

Bryant Park: A Growing Neighborhood in Central Manhattan

Living In

By C. J. HUGHES NOV. 8, 2017



Credit: Vincent Tullo for The New York Times

It seems far-fetched. But there is an area in the heart of Manhattan ringing an open space — one graced with bluestone paths and Beaux-Arts-style lampposts the color of pistachio ice cream — that is not first and foremost a residential enclave.

Unlike the blocks around Gramercy Park, Tompkins Square Park or even parts of Central Park, the area surrounding Bryant Park, a nearly 10-acre spread at West 42nd Street, between Fifth Avenue and the Avenue of the Americas, has for a century been mostly a business district. And while co-ops and condos are tucked here and there across this slice of Midtown, there are only a handful of places to live.

Yet with the gradual addition of new apartments, both condos and rentals, as well as amenities like major grocery stores that could pave the way for a boom, the area seems to be shifting gears.

“It isn’t really a true neighborhood yet, but it is developing into one,” said Anoush D’Orville, 36, who in 2004 moved from a studio in NoLIta to a one-bedroom co-op near

Bryant Park that cost \$385,000. His previous address was in somewhat of a party zone, and Mr. D’Orville, who was prepping for graduate school, was seeking a place where there wasn’t hollering on the sidewalk late into the night.

“When everybody goes home, and everyone takes their trains, there’s something really nice about the quietness of this neighborhood,” said Mr. D’Orville, who owns a technology consulting business.



100 WEST 39th STREET, No. 38E A one-bedroom, one-bath corner-unit *condo* with bamboo floors, marble counters and park views, in a postwar doorman building, listed at \$1,125,000. 212-729-4181

Credit: Vincent Tullo for The New York Times

And that starter apartment, which he has sublet in recent years, is now listed for sale at \$599,000.

Bryant Park can seem to cater almost exclusively to office workers. Places to get shoes shined or repaired dot many blocks.

But residents say that restaurants where diners can sit down for a proper meal and a drink are increasingly common, particularly on West 39th Street, which is home to the three-year-old [Calle Dao Bryant Park](#), a popular Chinese-Cuban joint.

Others — including Mr. D’Orville, who used to hike to a Fairway market 14 blocks away — rave about a Whole Foods that opened last winter.

As commuters across the city groan about balky subways and worsening gridlock, living in the center of the central business district also seems to offer conveniences that are hard to match anywhere else.

Jamie von Klemperer, 60, president of the architecture firm KPF, walks to his office on West 42nd Street, near Fifth Avenue, from a two-bedroom co-op just outside the neighborhood. But his commute is about to get much shorter.

This winter, Mr. von Klemperer will move into a two-bedroom at the Bryant, an under-construction condo on West 40th Street that faces the park. The apartment, which will

have marble counters and oak herringbone-patterned floors, cost \$4.3 million. Strolling out the door and across the park, Mr. von Klemperer could be at his desk in a couple of minutes.

Though tiny, the neighborhood offers enough in the way of diversions that Mr. von Klemperer rarely strays far. He regularly eats breakfast at [Andaz Fifth Avenue](#), a local boutique hotel. He hosts office parties at the [Bryant Park Grill](#), a longtime fixture in the area. And he has even strapped on hockey skates to exercise in the park's seasonal rink, where admission is free. (Squash games, though, take place at the [Harvard Club of New York City](#), a few blocks away.)

“The proximity,” he said, “makes you able to pack many more things into your day.”

What You'll Find

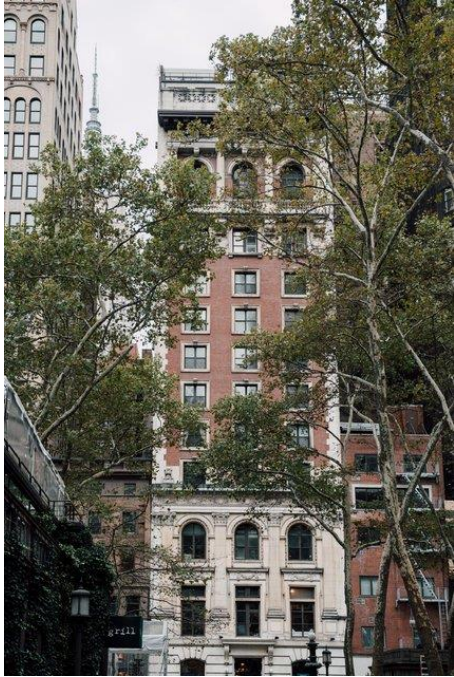
Like those of many emerging areas, the borders of the Bryant Park neighborhood can be subjective. But the blocks between Madison Avenue, 42nd Street, Seventh Avenue and West 38th Street share similar traits.

They often sport architecturally interesting prewar buildings, some of which once housed apparel businesses, like the Wheeler Building, at 28 West 38th Street, which is a co-op today. Yet there are also glassy postwar condo towers, like Nos. 425 and 445 Fifth.

New buildings include the terrazzo-faced [Bryant](#), whose 57 units sit atop a 227-room hotel. Developed by [HFZ Capital Group](#) and designed by [David Chipperfield Architects](#), the building, which is rising from a former parking lot, is 60 percent sold (sales began in November 2015) and closings have begun.

Soon to join it, around the corner, will be ML House, named for the Roman numerals for its address, 1050 Avenue of the Americas. The 24-story spire, developed by [Skyline Developers](#), has 62 apartments (from studios to three-bedrooms), said Orin Wilf, Skyline's president. It opens next summer.

Mr. Wilf, who also owns an office building next door, predicts the neighborhood's population will surge in the next decade, as aging prewar offices convert to residences. “Who would have thought NoMad would ever be a hot residential area?” he said, referring to a nearby neighborhood where the trend has played out.



32 WEST 40th STREET, No. 4G A one-bedroom, one-bath co-op with an open kitchen with a breakfast bar, and three closets, in a walk-up building that is part of the prewar Bryant Park Place complex, listed at \$599,000. 646-677-5534

Credit: Vincent Tullo for The New York Times

What has sparked interest in the area — and spiked property values — is undoubtedly the resurgence of Bryant Park itself, however unlikely that might have once seemed. “Look both ways before you enter,” said the narrator of “Bright Lights, Big City,” the novel set in 1980s New York, before buying cocaine there.

Frustrated by the crime, city officials handed off park operations in 1980 to a nonprofit corporation that local landlords later bankrolled. A four-year, \$16 million rehab removed hedges and widened entrances, and added a fancy public bathroom that today has fresh flowers, classical music and attendants.

Large-scale events are common. Oct. 28 saw the introduction of the annual Winter Village, sponsored by Bank of America, whose New York headquarters is across the street. It features 176 vendors, 38 of which serve food, along with that skating rink. Year-round features include surfaces for table tennis and numerous statues, including one of the writer Gertrude Stein.

What You’ll Pay

The 22 properties listed late last month, including existing apartments and new ones, had an average list price of \$3.01 million, according to StreetEasy.com. With so few apartment buildings, and transactions, it can be tough to draw meaningful conclusions. But prices seem steady.

So far in 2017, seven apartments have changed hands, at an average sale price of \$1.05 million, according to StreetEasy, while in 2016, 18 apartments sold, at an average of \$1.12 million. And in 2015, 15 apartments sold, at an average of \$1.22 million.

The Vibe

Perhaps improbably, the area is a hot spot for desserts. Pastries can be bought at [Maison Kayser](#), caramels at [Kreuther Handcrafted Chocolate](#) and cakes at [Lady M](#), whose colorful creations beckon in a window.

Tourists are also abundant, particularly at the New York Public Library's main branch on Fifth Avenue, a marble masterpiece. But who can blame them for coming? The building's [McGraw Rotunda](#) offers a Sistine-worthy ceiling mural featuring Prometheus with a fistful of flames.

The Schools

Some residents are zoned for Public School 51, the [Elias Howe School](#), outside the neighborhood on West 44th Street; it offers prekindergarten through fifth grade for about 450 students. On 2017 state exams, 49 percent of students met standards in English versus 41 percent citywide, while 55 percent met standards in math versus 38 percent citywide.

Sixth-graders are currently zoned for Middle School 297, downtown. Seventh- and eighth-graders receive their assignment after meeting with school officials.

A nearby public high school is [Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis](#), on West 46th Street. In 2016, average scores on SAT exams were 415 in reading, 410 in math and 417 in writing, compared with 446, 466 and 440 citywide.

The Commute

The B, D, F and M subway lines stop at the 42nd Street-Bryant Park station, though the B and M stop there only on weekdays. The 7 train also runs there, at the 5th Avenue-Bryant Park station. Yet many commuters simply walk.

The History

Bryant Park has had many lives. George Washington fought the British there during the Revolutionary War, according to the Landmarks Preservation Commission, and the area served as a potter's field, for the burial of unclaimed bodies, starting in the 1820s.

In 1842, a high-walled reservoir was built where the library is today. And in the 1860s, Civil War troops practiced drills in the area.

But the neighborhood hit a rough patch in the 1920s, prompting a redesign competition for unemployed architects during the Great Depression, according to a Landmarks commission report. The winning design, which resembled a French-style symmetrical garden, was by Lusby Simpson.