

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

Hell's Kitchen catering to a whole new crowd

By JOHN MAJESKI

Hell's Kitchen, Clinton or Midtown West?

It all refers to the area between roughly 34th and 59th streets, from 8th Avenue to the Hudson River. But broker Noble Black said which moniker he uses depends on to whom he is showing real estate.

"If you're talking to younger people and they understand the hipness of it, I prefer Hell's Kitchen," said the Corcoran Group vice president. "Middle age or they're out of town? It's Clinton or Midtown West."

That's because to some the Hell's Kitchen name still conjures up images of a rough neighborhood. While the 'hood's history is littered with gangs, various forms of criminal activity and an overall seediness that was seen up and into the 1990s, things are vastly different these days.

"There are lots of great restaurants and bars, lots of mom and pop hole-in-the-wall places. Lots of over-the-top luxury places, too," Black said. Convincing any doubters of the area's assets — central location, affordability, lots of dining options — does not normally take very long. "Honestly, you have them walk on 9th Avenue and the job's done. Some people remember when it was seedy, but they see for themselves it's not true (anymore)."

Black said that when the Time Warner Center was built in 2000 on the edge of the neighborhood, it accelerated the pace of positive change.

When it comes to housing stock, Hell's Kitchen has pretty much everything from small, tenement walk-ups to elevator buildings to high-end rentals to newer condos. As such, Black, who lives at the landmarked Parc Vendome on West 57th Street, said "prices are all over the map."



GREG BIBENS

For example, Black said you can find a walk-up one-bedroom unit in a prewar building near 10th or 11th Avenues for \$400,000. But if you look in one of the newer glass condo buildings, a one-bedroom might be going for \$1.5 million. Meanwhile, rentals can range anywhere in price between \$2,000, or even lower, to the mid-\$3,000s per month.

"There's some interesting finds in the neighborhood," Black said.

Hell's Kitchen was traditionally an Irish neighborhood that later saw a big influx of Puerto Ricans. Prostitution, drugs, gangs — it wasn't hard to find. On the neighborhood's 8th Avenue edge, there also were a number of pornographic shops and adult theaters that have since disappeared.

Such a past seems almost laughable now.

With its proximity to Broadway theatres, many actors continue to call Hell's Kitchen home. That's one of the reasons that drew Barak Realty broker Greg Bibens to live in the area.

"I'm also an actor, so I'm closer to auditions," he said. "It's just convenient; it's centrally located."

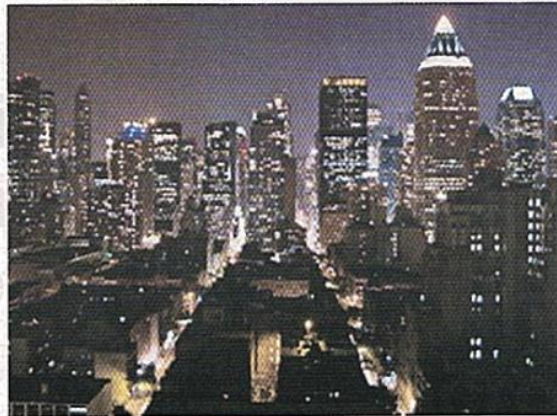
Like Black, Bibens said that one of the best things about Hell's Kitchen is that it has a wide range of apartments and prices.

"I think that's what has driven the neighborhood — there's something for everyone," he said. "It was a remote place in people's eyes, but even the tourists (from the nearby Times Square region) are coming to this area."

Hell's Kitchen has long remained affordable in comparison to some other Manhattan neighborhoods. The economy, like elsewhere, has driven down prices as of late.

"It used to be that a one-bedroom not under \$2,000 (per month) that was not worth living in," Bibens said. "If you're paying over \$2,000 for a one-bedroom now, you're paying too much."

While two-bedrooms can be bought for under \$800,000 in some instances,



Parkview Developers' The 505 on West 47th Street is one of a plethora of high-end new developments to go up in Hell's Kitchen in the past few years. Closings recently began at the building, which is being marketed by Halstead Property Development Marketing.

Bibens said committed buyers are not readily available.

"Sales are still tough to get people to pull the trigger," he said.

Much of Hell's Kitchen lies in the Special Clinton District, which works to retain the low-rise character of the neighborhood. Among other actions, the zoning places careful restrictions on building height and demolition.

Commercial thoroughfares are 8th and 9th Avenues, along with cross streets such as 46th Street, also known as "Restaurant Row." There is a community garden on 48th Street.

Several newer luxury buildings have come to the neighborhood the last few years. They include: The Atelier, the Moinian Group's 46-floor condo building on West 42nd; The Orion, Extell Development's modern glass building on West 42nd; Sheffield 57, a 30-year-old Emery Roth & Sons-designed building that was recently converted to condos; The Link, a 145-unit luxury condo building on West 52nd Street; The Platinum, a 43-floor modern building on West 46th Street; and the newest, 505, a mid-rise, luxury structure at 505 West 47th.

The further west you go, the less heavily developed the neighborhood is. "It's still considered up-and-coming, so you can get some great deals if you go west of 10th," Bibens said.

So what does Bibens use: Clinton, Midtown West or Hell's Kitchen? He prefers the latter.

"I use it myself because it's considered hip," he said.