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Living In Hamilton Heights: Harlem Enclave With River Views

By JULIE BESONEN



Credit Emon Hassan for The New York Times

The number of rescue dogs that Barry Katz crosses paths with in Hamilton Heights, a section of West [Harlem](#), tells him something about his neighborhood. “At this point, it’s not a wealthy area,” he said. “People love their pets but can’t afford to pay thousands of dollars for them.” Buggy, his walledd, French bulldog-Boston terrier mix, is also a rescue.

Mr. Katz, 57, a lawyer, moved into his two-bedroom condominium on Riverside Drive and West 146th Street last July. Selling his one-bedroom fifth-floor walk-up in the West Village (he declined to disclose the price), he paid \$260,000 less for a space in Hamilton Heights that was twice as big, with an elevator and eight windows facing Riverside Park and the Hudson River.

“I could sit here and look out all day long,” Mr. Katz said.

From river vistas to the neo-Gothic splendor of the [City College of New York](#), Hamilton Heights provides compelling sights around nearly every corner. On Amsterdam Avenue and 153rd Street, for instance, a mural of birds and a giant image of John James Audubon (who lived in the area and is buried at Trinity Church Cemetery on Broadway and West 155th Street) covers the facade of a building.

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611 WEST 147TH STREET A renovated three-bedroom townhouse with two full and two half baths, listed at \$2.3 million. (212) 381-2587

Credit Emon Hassan for The New York Times

Avi Gitler, 36, who founded his gallery, [Gitler & _____](#), at 3629 Broadway in 2014, enlisted artists to paint roll-down gates and buildings in Upper Manhattan with birds that are threatened by climate change, according to the National Audubon Society, a collaborator on the project. “We contact landlords and store owners to get everyone’s permission,” Mr. Gitler said. The goal of the [Audubon Mural Project](#), as it is called, is to depict 314 species on 250 murals by 2018. Currently, 25 are on view in and around Hamilton Heights.

The neighborhood was named for Alexander Hamilton, whose 1802 home is nestled at the northern tip of St. Nicholas Park (moved twice from its original location nearby) and open to the public as the [Hamilton Grange National Memorial](#).

Between 1886 and 1906, rowhouse developments and low-rise apartment buildings supplanted farmland, according to the city’s [Landmarks Preservation Commission](#). Affluent black families flourished there in the 1930s, with Sugar Hill, an eastern enclave of Hamilton Heights, perhaps the most desirable area.

“When I moved here 17 years ago, I saw mostly African-Americans and Dominicans, and now it’s more multicultural,” said Judith Insell, 46, a member of [Manhattan Community Board 9](#), which includes Hamilton Heights. A professional musician, Ms. Insell said, “I’ve noticed a lot of young musicians with instruments on their backs all over the place.”

Brad Taylor, 57, an architect and another member of the community board, said, “Younger folks are moving in, and folks who have been here longer are worried about it, since it could mean the price of their housing or the cost of goods and services going up.” He added, “We’ve always seemed a little behind what’s happening in Central Harlem, but it’s picking up.”

Still, a slower pace prevails than in many parts of the city, said Carleen Spencer, 79, a real estate agent who has lived in the area for nearly eight years. “We have trees around us and the pavements are very wide,” she said. “It feels peaceful.”



What You'll Find

The boundaries of Hamilton Heights stretch roughly from the Hudson River to St. Nicholas Avenue and from West 135th to West 155th Street. The neighborhood is shaped by hilly topography and a community that has worked to preserve open space and discourage large-scale development.

Streets of refined rowhouses slope down to the graceful, wooded curves of Riverside Drive. Convent Avenue, Hamilton Terrace and St. Nicholas Avenue are lined with 19th- and early 20th-century time capsules of intricate brickwork and limestone.

In 2015, [Manhattan Community District 9](#), including Morningside Heights and West Harlem, was 44 percent Hispanic, 25 percent black and 22 percent white.

What You'll Pay

On Jan. 28 there were 42 properties listed for sale in Hamilton Heights on Streeteasy.com, ranging from a one-bedroom [fixer-upper](#) for \$180,000 in an H.D.F.C. (income restricted) co-op to a renovated circa-1899 [five-bedroom townhouse](#) for \$2.35 million. Median sales prices for co-ops and condos in 2015 were \$290,000 for studios, up 28.9 percent from 2014, and \$440,000 for one-bedrooms, up 20.5 percent, according to Jonathan J. Miller, the president of the appraisal firm Miller Samuel. Two-bedrooms were up 6.1 percent, to \$604,500, while three-bedrooms jumped 45.2 percent, to \$813,000.



742 ST. NICHOLAS AVENUE, #15 A two-bedroom condo in a building recently converted from rentals, listed at \$780,000. (646) 253-0341

Credit Emon Hassan for The New York Times

According to data provided by [Streeteasy.com](#), the median sales price of townhouses in 2015 was \$1,896,000, an increase of 24.1 percent over the previous year's median price.

As for rentals, Don Burroughs, an agent at the Bohemia Realty Group, said studios range from around \$1,350 to \$1,800; one-bedrooms from \$1,650 to \$2,200; two-bedrooms, \$1,900 to \$2,800; and three-bedrooms, \$2,200 to \$3,300.

What to Do

A new pedestrian ramp is [under construction at Riverside Park](#), arching over train tracks and the Henry Hudson Parkway, to make the waterfront paths more accessible. [Riverbank State Park](#), reachable by a footbridge at West 145th Street, has an Olympic-size pool, a covered skating rink, a softball field and tennis and basketball courts.

Music, dance, theater and film by contemporary artists of color is found at [Harlem Stage](#). The [Dance Theater of Harlem](#)'s company sometimes performs at Sunday matinees and has free open rehearsals, called [Thursdays@DTH](#). [Harlem School of the Arts](#) and [Aaron Davis Hall](#) at City College present dance, theater, music and visual arts.

Popular local restaurants include [Harlem Public](#) for pub fare and craft beers, [Anchor Wine Bar](#) for an evening of pasta and Chianti, and [Chopped Parsley](#) for sushi.



750 RIVERSIDE DRIVE, #3G A two-bedroom, gut-renovated condo with Hudson River views, listed at \$650,000. (646) 770-3379
Credit Emon Hassan for The New York Times

The Schools

Two elementary schools share a campus: [Public School 368 Hamilton Heights School](#), serving about 220 students from kindergarten through Grade 5, and [P.S. 153 Adam Clayton Powell](#), with about 740 students from prekindergarten through Grade 5. According to the city's School Quality Snapshot, 18 percent of Hamilton Heights School students met state standards in English in 2014-2015, versus 30 percent citywide; 26 percent did so in math, versus 39 percent. At Adam Clayton Powell, 21 percent met standards in English, and 31 percent in math.

A high-achieving middle school is the [Mott Hall School](#), serving about 275 students from Grades 6 to 8. On state tests, 52 percent of students met standards in English, versus 30 percent citywide; 57 percent met standards in math, versus 31 percent citywide.

The highly selective [High School for Mathematics, Science and Engineering](#) at City College, where admission is by exam, serves about 475 students in Grades 9 to 12. Average SAT scores for the class of 2015 were 610 in reading, 683 in math and 596 in writing; citywide averages were 444, 466 and 439.

The Commute

The A and D trains at 145th Street make the trip to Midtown Manhattan in about 20 minutes. The 1 train makes local stops at 137th Street-City College and 145th Street-Broadway. The D also stops part time at 155th Street, and the B and C stop part time in the neighborhood. Among the buses are the M3, M4, M5, M11, M100 and M101.

The History

In 1800, Alexander Hamilton bought land to build a "little retreat, where I hope for a pure and unalloyed happiness with my excellent wife and sweet children." His final years fell short of that, according to [Ron Chernow's biography "Alexander Hamilton."](#) His wife, Eliza, was pregnant with their eighth child in 1801 when their eldest son, Philip, 19, was killed in a duel. Their daughter, Angelica, 17, went mad. Lin-Manuel Miranda's "[It's Quiet Uptown](#)" (from the musical "Hamilton") describes how the couple found solace in their tranquil home, the Grange — that is, until 1804, when Hamilton was killed in a duel by Aaron Burr.