

July 30, 2010

## YOUR HOME



Trays that  
serve as art  
INSIDE

A row of houses on the Clinton Hill side of Classon Ave., on the Bed-Stuy fringe



# High on Bed-Stuy

Furniture stores, cafes and condos bring new life to an old Brooklyn 'hood

**A** New York City neighborhood can change every six months, making most of what people say about it irrelevant.

Take the area around the Nostrand Ave. A/C train in Bedford-Stuyvesant toward the border of Clinton Hill, for example. Constantly criticized as “sketchy and dangerous” by people who have been there once or not at all, the area is an architectural wonder, with pending landmark status; has apartment buildings that make you gasp in delight; homeowners who have lived there half a century; antique furniture stores; at least 10 new construction developments, and restaurant/cafes that are more Greenwich Village than Greenwich Village.

Amid all this positive energy, it's still the people, old and new, who make this fast-changing area shine.



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### THE ARRIVAL

Even if you're told about the architecture near the Nostrand Ave. subway stop, it still shocks you. Designed by Montrose W. Morris, a famed turn-of-the-century Brooklyn architect, the Alhambra, a full-block apartment building on Nostrand near Halsey St., is one of the city's most important historic structures.

Dressed in turrets, archways, triangles, big windows and huge stones, the building merges Queen Anne and Romanesque styles to give the area a fairy-tale feel.

You can't believe something like this is

in New York, and then you can't believe you never knew it existed.

“Montrose Morris was one of the most creative architects of his time,” says Matthew Postal, a researcher for the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission and editor of the commission's guidebook. “He made apartment houses appeal to a more sophisticated New Yorker. The interiors of his row houses were like no other.”

Renovated and brought back to life by Brooklyn-based Anderson Associates in the late 1990s, the 1889-built Alhambra has 46 units and sits adjacent to the Renaissance, another Morris building one block over. Complemented by nearby schools, True South Books and Caddy the Barber, these buildings form a gateway to side streets lined with brownstones — some neglected, some not. Apartments in the

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**YOUR HOME**

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Alhambra, which rarely become available, rent for about \$1,300 for a one-bedroom.

**THE MORNING SMILE**

Diagonally across the street from the Alhambra, Ms. Dahlia's Café is nine months old. Fried chicken and waffles cost \$5.50. A breakfast that includes egg sandwiches on a croissant with a cup of coffee goes for \$3.75. Cucumber lemonade is the house specialty. On a recent Friday before 10 a.m., a Web designer demonstrated his capabilities to a potential music client, while a personal trainer caught up with a childhood friend. A woman in a pink sundress sat outside, sipping on sweet tea.

"I didn't like people very much before we opened," says co-owner Daphnee Surpris, a lawyer born in Haiti who opened the cafe with partner Margo Lewis, a Fort Greene cake maker. "But the people here are amazing. They have wonderful, rich lives. We have a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer, artists. The kids here are so gracious. I even live here, and I never expected this in a million years. It feels like I imagine the Midwest to feel."

**HOUSE PROUD**

Around the corner on Hancock St., Chester Gill stands in overalls outside a brownstone his family has owned since World War II. He estimates they purchased the home for less than \$30,000. Today, it's worth well over \$1 million.

"One thing for sure, this neighborhood has great transportation," he says on the 25-minute A train ride to 14th St. "It's as safe as anywhere else in the city, even the upper East Side. They have more problems there."

Across the street, a family from Montreal exits a townhouse with flowers decorating the front steps. They pay \$75 per night through a travel agency that rents rooms locally online. Legal or not, these small inns make this area popular among international residents and travelers who embrace diversity.

**FURNITURE ALLEY**

Half-broken cornices, rusty gates, majestic stoops with different-colored front doors characterized by grand entrances — this is brownstone Brooklyn at its best, another reason the area may receive landmark status. At Hancock St. and Jefferson Ave., two-bedroom



**The Alhambra, an apartment house designed by Montrose W. Morris**

apartments in brownstones rent for \$2,200. On Bedford Ave., where cars whiz by, two antique stores are loaded with French, Italian and American classics. At Bedford Galleries, at 1167 Bedford Ave., chandeliers cost \$300, with armoires, dressers and mirrors priced upward of \$175.

One street over, Panorama Galleries Inc. is run by Alex Panora, who owns the building. Two years earlier, he moved from Union Square, where the store sat for almost 18 years. While business is slow, he renews his inventory every few days by going to estate

sales all over the city. Luis Atauchi, who owns Bedford Galleries, worked for Panora before venturing on his own. Together, they are making this stretch of Bedford a go-to spot for quality furnishings, not unlike Atlantic Ave. years before.

"You can see the change in this neighborhood every day," says Panora, whose inventory includes a 1940s Chamber stove (\$700) and 1970s Lucite minibar (\$200). "New people are shopping here all the time. With so many new buildings, more are coming. It's also so easy to park on the street here, even for my truck."

**SALT OF THE EARTH**

Anna and Patricia Wilson sit out front of the wooden house they have lived in for over 50 years. Anna is 97 years old. She has a sister in Philadelphia who is 107. In the 1960s, Anna started Madison St.'s first block association. They held parties and cleaned sidewalks. Today, the association is going strong, having recently commandeered a vacant lot for a community garden after a house caved in. Patricia is her daughter. She has strong feelings about the neighborhood.

"We're going back to how we were in the late 1950s," she says. "We were 80/20



**Jose Done bought a building through a city-funded real estate program. It has a garage where he fixes his Cutlass convertible**



**Bed-Stuy newcomer Ana Sarmiento with friends Jason Boyce (l.) and Aaron Sharpe**



**Patricia Wilson and her mother, Anna Wilson, at their home on Madison St.**

PHOTOS BY JOY KEH

The aisles of Bedford Galleries always have new inventory and good prices



315 Gates has studios starting at \$195,000



NICHOLAS FEVELO



Chester Gill stands outside a home on Hancock St. that has been in his family for five decades



**ON THE CLINTON HILL SIDE**

Side streets off Classon Ave. have low-slung two- and three-story structures with metal-fronted garages, street-level entrances and an artsy warehouse feel. The streets are peaceful and full of charm. A dog barks down from its perch on a second-story roof. A cat sleeps in a window. A man wearing a black fedora hammers away at a windowsill.

Jose Done repairs his 1960s-era black Cutlass convertible. A former building-repair specialist for the city, he bought his building after the 9/11 attacks with the help of a city real estate program to spur the improvement of neighborhoods.

"It's an incredible change here in the past two years," says Done, who is planning a classic car show on his street for sometime in August. "There were needles and drugs. It was a big dumpster. Now it's so safe I might be the loudest person on the block."

**BRAND NEW**

According to Ana Sarmiento, a New School student seeking a degree in urban education, comparisons to Greenwich Village don't do the area justice. Just last week, she moved into a one-bedroom in a brownstone, paying around \$1,300. A local bar named Sweet Revenge, a bakery, corner store and restaurants are less than a block away. The subway is three blocks.

"There is so much less pressure here to do things that are cool," says Sarmiento, who had lived on W. Fourth St. "That's a

personal opinion, but it adds to the sense of community. People are easier here."

**EVEN A FOOD CORNER**

Carolina Barbagallo, who opened Nero Doro, a cafe and wine bar on the corner of Classon and Greene Aves., thinks the area has got a bit of Europe.

"You feel like you have a regular life here," says Barbagallo, who lived on the upper West Side for more than a decade and in Astoria for a year before settling in Brooklyn with her boyfriend, the sommelier at Clinton Hill restaurant Locanda Vini e Olii. "It's not frantic all the time like Manhattan. You walk everywhere. Everyone who lives nearby is happy."

Nero Doro anchors the neighborhood's newest amenity. The food corner where Classon meets Greene includes TigerLily, a Vietnamese sandwich shop owned by a former Pratt student, and Pilar, a Cuban eatery named after Ernest Hemingway's boat. Small and casual, Pilar serves some of the finest Cuban food in the city. Plates change daily and cost less than \$12. TigerLily adds spice to the emerging food and residential scene. Owner Pascale Tran lives across the street. Her mother helps in the kitchen, adding a very non-Manhattan authenticity to the space.

"This is so much more anonymous than Park Slope, where I used to live," says Tran. "It's comfortable. I wouldn't have opened this here five years ago. Now, you won't get shot quite as easily."

**'It's an incredible change here in the past two years'**



Carolina Barbagallo (r.) owns Nero Doro, a cafe/wine bar with art from local Meredith McNeal

white-to-black then. Then we were 90/10 black-to-white. Now, every new family who comes in is white. We welcome the change. It's great, but it makes me laugh. Let's say 20 years ago I moved to Howard Beach? I don't think I would be as welcomed as the white people coming here are. That tells you something."

**DEVELOPMENT ROWS**

Past pretty streets leading up to Classon Ave., a large church and buildings with black mansard roofs give the neighborhood the feel of a romance novel. More community gardens are mere steps from each other. On Gates, Quincy and Lexington at least 10 new developments

have colorful For Sale signs. Corcoran, Prudential Douglas Elliman and the Brooklyn-based Aguayo represent these buildings. The Lineage is almost a half-block long on Greene St.

315 Gates has 72 units. Studios start at \$195,000. Two-bedroom duplexes are on sale in the \$400,000 range. Michael Brooks of The Developers Group helms the project, which went on sale this week. The building has private parking, a resident's lounge, screening room and roof deck.

"Well-priced buildings like this will help this area get to the next level," says Brooks, whose company successfully sold 111 Monroe, down the street. "In some ways, this is Williamsburg 10 years ago."