

LIVING IN YORKVILLE

## Where Change Is Underfoot, and Overhead



Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Construction of the Second Avenue subway line has turned many of the blocks from East 90th to East 95th Streets into a jumble of jackhammers, cranes, dump trucks and chain-link fences.

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**TOO-TALL buildings. Middle-class displacement. A vanishing way of life.**

Over the last decade, as these phrases became battle cries at planning meetings from the Lower East Side to [Harlem](#), they had long since reverberated across Yorkville, a rectangular slice of the Upper East Side of [Manhattan](#).

Galvanizing protest in particular were “sliver” buildings, those skinny structures that went up in the ‘80s on small lots and rose to become decidedly out of scale with the neighborhood’s low-slung side streets.

Ultimately, the city rezoned key blocks, limiting the construction of sliver buildings, but in the ensuing years Yorkville has witnessed a steady stream of lofty high-rises going up, especially along York, First and Second Avenues. And now, it is enduring construction of the new Second Avenue subway, which is disruptive but will eventually make the neighborhood more convenient.

The changes in Yorkville have been witnessed at close range by Tabish Rizvi, the owner of a one-bedroom apartment on the ninth floor of a 45-story condominium.

He once enjoyed his glimpse of the East River: “It reminded me that we’re surrounded by water, that this place is different from the rest of America.”

But that was in 2000. Since then, new towers have totally cut off his view, but he doesn’t seem to mind. He has been busy over the years with three renovations of the 600-square-foot space. With the latest, “ ‘80s scissor closet doors” were replaced with sliding glass ones.

Eight years ago, the apartment cost \$292,000, and the three redos totaled \$48,000, but though he has no plans to

sell, he thinks he could get \$600,000 for the place today.

While Yorkville's skyline has changed, many residents take solace in its vibrant street life. On a recent afternoon, children wearing backpacks ducked into the AMC Loews Orpheum on Third Avenue to see the new Indiana Jones movie. A couple strolled through the leafy courtyard of the Church of the Holy Trinity. And a woman ordered coils of knackwurst (\$6.49 a pound) at Schaller & Weber, a butcher shop.

That shop is a vestige of a longtime German population, one whose traces linger in sometimes unexpected places. St. Joseph's Church, on East 87th Street, for example, holds a German-language Mass at 9:45 a.m. on the first Sunday of every month. [Pope Benedict XVI](#) paid a visit in April.

## WHAT YOU'LL FIND

For decades, the clattering Third Avenue elevated train cut off Yorkville from ritzier sections of the Upper East Side, like Carnegie Hill. Though the subway tracks were dismantled in 1955, a slight psychological barrier still exists, brokers and residents say.

The architecture, too, seems set apart. Five-story brick walk-up apartment buildings, many with heavy Romanesque arched windows, mark Yorkville's stock. What is missing here are those well-kept one-family town houses found closer to Central Park. Similarly, although the prewar apartment towers along East End Avenue are technically part of Yorkville, they too can feel like a place apart. The neighborhood's boundaries are 79th Street north to 96th Street, and Third Avenue to the East River.

The walk-ups contain mostly rentals, which make up 60 percent of the housing here, brokers say.

But there are also modern apartment buildings like the 1,437-unit Normandie Court, built in 1986, whose red-brick towers loom over East 95th Street, between Second and Third Avenues.

For buyers, co-ops make up about 85 percent of the apartments now for sale in the neighborhood.

Examples include the white-brick postwar Saxon Tower, on East 83rd Street, which has 114 apartments on 17 floors. Another is the Mayflower, on East 87th Street, a set piece for the movie version of [Neil Simon](#)'s "The Prisoner of Second Avenue," which has 119 apartments behind its rough-hewn facade.

Condos include the 47-story Waterford, with 230 units, completed in 1987; one-bedrooms there measure about 800 square feet.

Among the newer arrivals is the Century Tower, with chain stores at its ground level; a one-bedroom with about 650 square feet of space is listed at \$610,000.

There are more expensive condos under construction, like the Brompton, a red-brick colossus designed by [Robert A. M. Stern](#), which will have 165 apartments ranging from studios to five-bedrooms at 205 East 85th Street.

And the Azure, rising at 333 East 91st Street, with 128 units across 34 stories, is 15 percent sold since January, says Luis Vazquez, its sales director.

There's also the Cielo, on East 83rd Street. Just three sponsor units remain, out of 128 condos, said Chris Poore, a broker with the Corcoran Group.

There are the hulking Ruppert and Yorkville Towers, a four-building complex between East 90th and East 92nd Streets on the site of a former brewery. For decades they were part of the Mitchell-Lama program, but they left the affordable-housing program in 2003.

Two-thirds of its 1,257 units are condos and the rest rentals, with one-bedrooms starting at \$2,700 a month and two-bedrooms at \$3,600, though no units are now available, said Denise Kosta, the rental and sales manager.

## WHAT YOU'LL PAY

At the end of May, the average price for a one-bedroom co-op in a postwar doorman building was \$625,806, said Rena Goldstein, associate broker with Halstead Properties. In contrast, the average price for the same unit in an area a few blocks west, between Third and Fifth Avenues, listed at \$836,000, about a 30 percent premium. Average prices along East End Avenue were only slightly higher, at \$678,083.

The area's prices have risen with the city's; what's changed is that sellers have to bend, Ms. Goldstein said. "Buyers will come in and make an offer under the asking price," she said, "and that's a big change."

Average rents, meanwhile, depend on the age of the building. In new doorman buildings, one-bedrooms rent for \$3,250; a one-bedroom in an older buildings would rent for \$2,350, brokers said.

## WHAT TO DO

Stores, restaurants and bars are plentiful in Yorkville. Mustang Grill, with roomy outdoor seating, is a well-liked option, and \$4 cups of homemade ice cream can be found at a sidewalk stand at Eli's Manhattan, a two-level grocery.

Some merchants have taken a hit — their business is off by 30 percent, by some estimates — with the construction of the new Second Avenue subway, which has turned the blocks from East 95th to East 90th Streets into a mishmash of cranes, jackhammers, dump trucks and chain-link fencing.

## THE SCHOOLS

Yorkville's public schools are among [New York City's](#) strongest.

One elementary school is Bayard Taylor, on York Avenue, which enrolled about 700 students this year in kindergarten through fifth grade. On state exams in 2007, 82 percent of fourth graders met standards in reading and 92 percent in math.

Another option is Manhattan [New School](#), on East 82nd Street, which also has about 700 students. Last year, 91 percent of fourth graders met standards in reading, as 98 percent did in math.

For Grades 6 through 8, there is Robert F. Wagner Middle School, which, with nearly 1,300 students, is among the city's largest. In 2007, 71 percent of eighth graders met standards in reading, 69 percent in math.

Getting into the area's high school, [Eleanor Roosevelt](#), on East 76th Street, is daunting. Almost 3,300 students applied for 125 ninth-grade seats last year. To be accepted, students generally must have an 85 average in their core classes and have met standards on seventh-grade state exams.

On the SATs in 2007, its averages were 565 in math, 546 in reading and 549 in writing, versus 515 in math, 502 in reading and 494 in writing statewide.

There are many prestigious private institutions near Yorkville, like the Dalton School, whose middle and high schools are at East 89th Street, between Lexington and Park Avenues.

## THE COMMUTE

Until the new train is running, in 2015, it's a long walk to the subway. Commuters can head to Lexington Avenue to catch the No. 6 train at East 96th Street; they can also go to East 86th Street where the Nos. 4 and 5 trains also stop.

Nine bus lines serve the neighborhood, and an express bus, the X90, heads down York Avenue to the World Financial Center. But for now, construction has temporarily disrupted the schedule of the M15, which runs down Second.

## THE HISTORY

One of New York's smallest landmarks sits at 1501 Third Avenue, near East 84th Street. It is a 17-foot-tall sidewalk clock whose top is shaped like a pocket watch. It was built in 1898 by the E. Howard Clock Company to advertise a long-gone jewelry store.