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REAL ESTATE



Taking a Nibble Out of the Big Apple

New residential developments are promoting themselves as self-contained cities for the preoccupied young professional

BY CHRIS POMORSKI

"WILLIAMSBURG," HEATHER CRANDALL RECENTLY remarked, "is kind of a great interim between Brooklyn and Manhattan." Ms. Crandall, a 30-year-old entrepreneur and consultant in the high-end skincare trade, is a qualified judge. A New Orleans native, she spent four years in Manhattan before moving in 2014 to a Williamsburg walk-up, a living arrangement whose low-rise "neighborhood-ness" and outdoor space she found well-suited to her easy-going Southern sensibility and to her golden retriever Maya's fondness for fresh air. When the building's owner decided to renovate, however, Ms. Crandall and her husband, Evan, who works in private equity real estate, had to con-

sider other options.

Sharing the rough dimensions of the Crandalls' Williamsburg home, the townhouses of Cobble Hill and Boerum Hill seemed likely possibilities. Ultimately, though, the couple settled on something nearer by that shared neither style nor history with Brownstone Brooklyn. Truth be told, 1 North Fourth Place—1N4th to those in the know—a 40-story glass tower on Williamsburg's waterfront, didn't share history with anything: it had none. Erected last year, with two-bedrooms going for as much as \$6,200 a month, studios for \$2,450 to \$4,000, the building remains only partially occupied, with two- and three-bedrooms available in the \$4,000 to \$8,450 range.

Still, Ms. Crandall told the Observer, 1N4th's new residents were not without their own

commonalities. Like the fact that many of them were fresh Manhattan exiles eager to make new friends in unfamiliar surroundings. So far, the result has, for many residents, been both a fresh start and a throwback. "It almost feels like an adult college kind of atmosphere," Ms. Crandall said, laughing.

It would be a steeply tuitioned school indeed that came with an outdoor pool ensconced in an 8,500-square-foot sundeck, with views of lower Manhattan over the East River. But other—albeit high-sheen—elements of 1N4th are familiar from campus life: the library and the lounges, the common kitchens and billiard tables, the (relatively) young fitness-focused residents who've all just arrived from somewhere else, wanting similar things and knowing none of their neighbors.

Tara Atwood, who moved to the building in recent months after living for a decade in Midtown, had come to consider community life in Manhattan lacking. "Everyone has their head down, racing from A to B," she said. "After 10 years, half of my friends have left New York, and it's hard meeting new people without seeming like a weirdo. You can't just go up to someone on the subway and say, 'Hey, you look cool. Want to hang out?'" Ms. Atwood recalled once hopefully giving her card to a young woman she'd befriended—temporarily, it turned out—on a sailing trip. The woman never called.

"What I really love here are the communal spaces," Ms. Atwood continued. "It forces people



Residents Heather Crandall and Tara Atwood in the community space of 1N4th.

MELISSA MELIACI FOR NEW YORK OBSERVER

to be around each other all the time. You'll meet organically in passing, or maybe sitting at the pool or working in the library."

Ms. Atwood, who is also a skincare entrepreneur, made fast friends with Ms. Crandall after she bumped into Mr. Crandall walking the aforementioned retriever. She's since joined a network of young women who work out at 6 a.m., and both women have grown pleasantly accustomed to drinks "in the neighborhood" in new friends' apartments, and to sundesk movie nights, courtesy of the local projector screen. To make up for the townhouse charms she's forsaken—and to mitigate the "white box" look—Ms. Crandall plans to install molding, a chandelier and perhaps a faux fireplace in her apartment.

Granted, luxe campuses where 30-some-things bond over morning yoga and sunset margaritas are not quite what Jane Jacobs had in mind when she mused on the urban ideal—neighborhoods to cultivate density and diversity and heterogeneous exchange. But for New Yorkers who find themselves shuttling between work and home without so much as a nod to or from one of their 8.5 million neighbors—even those with whom they share elevators or stairwells—developments like 1N4th, that aim to foster self-contained community, hold a certain appeal.

The attraction is not limited to areas that were, like Williamsburg, until recently characterized by vacant windowpanes and industrial runoff—although that helps. Like many before her, Comora Robinson, who moved north from

Maryland eight years ago to attend graduate school and who now works in client management for an investment bank, has found the locals less engaging than folks back home. "On the street, most people make eye contact, smile and say 'Hi,'" Ms. Robinson said, recalling a quaint custom common to many parts of the country, which has nonetheless been known to make New Yorkers suspicious, if not outright aggressive. "But here it's not like that. You know they're not going to go out of their way to say hello."

It's a practice that thrives—or rather, fails to—even on the tourist-overrun blocks around Times Square, where Ms. Robinson lives with her husband in the Ritz Plaza apartments on West 48th Street, and one which the building's developer, Stonehenge Management, has endeavored throughout its portfolio of more than 20 rental properties to mitigate. Stonehenge's lifestyle department can be traced back 11 years, Lauren Macaulay, the company's creative director, told the Observer, to the first meeting, in Israel, between CEO Ofer Yardeni and Michael Stern, who was until recently the in-house creative guru.

"They were inspired to create a new concept: vertical, kibbutz-like living," Ms. Macaulay said. "A lot of our residents don't have time to seek out the benefits of living in the city, so we curate events to bring New York City home to them."

For a kibbutz aspirant, Stonehenge falls rather short on collective farming opportunities. But Ms. Macaulay estimates that she oversees

300 or more events throughout the company's properties per year, including TEDx and fitness programming, as well as "everything from family fun days to pet-friendly happy hours, comedy and trivia, DJ dance parties and sunset cocktail soirees," all of them free to residents. Ms. Robinson has enjoyed Halloween parties and rooftop oysters and champagne complemented by a live jazz band. Recently, Stonehenge imported bartenders from Liquid Lab to concoct old-fashioned libations for a party set to classic New York films.

"It's nice when you live with 500 people to go to these events and actually meet some of them. You find out that they're actually nice and will talk to you!" Ms. Robinson enthused.

Still, she acknowledged, the same 30 or so guests tend to show up at each function. And there's perhaps something slightly misguided in attempting to buck New Yorkers' insularity by in part obviating their need to leave home to socialize. Manhattan Skyline, another company with an extensive Manhattan rental portfolio, including Soho Court on Elizabeth Street and West River House on West End Avenue, aims—like Douglaston Development, the proprietors of 1N4th—to encourage serendipitous resident interactions with flowing, open common spaces. But Laurie Zucker, Manhattan Skyline's vice chairperson, told us that the company's event programming often seeks to draw residents out into the city. Recent gatherings have included a private reception at MAMO—casual, celebrity-friendly Italian in Soho—a gallery tour at the Norwood club and bingo at Le Poisson Rouge on Bleeker Street.

Of course, neighborhood connectivity represents a more realistic goal when residents have skin in the game—that is, when they actually own a place. Martin Nussbaum, the owner of Slate Property Group, whose 51 Jay Street—a project in Dumbo in the midst of a luxurious warehouse-to-condo conversion—is currently 60 percent sold, has strived to indicate to buyers, many of them first-time Brooklynites from the Upper West Side and Tribeca, that their new neighborhood will offer both community and comfort. There has been an ice cream social and a chef-catered event at Gaggenau, whose pricey wares will grace the condo's kitchens. "To our happiness, [the events] have led to some relationships and friendships," Mr. Nussbaum said. An open-air "food-and-band type event" in Brooklyn Bridge Park is in the works for early September, and 51 Jay's website features testimonials from local coffee roasters, artists and restaurateurs attesting to Dumbo's history as a neighborhood where "people got to know each other."

"We didn't know anyone in the neighborhood when we moved here," said Jason Wachob, a health and wellness entrepreneur who moved to a Dumbo rental six years ago with his wife, and who's lately purchased a place at 51 Jay Street, where two-bedrooms start at \$2 million. "But we've actually gotten to know quite a few people. The neighborhood still has a little bit of old New York. You know the guy at the corner shop and you say hello. Manhattan has largely lost that. It's about being around a community of like-minded people. It's something more than just living in a really nice, expensive building." ■

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