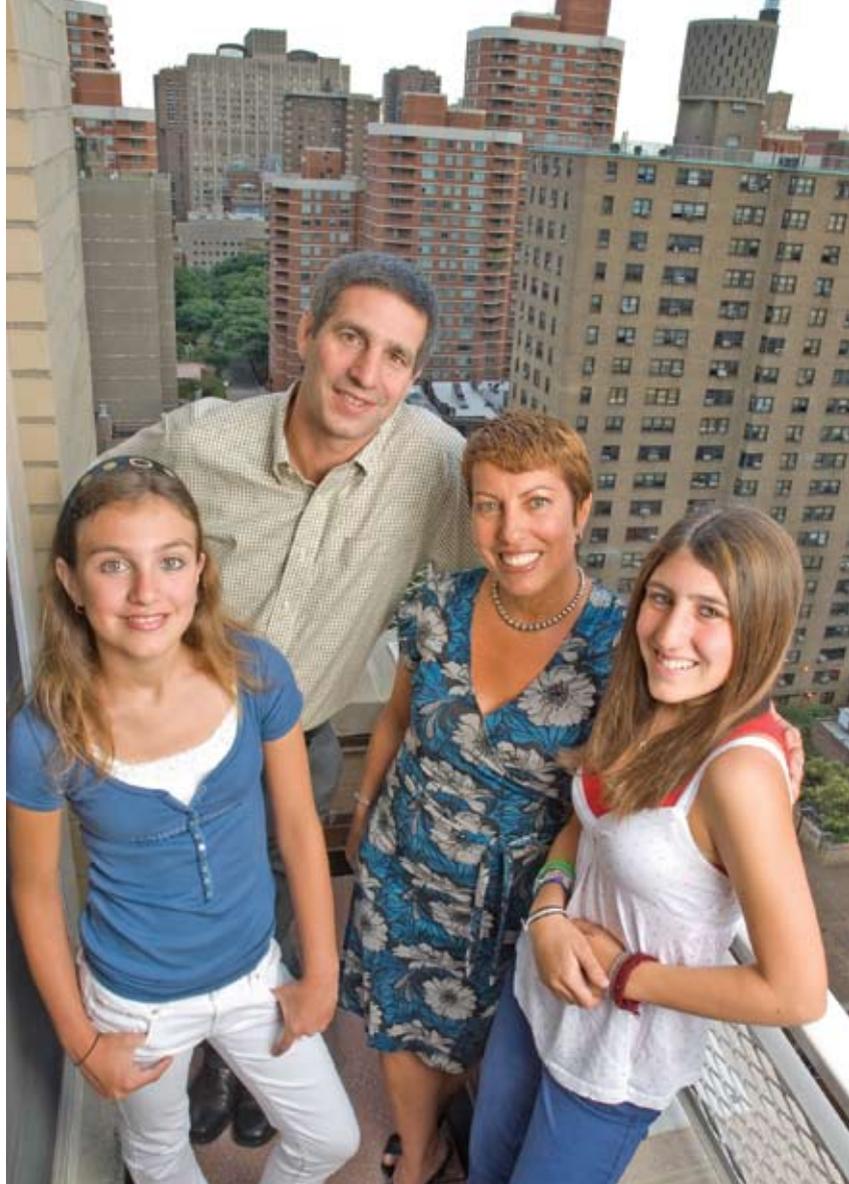


Wouldn't Live Anywhere Else

Lisa Urban and Michael Urban, with daughters Jennifer and Zoe.



New Yorkers Talk About Their Neighborhoods

By Steve Cutler

MURRAY HILL

Attorney Lisa Breier Urban shares a destiny with the Second Avenue Deli.

"My first apartment was on 12th Street between Second and Third," she recalls, two blocks from the iconic pastrami emporium.

Loyal patrons of the Deli — "I love the tongue, my husband has the pastrami and chopped liver and we're both fans of the pea soup"

— Urban and her husband Michael never suspected four years ago when they moved to 28th Street and Third Avenue that the legendary kosher restaurant would one day follow them to Murray Hill.

"We were always going to the

Second Avenue Deli back then," says Urban, "so when they opened up here we were incredibly excited."

Beyond tongue sandwiches, for Urban, whose two girls, Jennifer

'People are people and people like good food.'

— Michael Urban, Murray Hill

and Zoe, are 11 and 13, Murray Hill is about school and family. They've both attended the highly-rated PS 116 and Urban has been on the executive board of the school's PTA since 2001.

"My kids all have friends here and by extension my husband and I have friends here," she says, "which gives us a feeling of neighborhoodishness." And she finds Murray Hill to be "a little more low-key and community-oriented" than other residential neighborhoods, such as the Upper East Side, which suits her.

For Second Avenue Deli owner Jack Lebewohl, the major difference between the East Village and Murray Hill — "it was easier to park on 10th Street. You had metered parking off the corner for a quarter of the block, and then you had alternate side. Here you have alternate side on one side and commercial on the other."

"You can't park here." He has resigned himself to having to put the





Second Avenue Deli owner Jack Lebewohl.

car in a lot. “There is no choice in the matter,” he says.

Parking aside, “People are people and people like good food,” he observes. A famous destination restaurant, Second Avenue Deli could be anywhere and business has been going pretty much as usual. Except, Lebewohl reports, “we find that the crowd coming in during the evenings is younger now. We’re selling a lot more hamburgers than we sold before.”

For chef Alex Urena, owner of the Spanish tapas restaurant Pamplona on East 28th Street off Madison Avenue, the move to Murray Hill made a world of difference, especially compared to Marseilles, a restaurant whose kitchen he ran in the theater district. “Marseilles used to be packed from about 5:30,” he recalls, “but after eight o’clock it was almost halfway empty.”

Here the theater IS the food, and the festive décor and Spanish music. “A tapas place has to be something fun,” says Urena. “Sometimes I get packed around eight o’clock”

Urena figures Murray Hill is about to become a destination spot for people from all over the city. “It’s going to be a good neighborhood for restaurants in maybe two more years,” he says. “You know, Union Square and the 20s was hot before us, and I think we’re going to catch up to them.”

The action on the trendy Park Avenue strip is flowing upstream to Murray Hill at a steady clip. “There is

definitely a lot of change in Murray Hill,” reports Bond New York real estate agent Liz Spano, who lives at 26th Street and Lexington Avenue, which she calls “Gramurry,” where Gramercy Park meets Murray Hill.

“Restaurants like Prime House are opening,” she notes. The elegant, modern-design steakhouse replaced the plasma TV-laden sports bar Park Avenue Country Club at 27th Street. “And a lot of the Indian restaurants are completely revamping and cleaning up their act — going upscale.”

The quiet residential neighborhood is getting a slew of luxury high-rise condominiums — 33 of them according to Warburg Realty agent Burt Rubin, a 35-year resident of Murray Hill, “and you’re starting to see stretch limousines.”

At the same time, it’s becoming more family-oriented, he adds — “you see baby carriages all around.” To enhance its neighborhoodishness, the Murray Hill Neighborhood Association has just planted over 150 new trees in the area, says Rubin, a trustee of the group. And Jane Hsu, principal of PS 116 is working to put a green roof on the school.

Murray Hill certainly doesn’t lack in smarts. “Sixty-nine-percent of the people in 10016 have a bachelor’s degree or better,” boasts Rubin, who claims, “the rest of the country is only 25-percent.” And PS 116 is one of the brainiest schools in the system.

“One of its teams won the national chess championships,” he says. “They didn’t win weightlifting, you know.”

TRIBECA

Even in the six short years since Lan Tran Cao opened her art gallery, V-Gallery, and adjacent Vietnamese restaurant, V-Café, on Greenwich Street, and moved into an apartment right above, she’s noticed a change in the neighborhood.

“Tribeca used to be an artist’s neighborhood,” she says. “Used to be.”

Some galleries, like her own, have survived, and some artists still live and work there, but only “the accomplished ones,” she says. “The famous photographers or painters.”

But, according to Benj Gershman, a photographer and bassist for the rock band O.A.R., even if beginning artists have been priced out of the area, “one of the cool things about Tribeca is that even if you’re not an artist with a studio, it’s the kind of neighborhood that artists will gravitate towards because of the artistic vibe down there.”

Taking up residence in Tribeca three-and-a-half years ago, Gershman has found the area ripe for artistic entrepreneurship. He has founded an art community called Look at Life, which runs exhibitions and programs like City Culture, New York, which offers resident artists the opportunity to exhibit their work at Central Park Summerstage. The



“The community has a very good mix of people,”

— Lan Tran Cao,
Tribeca

group also has a program which places art in the model apartments of new-construction condominiums.

Also, while the neighborhood has become more upscale — its 10013 zip code was cited by Forbes magazine as one of the wealthiest in the country — it remains comfortable, friendly and, says Cao, more interesting than most.

“The community has a very good mix of people,” says Cao. “There are professionals and TV, movie and media people. And families. PS 234 is one of the best schools in the city, so people are flocking down here to get their kids into that school. Getting to know people with wide varieties of experiences and backgrounds is a breath of fresh air.”

Also, says Cao, “I really like the architecture down here. The structures are really beautiful. I don’t know any part of Manhattan that has a similar loft style, with the old skylights and steel doors.”

While the Tribeca Film Festival has raised the profile and energy level of the neighborhood, as has Nobu, Bouley and Chanterelle, it doesn’t teem with outsiders as yet.

“A lot of friends say they come down here maybe once a year,” says Cao. “It’s like another country.” But, she predicts, “I see it becoming even more popular than the Meatpacking District one day.”

Till then, residents have the amazing waterfront promenade and parks to themselves, as well as tennis courts at both the Hudson River Park and Chambers Street, which Cao and her friend Sonia Stock frequent three or four times a week at midnight, their only undisturbed time of day — winters included.

“Winter doesn’t bother me,” says Stock, Prudential Douglas Elliman Real Estate agent and former tennis pro, “as long as I’ve got plenty of layers.”

With the real estate market having slowed down a bit in recent times, Stock stays busy trudging off to a greater number

Benj Gershman,
a photographer
and bassist.

of apartments per client than in the boom times.

Where people used to see 10 or 20 apartments before settling on one, now they see 20 or 30. “I have one person who saw 119 homes before I found them a place,” she says. “I keep a running roster, because you don’t want to see the same apartment twice.”

Architect Dana Sottile and her husband saw 80 apartments before closing on their pre-war loft, which is now finally complete after a two-year renovation. Sottile first discovered Tribeca when she was commissioned to design 48 Laight Street, a boutique condominium.

Living on the Upper West Side at the time, she found herself seduced by the terrain in Tribeca, which, she says, “is more interesting architecturally, more muscular,” having been built for manufacturing.

“I love it,” says Sottile. “Like people have chemistry, I have chemistry with Tribeca. I’m here to stay.”

WILLIAMSBURG

Williamsburg was not always the trendiest neighborhood in the United States.

When he was growing up there, recalls Dave





Architect Dana Sottile
and husband
Kevin Reymond.

*‘Like people have chemistry,
I have chemistry with Tribeca.
I’m here to stay.’*

— Dana Sottile,
Tribeca

Maundrell, owner of Aptsandlofts, a brokerage on Bedford Avenue, his chums at the high school he commuted to in Manhattan had hardly heard of it.

“You know the Williamsburg Bridge?” he would say. “You ever hear of Peter Lugar? Yeah, well, over there.”

Williamsburg was a blue collar neighborhood then, he adds. “No one got off at Bedford Avenue,” the subway stop that feeds the bustling area now, the first stop out of Manhattan on the L train. “It was a 100-percent ghost town. Everyone got off the second stop on the L train, the Lorimer stop. The Bedford area was mainly industrial.”

Maundrell saw the tide changing, he recalls, “in 1992, taking the train coming home from the city at nine or 10 o’clock at night after work I started seeing people get off the train, younger artist types. And from there it just got bigger and bigger and bigger.”

Some of the early landmarks in the hipsterfication of Williamsburg were the (still-thriving) Planet Thailand, Vera Cruz and Sea Thai Restaurant — and Galapagos, the much-heralded bar/art space/performance scene.

“When I first started working in the neighborhood it was mostly rental apartments and houses for sale,” recalls Maundrell. “Then, back about five years ago the first condos came in and now it’s becoming more of a high-end neighborhood. The artists that have made

Williamsburg the name that it is today are long gone.”

Still, he says, “there is a real sense of community here. One Sunday this summer there was an Italian festival on Havemeyer Street and Bedford Avenue was closed for pedestrian traffic and people were hanging out on the waterfront and there were concerts in McCarren Park and the whole neighborhood was alive.”

With development on the Williamsburg waterfront just getting started and a spate of true luxury high-rise condominiums just now opening for pre-construction sales, “Williamsburg is still in it’s infancy,” says Maundrell. “There is a lot of room to grow.”

“The price for apartments is about one-third less than in Manhattan,” observes Andrew Kevelson, owner of Baxter Liebchen Vintage Modern Design, a shop in DUMBO specializing in Danish furniture from the fifties and Sixties, “and I believe that the coastal neighborhoods in Brooklyn will gentrify sooner and are better investments.”

A resident of the one of the new condominiums springing up around McCarren Park, Kevelson says, “I was looking for a modern-architected, lofty apartment, with views, nice amenities and parking — and good value per square foot.”

An non-recovering workaholic, Kevelson admitted his experience so far of Williamsburg has extended only so far as, “primarily enjoying the restaurants,” including the famous ones, such as Planet Thai and Sea, and he says, “I highly recommend Marlow and Sons and Dressler on Broadway.”

Kevelson is not too busy to enjoy “the friendly neighborhood feeling and the vibrant, colorful, multi cultural scene.” Not to mention the unobstructed views of McCarren Park. “I can see the performing stage at McCarren Pool,” he says, and hear it if he chooses. “My windows are soundproof, so when they’re closed you can’t hear anything. But if I just open them, you can hear the band playing quite clearly.”

RIVERDALE

Many who live in Riverdale in The Bronx, when they say where they live, leave out the part about The Bronx. Jennefer Witter leaves it in, no problem.

Raised in The Bronx and ready for a change, Witter, principal of the Boreland Group, a public relations firm, moved to Riverdale in 1990, she says, “because it’s almost like living in suburbia, with lots of trees and grass





Andrew Kevelson, owner of a design firm .

and birds chirping outside the window.”

Witter has seen changes in 18 years, but one thing has stayed the same. “The prices here are ridiculous,” she says, meaning the opposite of what people in Manhattan mean when they say that. Of the one-bedroom apartment she bought in 1997, she says, “It was cheap then and even now it’s cheap compared to Manhattan prices.”

Indeed, Witter recalls shopping for furniture for the new place. “I mentioned to somebody that I was buying a dining room set and they said, ‘you have room for a dining room table?!’ I said, yeah, and I have four moldings, hardwood floors and a separate eat-in kitchen.”

When she moved to the area in 1990, recalls Witter, “there were very few professional singles living here. It was mostly senior citizens and it was very a drab place to be at night.”

Not anymore. The neighborhood has attracted young people from all the boroughs and Johnson Avenue, a main drag, “is now a thriving strip, with a huge number of restaurants on either side,” says Witter, such as Josepina, which serves Italian, and Palace of Japan, which has expanded and modernized to suit the new demographic, as has Madisons and Greentree on Riverdale Avenue.

“And for the first time we actually have a Starbucks,” adds Witter.

For better or worse, Riverdale has yet to explode in the way some of its Brooklyn counterparts have. “This could

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be like Park Slope, but for some reason we still have not been able to take that additional step,” observes Witter. Which might account for Riverdale’s small town feel.

“The people who live in your building all know one another and look out for one another,” says Witter. “You smile and say hello to people on the street. And now with younger families moving in you have children laughing and playing and it just revitalizes everything.”

Riverdale’s 45,000 residents live in every sort of dwelling.

According to architect William Hallisky, vice president of Meridian Design, “The housing stock goes from one extreme to another and everything in between. I just love looking at the houses — the urban fabric is my museum on the weekends.”

“The Fieldston section is just really stunning,” says Hallisky, “The mansions are so beautiful, as is anything along the river.”

While smaller properties all over Riverdale were torn down after World War II to make way for apartment buildings to accommodate returning servicemen, as they were all over the country, Hallisky says, “Riverdale was able to do things on a scale that maintained the trees and kept a slower pace, maybe because the streets are very irregular up here and it’s isolated geographically from the rest of the city.”

The strikingly modern new condominiums on the rise in Riverdale make an interesting juxtaposition to the traditional buildings that have defined the area. But, Hallisky points out, “there are some very modern buildings that went up in the late sixties and early seventies. Some people find them disgusting. I think they’re beautiful. Riverdale has its own version of the Fontainebleau, 3333 Henry Hudson Parkway, The Whitehall, with a pool with cabanas. It’s very cool.” The building also provides a day spa to local residents.

A native of Tampa Bay, Florida, Hallisky’s first dwelling in New York City was in the Financial District. When friends recommended he check out Riverdale, he told them, he recalls, “I haven’t been above Union Square in a year. But when I came up here, I fell in love. The scale of the neighborhood immediately caused stress relief. I didn’t give a second thought about the distance or anything like that.” It is, after all, just 20 minutes to Manhattan on MetroNorth.

“Between Wave Hill Park to the east, and everything that that offers, including an equestrian center — I like to ride — the tennis courts and basketball courts, to the hiking in the virgin forest that is Riverdale Park on the Hudson, it’s wonderful,” says Hallisky.”

“I wanted a place to be able to come home to at a reasonable price, with a good amount of light, and still be in New York. It’s the city when I need it to be the city, and the burbs when I need it to be the burbs.”

‘It’s the city when I need it to be the city, and the burbs when I need it to be the burbs.’

— William Hallisky,
Riverdale



Jennefer Witter enjoys ‘stunning’ Riverdale.



Architect
William Hallisky.