

The Lower East Side, Where Gritty Meets Trendy

Living In

By JULIE BESONEN MARCH 30, 2016



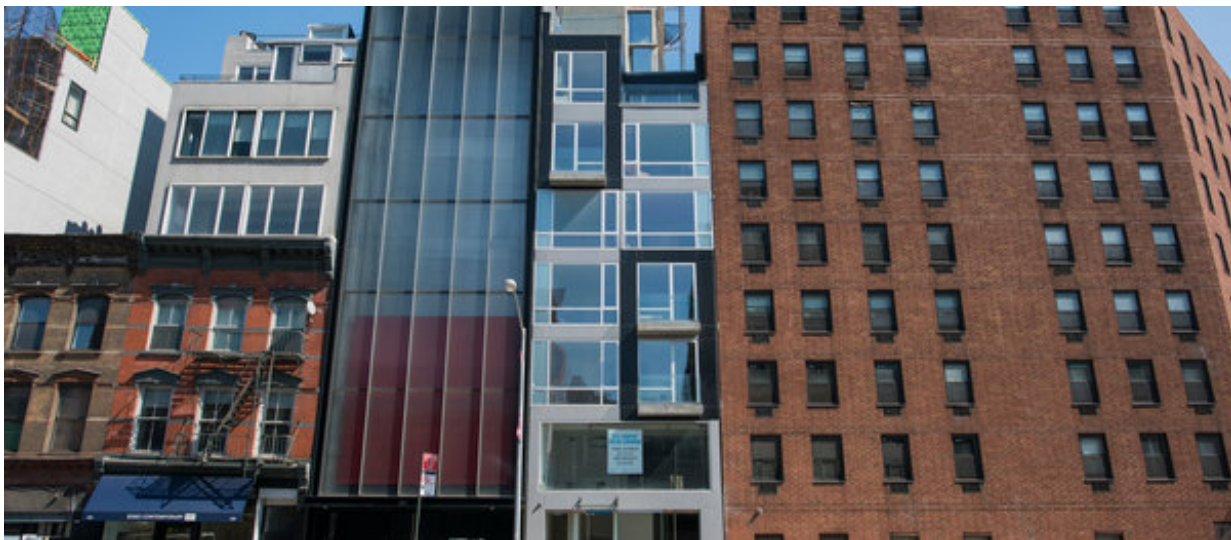
Joshua Bright for The New York Times

When Ian Fuller, 37, a managing director of [WestFuller Advisors](#), a wealth management firm, first saw the 20-story midcentury [Seward Park Cooperative](#) on Grand Street, on the Lower East Side, the complex reminded him of “very expensive public housing,” he said. Then he and his wife, Ellen Wang, 43, a scientist at Pfizer, “realized it was one of the better deals in the city.”

Maintenance on the two-bedroom co-op they bought there last year for \$1.2 million was low — a bit over \$700 a month — and the 17th-floor balcony afforded skyline views. They were ready to leave their two-family house in Ozone Park, [Queens](#), for a shorter commute to their Midtown [Manhattan](#) jobs and to their 6-year-old daughter Nilaya’s school on the Upper West Side. But it was the Lower East Side neighborhood the couple were particularly sold on. “It feels like authentic New York without the whitewashing, still a little gritty,” Mr. Fuller said.

Now that construction is underway at [Essex Crossing](#), a \$1 billion development mostly around Essex and Delancey Streets, the neighborhood is likely to be less gritty in years to come. The nine-building complex will include 1,000 residential units, half of which are reserved for low- and middle-income residents, according to Charles R. Bendit, a chief executive of [Taconic Investment Partners](#), one of the three developers. The entire project, scheduled for completion by 2024, will feature a 15,000-square-foot public park, a medical facility operated by NYU Langone Medical Center, a cineplex, a bowling alley, retail and offices.

It will also be the new home of the [Essex Street Market](#), which will move from the space it has occupied for more than 75 years to be part of the bi-level three-block-long Market Line, selling food, arts and crafts.



255 BOWERY, #4 A two-bedroom two-bath 2015 condo with two private balconies, listed at \$2,549,000.
Joshua Bright for The New York Times

A polyglot mix of immigrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries first found a foothold in the United States on the Lower East Side. From about 1880 to 1900, conditions in tenements were so dire that “as many as four or five families were routinely housed in apartments intended for one,” Luc Sante wrote in [“Low Life”](#) (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), a history of New York’s underclass.

Today, a restaurant on Stanton Street called [Lowlife](#), partly in tribute to the book, offers a charcoal-seared half-chicken with

smoked cabbage for \$32. But even high-end restaurants can be crushed by the wheels of progress, such as Wylie Dufresne's WD-50, which was [forced to close in 2014](#) to make way for [50 Clinton Street](#), a 37-unit condominium. Five units recently listed for sale there, according to Streeteasy.com, ranged from \$1.375 million for a one-bedroom to \$3.5 million for a two-bedroom penthouse.

"This used to be a place for a new beginning, people living the dream in a tenement apartment," said Ariel Tirosh, an associate broker with Douglas Elliman who is the sales agent for several luxury condos, including [100 Norfolk](#) and [179 Ludlow](#). "Now they live the dream in a new condo."

Later this spring, [Ludlow House](#), a branch of the private club Soho House, will open on Ludlow Street. A "Local House" membership will cost \$2,000 a year, along with a \$300 registration fee.



By The New York Times

Ed Litvak, 49, the editor in chief of [The Lo-Down](#), a website of Lower East Side news, has lived there since 2007. "The amount of real estate development and revolving door of restaurants is dizzying," he said. Still, "old school places like Russ & Daughters," the smoked-fish shop on East Houston Street, "are incredibly enduring."

What You'll Find

Geographical definitions of the Lower East Side vary. "The border question is tricky, since longtime residents will say it's anything below 14th Street, even Alphabet City," said Gigi Li, 34, the chairwoman of [Community Board 3](#), which includes the East Village, the Lower East Side and parts of Chinatown. One popular view puts its boundaries at East Houston Street to the north, the Bowery to the west and F.D.R. Drive to the east. Southern and southwestern borders are especially hard to pin down, as the neighborhood's corridors there bled into Chinatown.

Century-old brick tenements stand shoulder to shoulder with shiny buildings like [the Chrystie](#), where the lowest monthly rent for a studio on its website recently was \$3,595. Studies in contrast abound: The single-story [Katz's Delicatessen](#) on East Houston

Street is dwarfed by a 25-story luxury building at 188 [Ludlow](#) on one side and a massive dig for an [11-story development](#) next door.

What You'll Pay

In 2015, the **median sales price** of a one-bedroom co-op on the Lower East Side was \$550,000, up 10 percent from 2014, according to Gregory J. Heym, the chief economist at Terra Holdings; for a two-bedroom co-op, it was \$829,000, up 15 percent. The median for a one-bedroom condo was \$1.4 million, an increase of 20 percent over 2014; for a two-bedroom condo, it was \$1.8 million, an increase of 13 percent. Sales of three-bedroom condos and co-ops were rare, he said.



134 ELDRIDGE STREET, #6 A two-bedroom one-bath co-op with income restrictions, listed at \$800,000.
Joshua Bright for The New York Times

On March 23, the 48 condos and co-ops listed on [StreetEasy.com](#) ranged from a one-bedroom 1956 co-op for \$550,000 to a two-bedroom 2015 condo with a terrace for about \$2.55 million.

Joe Safdie, an agent with Misrahi Realty, which owns or manages 2,000 units in the area, said **rents** for typical studios range from \$2,000 to \$2,500 a month; one-bedrooms, \$2,200 to \$3,000; two-bedrooms, \$3,000 to \$4,200; and three-bedrooms, \$4,500 to \$5,500. "There are a lot of shares going on," he said.

What to Do

Clinton, Orchard, Ludlow, Essex, Allen, Stanton and Rivington Streets are alive with bars, music clubs and destination restaurants, such as [Ivan Ramen](#), [Russ & Daughters Cafe](#) and [Dirt Candy](#).

At last count, the neighborhood had 122 **art galleries**, said Sue Stoffel, an art collector who administers a gallery map and website, [LES Galleries NYC](#).



570 GRAND STREET, #H406 A one-bedroom co-op with a renovated kitchen and bath and a balcony, listed at \$659,000. Joshua Bright for The New York Times

The [Tenement Museum](#) vividly interprets the neighborhood's past with guided tours. On the Bowery, the [New Museum showcases current American and international artists](#). Contemporary performance and visual arts are featured at [Abrons Arts Center](#). A new art house cinema, the [Metrograph](#), screens 35-millimeter prints and digital video.

The Schools

The Lower East Side is within District 1, which includes the East Village. There are no zoned elementary schools, so parents rank **preferences** and submit applications; at least one placement is guaranteed. [Public School 110](#) on Delancey Street offers a gifted and talented curriculum and serves about 385 students from prekindergarten through Grade 5. According to the city's School Quality Snapshot, 43 percent of students met state

standards in English in 2014-2015, versus 30 percent citywide; 61 percent did so in math, versus 39 percent.

According to Ms. Li of Community Board 3, the [School for Global Leaders](#) (Middle School 378) on Stanton Street is an “up-and-coming” school. It serves about 261 students in Grades 6 through 8. In 2014-15, 16 percent of students met state standards in English versus 30 percent citywide; 20 percent met math standards, versus 31 percent.

There is citywide competition for admittance to [Bard High School Early College](#) on East Houston Street, offering rigorous instruction for about 535 students in Grades 9 to 12.

The Commute

The F train stops at Second Avenue and at Delancey Street/Essex Street, reaching Midtown in about 15 minutes. The D train stops at Grand Street; the B serves the station part time. The J train stops at Essex Street and at the Bowery; the M and Z stop at those stations part time. Local buses include the M9, M14D, M15 and M21.

The History

Two million Jewish **immigrants** arrived in America from 1881 to 1914, a majority landing on the Lower East Side. One was Emma Goldman, an anarchist born in imperial Russia who agitated for labor unions and women’s rights. In “Emma Goldman: Revolution as a Way of Life” (Yale University Press, 2011), Vivian Gornick wrote that Goldman felt at home in this Yiddish-speaking world of “newspapers, synagogues, and cafes; sweatshops, theaters, and warehouses; peddlers, gangsters, social workers.” The streets were “choked with noise, dirt, and poverty, as well as something never experienced in [Europe](#): expectations.”