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Secret Gardens Grow in Hell's Kitchen

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Property on the gritty western edges of Hell's Kitchen may never become as hot as the stretch of land abutting the High Line, the elevated former rail line in Chelsea that has become one of the city's most popular parks.

But a trench for subterranean railroad tracks cutting through Hell's Kitchen has given life to an unusual New York amenity: secret gardens that have helped close deals in the rough-hewn area during the city's real-estate slowdown.

The tracks were built for the New York Central Railroad in the 1930s to divert freight trains from the middle of 11th Avenue, which had become so dangerous for pedestrians dodging trains that it was known as "Death Avenue."

The trench runs through the neighborhood west of 10th Avenue, and while the freight traffic is gone, the rumble of Amtrak trains en route to and from Albany and points north can still be heard.

During the recent real-estate boom, the space above the trench was put to another use: Some sites, 200 feet in depth, were sold off and spanned with concrete planks. The space between opposite buildings across the trench then was covered



The garden over railroad tracks behind 505 W. 47th St. is credited with helping to revive sales in the building. One of the building's developers plans to redo another location nearby.

with landscaped private gardens.

The hidden gardens behind one new project, at 505 W. 47th St., were credited with helping revive sales of units in the building. Mati Weiderpass, a developer of the 505, said the New York Central began selling off parcels over the tracks in 1960s, when sites were developed as hotels with parking to accommodate the 1964 World's Fair.

His company is now planning to redevelop one of those older railroad sites, a Travel Inn on West 42nd Street, into what he described as a "gay urban resort" with a 10,000-square-foot dance floor and 123 guest rooms.

Over the years, private landscaped courtyards in Manhattan have been familiar features at many prewar buildings such as the Aphorp on West 79th Street, which was built more than a century ago on a full square block on the Upper West

Side.

But the gardens in Hell's Kitchen are a bit different. Rather than being located along a grand boulevard, the gardens are hidden away in the 40s near 10th Avenue in a mixed neighborhood of low-rise tenements, small industrial buildings and some newer apartment buildings, limited to seven stories under city zoning rules.

The first hidden garden was built in 2006 over tracks in a condominium called Clinton West on a site between West 46th and 47th streets, west of 10th Avenue, the first development above the tracks in two decades.

Two seven-story buildings, one facing each side street, were connected with a putting green and a greenhouse atrium. After a whirlwind marketing campaign, 149 condos sold out after eight days on the market, according to

the project's developer, SDS Procida.

The second project, the 505 building, was built on concrete planking between West 47th and 48th streets, with seven-story buildings connected by a rear public garden featuring wood-planked walkways and a glass-walled pavilion that houses a fitness center. Ground-floor apartments have private gardens as well. There are private cabanas on the roof.

The project, built by Mr. Weiderpass and Ian Reisner of Parkview Developers, quickly when it went on the market in 2007, and at one point it had 95 of the 108 units under contract. But as the real-estate market tottered during the recession, many buyers refused to close and some filed administrative complaints and lawsuits to get back their deposits back.

Now the marketing campaign is getting a second wind. Some buyers have come back and closed at or near their original contract prices. Other buyers have stepped in to sign new contracts. So far 36 apartments have been sold and another 59 are under contract, according to Stephen G. Kliegerman of Halstead Property, which marketed the project.

Apartments at the 505 are priced at about \$1,100 per square foot, or less than \$600,000 for a smaller one-bedroom, and more than \$800,000 for larger ones. Two-bedroom apartments begin at less than \$1 million.

A few blocks to the north, the Griffin Court, a new condominium that just went on the market, will have a large hideaway rear garden.

Kenneth S. Horn, president of Alchemy Properties, which is developing 95 apartments on 10th



Avenue and West 54th Street, said the site would include an 8,700-square-foot private courtyard with a patio on two levels, gardens, trees and play areas. There are private gardens as well, lined with fencing and bamboo trees.

Because the neighborhood is a bit off the beaten path, buy-

ers—many of them first-time home buyers have been drawn by lower prices on new condos. At Griffin Court, prices are a bit higher, though room sizes are typically larger. One-bedrooms start at \$875,000. Two-bedrooms begin at \$1.7 million, with most priced at more than \$2 million.