Village, designed in collaboration with the community and utilizing the most advanced sustainable design practices," said Rudin Vice Chairman and Chief Executive William Rudin.

The area's character seems, at the very least, in a state of flux. The city's newest comic-book shop isn't in Midtown or on St. Mark's Place, but rather the otherwise postcard stretch of Carmine Street.

When two chefs from Masa opened Neta, they did it not in the Lower East Side but on sleepy West Eighth Street. The jalapeño mezcal-based Very Important Cocktail at Wallflower, a new West 12th Street drinking spot developed by Xavier Herit, the longtime head bartender at Daniel, seems playfully puckish in a way more at home in Williamsburg.

And if New Yorkers were to guess where a Los Angeles-based burger chain would set up its first Gotham outpost, few would guess the spot on Sixth Avenue across from Jefferson Market Library, but there Umami Burger sits, defying expectations.

"Even Babbo and the Spotted Pig are old now," said Tim Zagat, of the eponymous dining guide. "A new wave is due."

John Strausbaugh, author of "The Village: 400 Years of Beats and Bohemians, Radicals and Rogues, a History of Greenwich Village," said the area is in the throes of its biggest shift in residents since the AIDS crisis.

"Back then," he said, "you had droves of people moving out, either because they died or left in fear, and all the doctors and lawyers moved in. That was when it became about this conventional luxury we know today."

But Greenwich Village has always tilted more radical than conventional: the city's first Catholic church, St. Joseph's, in 1833; or the flashpoint for gay rights in riots at the Stonewall

Inn, in 1969; and the nation's first federally subsidized artist colony at Westbeth, in 1970.

At an illegal midnight picnic atop the arch in Washington Square Park in January 1917, Marcel Duchamp and other artists went so far as to declare Greenwich Village an independent nation.

The Village rolls with the punches; how will the latest punch land?

Andrew Berman, executive director for the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, said Greenwich Lane is the biggest development in the neighborhood since the I.M. Pei-designed, Picasso-decorated University Village towers in 1966, two of which house New York University faculty exclusively, with the third an artists' co-op at below-market rates. "When I say that, it's not a compliment," he said.

Mr. Strausbaugh goes back even earlier, to a project what was then known brutally as "the Cut"—the extension through the Village of Seventh Avenue in 1917 and Sixth Avenue in 1925, tearing down many buildings in the process.

"That's why even today those streets don't feel quite like the Village," he said. "And it'll never go back. These big changes are always one-way roads."

