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LIVING ALONG/Museum Mile

At the Intersection of Art and Nature

By C. J. HUGHES

FIRST-RATE paintings, photos and films offer plenty of reasons to duck inside the nine cultural institutions lining Museum Mile, a narrow slice of Upper Manhattan fronting Central Park.

But on a warm Sunday afternoon, judging from the crowd near the Metropolitan Museum of Art, it seemed as if most residents of and visitors to the area, which cuts through Carnegie Hill and East Harlem, were outside.

Couples hauled shopping bags, two to a hand, past dozens of tables heaped with art-themed bric-a-brac, like Van Gogh self-portraits modified as magnets. Wide strollers stood wheel to wheel in a playground; their passengers were now busy scrambling up flat-top Mayan-style pyramids. And hundreds sat rapt on the museum's steps while a five-piece doo-wop group crooned Sam Cooke's "Wonderful World," as if bidding a last hurrah to fall.

On weekdays, a more subdued mood prevails along the well-scrubbed blocks, which have a reputation as beautiful and pricey. Passers-by are more accustomed to keeping company with the stone creatures crouching on the area's castlelike buildings — the owls on the Ukrainian Institute of America on East 79th Street, say, or the cherubs at a converted condominium at 1200 Fifth Avenue.

Contrasts like these are a distinguishing feature of Museum Mile, said Ron Berger, an advertising executive, who in 2008 moved from a four-bedroom house in Passaic County, N.J., to a two-bedroom co-op.

The windows of his corner unit, which cost \$2.995 million, at once reveal the natural tableau of Central Park, and the architecture of the former Vanderbilt mansion that is home to the Neue Galerie New York, a museum of German and Austrian art.

"You have this incredible building," Mr. Berger said, "and when the leaves are down, you can also see lights coming through from cars on the park drive. It's one of those great New York views."

Not that the changes in scenery are always harmonious. The renovation of the Guggenheim Museum, at 88th Street, for example, drew complaints about its three-year duration.

Other museums have closed for extended periods while refurbishing, like El Museo del Barrio, on Fifth and 104th, which until October had been shut down for 17 months. Classroom trailers hog the yard of the Cooper-Hewitt museum, at 81st, while it expands, and Goethe-Institut New York, on Fifth at 83rd, will relocate to SoHo next month to allow for the installation of sprinklers.

The Mount Sinai Medical Center has generated controversy with its plan for a 238-unit rental tower at 4 102nd Street, because at 45 stories it will be the highest structure around, even surpassing the black hulk of the Annenberg Building at Fifth and 99th.

The new high-rise, being developed by Durst Fetner Residential, helps Mount Sinai finance a new wing. As part of the deal, the hospital, which did not return calls seeking comment, also sold Durst Fetner a prewar former rental at 1212 Fifth Avenue, which will house 83 condos, said Hal Fetner, the chief ex-



BERENIS MARQUEZ FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

ON THE AVENUE
Looking north up Fifth Avenue toward the Jewish Museum at 92nd Street gives a taste of the area's botanical and architectural beauties.



Its developer is Brickman; Robert A. M. Stern is the architect.

Though initially scheduled for a 2009 completion, the building is now to be finished in June, with the condos following next winter, said Roderick O'Connor, a Brickman principal.

Facing it is Arthur A. Schomburg Plaza, a twin-towered complex recently removed from the Mitchell-Lama affordable housing program and rebranded as the "Heritage at Schomburg Plaza."

Side streets nearby, like East 104th, contain worn apartments laced with fire escapes; better-aged row houses, whose earth-toned stone facades recall battlements, stand on East 94th.

Squeezed amid taller buildings to the south are Beaux-Arts town houses with lanterns, balconies and verandah roofs, like the one owned by Mayor Bloomberg on East 79th. Condos are part of the mix, too: The soaring 30 East 85th was completed in 1987.

Museum Mile is probably best known for elegant brick co-ops, including a dozen designed by J. E. R. Carpenter, who can count Dr. Marianne Legato, an internist and cardiologist, among his fans.

Last year, Dr. Legato left her rental in the Manhattan House at East 66th Street, where she had lived for 40 years, and paid \$2.1 million for a six-room unit at 1150 Fifth. Though it required a "significant" redo, she said, the building's architecture is worth it.

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What You'll Find

Actually measuring about a mile and a half in length, the rectangular neighborhood, bound thematically by museums, is bound geographically by Fifth and Madison Avenues, and East 79th and East 104th Streets, with much of it protected by two landmark districts.

At the northern point sits the unfinished shell of the first museum to be built since the Guggenheim in 1959. (The Whitney opened in 1966 but is just south of Museum Mile.) Called the Museum for African Art, it will feature a three-level space topped by 116 condos.

prices remain strong.

From January to mid-November of 2007, near the market's peak, there were 252 sales of co-ops, condos and town houses, for an average price of \$4.2 million, according to sales data.

Prices ranged from \$399,000, for a 400-square-foot co-op at 1161 Madison Avenue, to \$46 million for a seven-bedroom co-op at 1060 Fifth Avenue.

The year has seen 94 deals, a 63 percent decrease, largely in line with Manhattan as a whole. Prices have barely budged; the average is \$4.01 million.

"If you did not have to sell your apartment," said Liz Fishman, a Stribling broker, "you didn't put it on the market, because you would get a reduced price." Many sellers "figure, let's wait till the market comes up."

Bamford are all here or close by.

What to Do

There's the park, of course. But save for sidewalk vendors, Fifth Avenue here doesn't offer much shopping. For that, residents head to Madison, which is chockablock with boutiques, including hip clothing stores for kids, between 88th and 90th Streets.

In the window of Greenstones, Too, recently, there was a child-size three-quarter-sleeve T-shirt emblazoned with a motorcycle, while Bumpoint displayed designer denim. Parents might savor the Corner Bookstore, which casts a warm glow on an evening sidewalk.

The Commute

The Nos. 4, 5 and 6 subway lines stop at 85th Street and Lexington Avenue. Local 6 service is available at 77th, 96th and 103rd Streets. But to avoid the eastward walk, some residents opt for the bus, including the M1, M2, M3 and M4, which offer limited-stop service along 95th Avenue to Midtown in 15 minutes.

The History

Frawley Circle, the Columbus-Circle-like roundabout with skinny trees at Central Park's northeastern corner, was named for James I. Frawley, a state senator who also ran the construction company that built the Manhattan and Queensboro Bridges. The statue that anchors the circle, however, is of Duke Ellington, the jazz musician, immortalized here because of his Harlem connection, alongside a grand piano.

The Schools

The public schools are mixed. At Central Park East 2, which teaches kindergarten through fifth grade, 63 percent of fourth-graders met state standards last year in math while 44 percent did so in English. Citywide, those percentages were 85 and 69.

At Public School 171, which teaches kindergarten through eighth grade, 100 percent of fourth-graders met standards in math and 98 percent in English. In eighth grade, percentages were 96 and 57, versus 71 and 57 citywide.

At Park East High School last year SAT averages were 407 in math, 391 in reading and 390 in writing, versus 515, 502 and 494 statewide.

But such are the area's contrasts that it is hard to throw a squash ball and not hit a private school, St. David's, St. Bernard's, Dalton, Spence and Nightingale-

What You'll Pay

Sales activity has dropped significantly along Museum Mile, though

ONLINE: COMMUNITY PROFILE

Demographic data, map and sales on the Upper East Side, and a slide show on Museum Mile:

nytimes.com/realstate