

# Why Vinegar Hill is Brooklyn's edgiest enclave



A hipster makes his way down Hudson Avenue in Vinegar Hill. Photo: Anne Wermiel/NY Post

When the Brooklyn Navy Yard announced in May that Wegmans, a Rochester, NY-based supermarket chain, will build on its Admiral's Row site, local activists and residents alike breathed a sigh of relief.

The decade-long fight to save the crumbling mansions along Flushing Avenue would be laid to rest.

And the two neighborhoods bookending the site — Vinegar Hill to the south and the Wallabout to the north — would at last get a quality, affordable grocer.

This connection, made possible by food, fits the Brooklyn that is now: a borough of linkages where a historic park connects Fort Greene and Clinton Hill, bike paths connect Williamsburg to Red Hook and water taxis connect Red Hook to Dumbo.

The grocer will be a metaphoric link between two historic working-class neighborhoods where time has stood still. Until now.

“When Wegmans comes in, that complex will change even more significantly and help the community that’s already there,” said Elizabeth Stile, a real estate agent and 30-year resident of neighboring Clinton Hill. “It’s going to be a very busy and industrious area, and that will bring in more housing.”



The 25-unit Waterbridge 47 project. Photo: AB Architekten

But many developers aren’t waiting for that much-anticipated opening. New real estate projects are peppering the Wallabout and Vinegar Hill — from large projects such as

Navy Green, the full-block, mixed-income complex on Flushing Avenue that will include condominiums and townhomes, to Waterbridge 47, a 25-unit condominium straddling Vinegar Hill and Dumbo at 47 Bridge St.

And there are plenty in between. Though technically in Dumbo, just within one block of Waterbridge 47 three conversions are under construction: 74 condominiums at 51 Jay St.; 15 at the former Brillo factory at 200 Water St.; and a 105-unit rental building at 177-183 Front St. that will offer luxury and affordable housing.

Jeffrey Simpson, head of Greystone Property Development Group, Waterbridge 47’s developer, isn’t daunted by the competition. “Our units are not super large or super expensive,” he says. “[They] fit in the context but still have a boutique feeling and modern systems.”

Pricing for Waterbridge 47 ranges from \$939, 750 to \$1.4 million for one-bedrooms with 698 to 1,267 square feet (all are in contract); and \$1.29 million to \$1.52 million for two-bedroom units averaging 980 square feet. A 1,230-square-foot, three-bedroom condo lists for \$1.75 million. Sales launched four months ago and the building is 60 percent sold, Simpson said.



Pricing at the nearby projects starts at \$2 million and reaches more than \$5 million; estimates for the Front Street market-rate rentals are \$3,000 to \$6,000 monthly when that project is completed in 2016.

In the Wallabout, the developments are residential and commercial. Though the massive Navy Green is up front and center here, smaller private-owner projects along Washington Avenue, the commercial strip across from the Navy Yard, are in the works.

Peter Duhamel, longtime resident and himself an owner of a five-unit mixed-use conversion at 66 Washington Ave., has both a 1,816-square-foot loft (\$1.295 million) and ground-floor retail for sale. Across the street, No. 73 is undergoing conversion to seven one-bedroom lofts averaging about 900 square feet. Owner Sol Moskowitz says he hasn’t developed pricing for them yet, but anticipates completing the project in the fall. He hopes to rent the 2,000-square-foot retail duplex to a spa or yoga studio.

“The neighborhood is becoming full of people who need services,” Moskowitz said. “In 10 years you’ll come down here and you won’t recognize it.”



Diego Faccioli at Grapeshot. Photo: Anne Wermiel/NY Post

Despite the rapid changes, Duhamel, who said he’d been there, done that in Tribeca back in the day, is unfazed.

“What doesn’t trouble me about gentrification is that this block is sui generis — sort of a standalone, and I like that,” he said. “If there was the slightest possibility that this was going to become Williamsburg, I’d sell and move.”

For people coming from trendy neighborhoods, the Wallabout offers both authenticity and a feeling of being on the cusp. Looking over the crowd of young mothers, Warby-wearing laptop hipsters and paint-splattered Navy Yard workers sipping their afternoon joe at Brooklyn Roasters, Julian Peters, who works at the coffee shop, says “it’s definitely a mixed crowd.”

“It’s somehow avoided gentrification and maintained its neighborhood feel,” said Peters, who moved here a year ago from the East Village.

Part of that feel is the organic growth of businesses that evoke Wallabout's commercial food history.

Grapeshot Wine & Spirits, Brooklyn Roasters and Mast Brothers Chocolates opened in 2013, and were joined a year later by Parlor Coffee, a roastery nearby.



Parlor Coffee Roasters' Dillon Edwards. Photo: Helayne Seidman

Parlor Coffee founder Dillon Edwards previously lived on the Lower East Side, and roasted his beans at a collective in Red Hook before setting up shop at 10 Vanderbilt Ave.

“I was eager to get out of the Lower East Side for the sake of the business,” he said. “I didn’t dislike it, but I didn’t have enough space. So when the opportunity to roast and live [in the same place] presented itself, I couldn’t say no.”

He declined to cite his rent, but said, “Per square foot, I’m getting a lot more for my money than on the Lower East Side. There’s more space in this little pocket of the city, but I don’t know how much longer that will last.”

And it's not just artisanal businesses finding a home here. Just this month, Propel, a shop specializing in high-end electric bikes, opened along the busy Flushing Avenue bike path, the first retailer in the Navy Green complex.

Owner Chris Nolte says the combination of the location, the rent and the uptick in urban commuting — the city Department of Transportation estimates 2,600 cyclists rode that stretch daily in 2014 — sealed the deal for his first retail location.

“I think there are opportunities here,” he said. “The area is on the upswing and I’m really looking forward to what the future holds.”



Vinegar Hill's massive Navy Green project. Photo: Handout

Part of that future banks on occupancy of the units above and around Nolte, which are opening in phases. The lottery for Navy Green's income-restricted condos opened in March with 75 units starting at \$230,000 for a one-bedroom, \$330,000 for a two-bedroom and \$410,000 for a three-bedroom. Under construction and selling now are 23 single-family townhomes lining the sides of the development along Vanderbilt and Clermont avenues, which will average \$1.85 million for a 3,000-square-foot, four-

bedroom home. And pending offering approval, Navy Green will list another 24 market-rate and 74 middle/moderate-income condos in a 12-story building this summer.



48 DUFFIELD ROAD, \$2.2 MILLION: Historic 32-foot-long, four-story red-brick Federal townhouse on 1,100-foot lot. The ground floor is a separate one-bedroom apartment. Parlor floor has 10-foot ceilings; upper duplex has private deck. Agent: Anna Milat-Meyer, Halstead, 212-381-2296 Photo: zagphoto.com

Halstead agent Peter Denby, who is directing sales for Navy Green, called the response for the townhouses “great,” noting buyer traffic from other Brooklyn neighborhoods and downtown Manhattan.

“People want to get into a neighborhood that’s still growing and has large gains to make,” he said. “It’s not just a matter of if the neighborhood will take off — it’s taking off now.”

Doug Bowen, a realtor and 16-year resident who has served on several community initiatives, says “the service and amenities just continue to get better and better.” He recalls the days when the developing fringes were vacant hangouts for vagrants.

“There were people drinking 40s and smoking dope ... there were dice games, and it was rough around the edges — a whole different feel,” he said. Now, he says, the formerly downtrodden Myrtle Avenue on Wallabout’s eastern edge “has gone from ‘Murder Avenue’ to one of the hottest commercial corridors in Brooklyn.”

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