

THINK SMALL

THE JEWEL-BOX ENCLAVE KNOWN AS POMANDER WALK GETS A GENTLE FACE-LIFT—AND GROWS EVER MORE DESIRABLE

By S.Jhoanna Robledo | August 22, 2005



(Photo: James Leynse/Corbis for New York Magazine)

The Upper West Side is famously resistant to change. New buildings are picketed, and renovations to prewar structures are cautiously—sometimes vigorously—monitored by the neighbors. So when steel platforms and black shrouds appeared last month in front of Pomander Walk, a block-long, gated street running from West 94th to West 95th Streets between Broadway and West End Avenue, neighbors grew curious. “I noticed the scaffolding was up,” says John Clifton, an ad exec who hoped the complex wouldn’t be torn down for yet another new tower. He can breathe easy: The beloved mews is going nowhere. Instead, it’s slated for a seven-figure makeover restoring the façade to its twenties glory and enhancing its allure.

Built to resemble the London stage set from a romantic 1910 play called—what else?—Pomander Walk, the enclave is chiefly made up of 27 Tudor-style houses, most lining a narrow pathway and carved into 63 co-op apartments. Its Alice-in-Wonderland feel, fostered by its charming English gardens, has

attracted fans like Humphrey Bogart, who lived there, and Woody Allen, who has one character in *Hannah and Her Sisters* wax poetic about it. Once residents enter the gates, “the city just drops away,” says actor Peter Francis James, who has called it home since 1980. “People are always peeking through the gates,” adds musician Pete Smith, who’s been accosted by passersby asking if they can stroll through. (They can’t; it’s private.)

The exclusivity comes at a price, of course. In winter, a two-bedroom sold for \$610,000, and, months later, a similar apartment went for \$725,000. Those numbers may not seem all that high for the Upper West Side, but the spaces are dainty, with small windows that don’t let in much light, says Halstead’s Shelle Sklarsh. Bellmarc agent Natalie Weiss, who grew up there and got married on the Walk, will further test the ceiling with her new listing, a rare, fully renovated, approximately 1,500-square-foot house created from three original apartments that’s priced at \$1.55 million.

Other caveats: Ancient plumbing requires that one choose between a dishwasher and a washer and dryer, and homeowners pay a 15 percent flip tax when they sell. Still, says Sklarsh, “it’s a tranquil oasis unlike any other.” Weiss says she has such fond memories of growing up on the Walk she’d love to move back, but only “if something opened up in my price range.” That’s not likely anytime soon.

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MOVERS

SALES AND THE CITY

Actor David Eigenberg, who played Miranda's boyish beau Steve Brady on HBO's *Sex and the City*, has sold the West 17th Street duplex he "lovingly restored" himself at a price of about \$1.1 million. The renovation added such offbeat touches as wrought-iron-and-glass doors straight off the *SATC* set, a three-tier roof deck with a hot-and-cold outdoor shower, and a claw-foot tub in the kitchen. Moreover, all that work paid off: Corcoran's Janice Figueroa says her clients, theatrical-costume designer Anne Kennedy and photographer Wit McKay, "had a wish list of their ideal apartment, and this was it and more." As for Eigenberg, who played the quintessential New York nice guy to a T? He'll soon be on movie screens in *Love, Ludlow*, an indie comedy set on Long Island that was quite well-received at Sundance. And on the real-estate front, "he's off to California working on his new house," says his broker, Bruce Wayne Solomon of Prudential Douglas Elliman.

SAME SPACE, DIFFERENT PLACE

NOT SO COMMON, THESE CHARGES

Both these Battery Park City apartments are in good condition and have nearly the same amount of space and comparable views. Why the price difference of \$65,000 (or 18 percent)? The slightly more intimate townhouse section of the building—where there are fewer apartments per elevator stem, and the entrance is on a cul-de-sac—has a much higher monthly common charge, explains listing agent Heather E. Stein. Correspondingly, the apartment with a smaller fee is more desirable and sells for more; in the end, one's month-to-month outlay for either space is likely to be about the same, give or take \$100 or so.

2 South End Avenue, Apartment 4M

The Facts: One-bedroom, one-bath, 574-square-foot condo.

Asking Price: \$425,000.

Charges and Taxes: \$1,344.

Agent: Heather E. Stein, Brown Harris Stevens.

2 South End Avenue, Apartment TH9

The Facts: One-bedroom, one-bath, 548-square-foot condo.

Asking Price: \$360,000.

Charges and Taxes: \$2,037.

Agent: Heather E. Stein, Brown Harris Stevens.