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Neighborhoods Revealed

REDEFINING THE SKYLINE ALONG THE HIGH LINE

By: Filippa Edberg-Manuel



My friends and I no longer call it West Chelsea. We live in the High Line Area. This is a neighborhood that is changing and developing every day. To me, this neighborhood symbolizes what New York is all about: a constant moving energy, an eclectic mix of old and new, art and fashion, high and low...and above all, like in a futuristic novel...we have a park in the sky.

Spanning from The Meatpacking District, West Village, and West Chelsea to the Southern part of Hell's Kitchen a new neighborhood is slowly taking shape: The High Line Neighborhood. This is the area surrounding the High Line, the 1.45-mile-long freight train tracks originally constructed in the 1930-s, running 22 blocks from Gansevoort Street to 34th Street. Former slaughterhouses, gas stations and hang outs for drug dealers and transsexual prostitute are today host to some of the city's coolest boutiques, hippest restaurants and most exclusive clubs and hotels.

Friends of the High Line have been advocating to save the High Line since 1999 when the Giuliani administration was seeking to have the 70-year-old viaduct demolished. Today over 2,000,000 people have visited Section 1 (from Gansevoort to 20th Street) of the elevated park since the opening in June 2009. Section 2, which extends from 20th to 30th Street, is under construction and is expected to open during spring 2011.

Since the mid-1990s, Chelsea became a center of the New York art scene. As art galleries were priced out of Soho, the old industrial lofts of West Chelsea turned into perfect art galleries and lofts. From 16th Street to 27th Street, between 10th and 11th Avenues, there are somewhere between 350 to 400 art galleries. A rezoning was designed to protect the West Chelsea Arts district and allow for the development of world class architecture on its periphery.

The city rezoned the area in 2005, allowing for a large district around the High Line in which air rights could be transferred, and also allowing for a bonus that permitted developers denser apartment buildings if they include one-fifth of the units as affordable housing.

The West Chelsea/High Line Rezoning Plan by the City of New York's Department of Planning paired with the opening of the High Line park, has led to a construction boom that might be unrivaled in terms of the instant creation of super-expensive real estate and spurred the development of over 1,000 residential units and 2 million square feet of commercial space.

Today the neighborhood is being lined with architectural wonders by "Starchitects" like Richard Meier, Neil Denari, Linda Roy, Gary Handel, Audrey Matlock, Enrique Norten and Robert A.M. Stern. Frank Gehry's IAC building, Shigeru Ban's Metal Shutter Houses, Annabelle Selldorf's 100 11th Avenue, and Jean Nouvel's 200 Eleventh Avenue are among the new structures redefining the skyline.

If you can't afford to buy into one of these master pieces, you can always enjoy looking at them while strolling down the High Line. It's particularly pretty as the sun is setting over NJ.

