

LIVING AROUND/Gramercy Park

Growing Younger With Time

By CLAIRE WILSON

ROBERT COHN'S move to Gramercy Park in 1978 left his friends bewildered. He was in his late 20's and they thought Gramercy Park "was where all the old ladies lived," recalled Mr. Cohn, a publishing consultant whose large one-bedroom apartment looks out over evergreens, gravel paths and a multistory bird condo in the park. "It was much more geriatric."

What Mr. Cohn's cynical friends didn't realize was that he was 27 years ahead of the curve.

Gramercy Park is now one of the brightest stars in a firmament of sparkling, rejuvenated neighborhoods around and below 23rd Street that include Union Square, Madison Square, the Flatiron District and Chelsea. The actors and writers — and a few of the dowagers — who once defined it still live there, but they are part of a greater mix of



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young professionals, flush financial types, families with small children and media executives who consider Gramercy Park their town square and Irving Place their Main Street.

The Rev. Dr. Thomas F. Pike, who arrived in 1971, said the addition of more young people and children to the New York-style mix of ages and ethnic groups makes for a very lively street scene that is infinitely more diverse and far less exclusive than the image the Gramercy area might have had in the past.

"The coffeehouses and people sitting out having meals create a very playful atmosphere," said Dr. Pike, who is rector of Calvary Church, part of the Episcopal parish of Calvary and St. George's, near the northwest corner of Gramercy Park, and who also serves on the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission. "It is an intensely human neighborhood."

What You'll Find

Successful young Hollywood types must also feel right at home in the Gramercy area, parts of which look like a stage set, with picture-perfect

town houses, tree-lined streets, quaint cafes and immaculate toddlers chasing pigeons in the park. Running between 17th and 22nd Streets, and Third Avenue and Park Avenue South (although some say the borders are wider), the area encompasses two historic districts, the East 17th Street/Irving Place Historic District, created in 1998, and the Gramercy Park Historic District, one of the city's first, created in 1966.

East 19th Street between Irving Place and Third Avenue is called the "Block Beautiful" by many residents and real estate brokers, for the elegant row houses of different architectural styles that line both sides of the tree-shaded thoroughfare, but it is the four blocks surrounding the park and the park itself that are the focal point of the neighborhood.

"Our life revolves around the park," said Arlene Harrison, currently one of the trustees of Gramercy Park, who is also president of the Gramercy Park Block Association. "I have an e-mail list of about 800 names of park residents, with 110 families with young children. We are close-knit and look after each other."

The two-acre gated park is the only private park in New York City, open only to people with addresses on Gramercy Park. There are 66 lots around the park, with each lot paying an assessment of \$2,500 annually for two keys. Residents may also buy their own keys for an additional \$350, and new keys are issued each Oct. 1. The park is open to the public once a year, but that public does not include dogs, which are relegated to the cement skirt on the periphery.

Residents and park trustees have a contentious relationship with the National Arts Club at 15 Gramercy Park South, with which it has running feuds over issues like tree removal and access for club visitors and guests. Built in 1884 by Samuel Tilden, the elegant arts club stands next to the Players Club, at No. 16, which was remodeled by Stanford White in 1889.

What You'll Pay

Young single women of modest means pay \$844 a month for room and board at the Salvation Army's Parkside Evangeline Residence on Gramercy Park South, just opposite 50 Gramercy Park North, where the 23 condominiums currently being carved out of the former Gramercy Park Hotel start at \$5 million to \$6 million for a unit measuring approximately 2,800 square feet, and go as high as \$16 million for a 4,300-square-foot, four-bedroom, five-bath duplex.

The majority of the units have been sold in the building, which is slated for completion by January, according to the developer Ian Schragger. A new, five-star, 186-room incarnation of the Gramercy Park Hotel will open adjacent to the condo com-



plex next spring. Hotel services will be available to residents.

There are lofts on and around Park Avenue South and condos are part of the mix, but there is only one on the park, at No. 7. Blue-chip co-op buildings like One Lexington Avenue have family-sized 8-, 9- and 10-room apartments, and a trend toward combining apartments is helping to drive prices up, said Emily Tannen, director of sales and marketing at the A. J. Clarke Real Estate Corporation.

"You can buy two studios for \$500,000 each, but you will pay \$1.5 million for the combined apartment," she said.

A price of \$1,000 to \$1,200 a square foot is a loose rule of thumb off the park, but a two-bedroom facing the park on a low floor at 60 Gramercy Park North recently sold for \$1,500 a square foot, said Judith Thorn, an executive vice president with Warburg Realty Partnership.

Benita Cohen, a vice president with the Corcoran Group, said a tiny one-bedroom might sell for \$500,000, while two-bedroom units start at \$1.2 million to \$1.3 million. Three-bedrooms in a loft can start in the high \$2 million range, "and that would depend on the kind of three-bedroom it is, and whether it was an add-on."

Studios run between \$365,000 and

ON THE WEB

School information and more for Gramercy Park: nytimes.com/realestate/communitles



Photographs by Phil Mansfield for The New York Times

THE LUSH LIFE

Historic town houses along Gramercy Park West, above, and a quiet moment in the park, the only private park in New York City.



\$500,000. Town houses rarely come on the market, but Ms. Cohen said two on 18th Street recently sold for \$6.9 million and \$8.5 million.

Rental prices have generally been stable in the area, with studios starting at about \$1,600 a month, one-bedrooms ranging from \$2,700 to \$3,500, and two-bedrooms starting at \$3,750, said Jeffrey Ryan, associate broker at Stribling & Associates.

What To Do

Newly refurbished Madison Square Park and Union Square are each only a block or two from Gramercy Park, which is where Joan Feeney's 7-year-old daughter has a ready-made network of friends. There's always a familiar face in the park, making play dates unnecessary. In addition, there are puppet shows, Easter egg hunts and other seasonal events for children, as well as concerts for adults.

"My daughter has this illusion that she lives in a place where she knows everyone," said Ms. Feeney, a freelance editor. "That is a miraculous illusion for someone to have in Manhattan."

The Greenmarket at Union Square is the favorite local shopping destination for Gramercy residents, who

also welcomed the recent arrival of Whole Foods. "We haven't had a decent supermarket in the area for many years," Ms. Harrison said.

Lively bars of all descriptions can be found on Park Avenue South, and the choice of restaurants in the area keeps expanding.

Mario Batali has a new outpost, Casa Mono, on Irving Place, near Jeffrey Chodorow's Eastern-inspired Pure Food and Wine and the historic Pete's Tavern. The restaurateur Danny Meyer lives on the park and can walk to any of his restaurants, including Gramercy Tavern and the Union Square Cafe.

The Schools

Neighborhood schools include Public School 40 on East 19th Street, which teaches prekindergarten through Grade 5. Of fourth grade students there, 85.7 percent read at or above grade level, while 79.8 percent perform at or above grade level in math. Junior High School 104 teaches Grades 6 through 8; 56 percent of eighth graders read at or above grade level and 67.4 percent perform at or above grade level in math.

Some 600 students attend the School of the Future, on Lexington Avenue, which teaches Grades 6 through 12. No senior class has taken the SAT reasoning tests at the new school yet, but among eighth graders, 78.8 percent read at or above grade level and 66.7 percent at or above grade level in math. One local school is Washington Irving High School, on Irving Place, which teaches Grades 9 through 12. Of students there taking the SAT reasoning test, the average score was 400 on the verbal test, compared with 444 statewide, and 417 on the math, compared with 472 statewide.

Other students attend the High

School for the Humanities, on West 18th Street. Of students there taking the 2004 SAT reasoning test, the average score was 482 on the verbal and 453 on the math.

A new program in conjunction with Baruch College, Baruch College Campus High School, on Lexington Avenue, teaches Grades 9 through 12. Of students there taking the SAT reasoning test, the average score was 507 on the verbal test and 547 on the math.

A number of children attend private schools in the area. Those include Friends Seminary on East 16th Street, and Grace Church School on Fourth Avenue. Xavier High School, which is Roman Catholic and teaches Grades 9 through 12, is on West 16th Street.

The History

Gramercy Park is the anglicized version of the original Dutch, "Krom Moerasje," meaning "crooked little swamp," which indeed it was. Samuel Bulkley Ruggles bought the land, drained it, and in 1831 laid out the streets around the park, which were meant to mimic squares in London.

What We Like

Gramercy Park is an urban oasis, far quieter and more serene than you would expect, sitting as it does at the very start of Lexington Avenue, with construction and refurbishment work going on all around it.

What We'd Change

Traffic funneling off of Lexington Avenue onto Gramercy Park North, and drivers trying to make their way across town, add up to a lot of traffic for these residential streets.

On the Market



130 EAST 18TH STREET
This one-bedroom, one-bath co-op is listed at \$799,000. Emily Tannen, A. J. Clarke Real Estate (212) 541-5522 ext. 35.



4 LEXINGTON AVENUE
This sixth-floor co-op studio is on the market for \$349,000. Dana Simonetti, the Corcoran Group (212) 848-0470.