

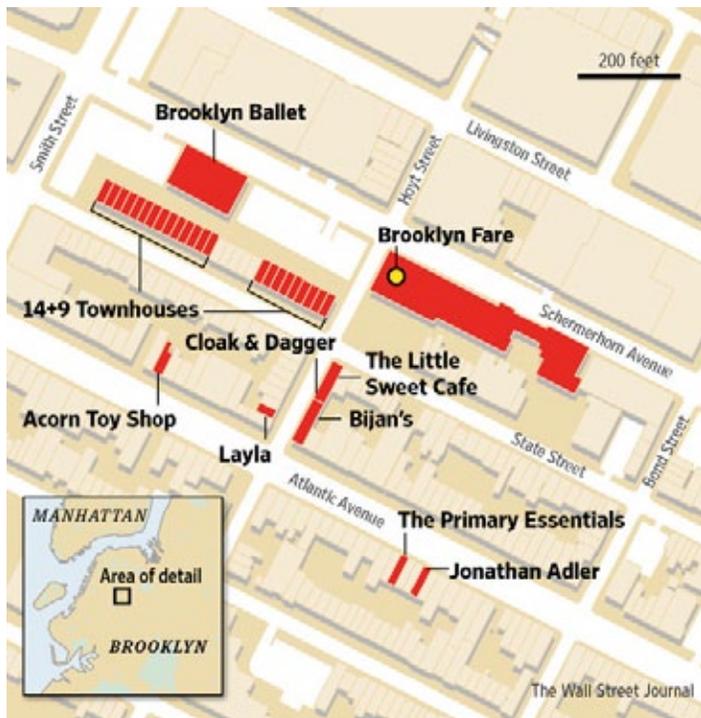
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Townhouses Line Up on Brooklyn's State Street

Block Party

By Lana Bortolot

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Lana Bortolot of the Wall Street Journal puts the 14+9 Townhouses in context.

A recently completed swath of construction in Brooklyn provides buyers with high-end housing while bucking the trend for high-rise development.

Just within the shadow of condominium buildings such as the 30-story Toren and the 26-story be@Schermehorn, it's easy to overlook the set of modernist townhouses that line State Street on the southern edge of Downtown Brooklyn between Hoyt and Smith streets.

Begun as a set of 14 single-family homes in 2006 on a formerly blighted block of empty lots, and now nearing completion with an additional nine houses, the project—nicknamed 14 + 9 Townhouses—represents the first such block-wide development in Brooklyn in more than a century.

“No one had designed a row of modern townhouses in an of New York City to such a large degree,” said Jonathan

Marvel of Marvel Architects, who worked on both phases of the project. “we weren't really sure how the market was going to respond.”

The now-23 houses are interrupted only by a cluster of five brownstones mid-block, dating from the 1880s. The refashioned row of houses faces a harmonious block of brick Greek Revival townhouses built between 1847 and the mid-870s, which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

“Our approach to this project was to create an architecturally distinguished composition of houses that complemented the historic without imitating them;” said Abby Hamlin, president of Hamlin Ventures, which co-developed the site with Time Equities Inc. They purchased the lots for \$4.65 million after a successful bid in the state-issued request for proposal.

The first phase sold out in 2007, at an average price of \$2.5 million. The project was on hold during the recession until construction resumed in 2012.

Of the nine newest homes, two remain unsold: contractors are putting the finishing touches on them. This time, the asking prices are set at \$3.6 million with the largest building (No. 309, which includes a parking spot) listing for \$4.3 million. The first resale of one of the initial houses occurred this year, fetching \$3.3 million.

“The key difference between when we started and where we are today is downtown Brooklyn,” Ms. Hamlin said. “[It] was kind of shabby, and what it is today is a mixed-use neighborhood with an amazing amount of high-tech growth coming.”

Hemmed in by county civic and court buildings on one side and a street of homegrown businesses—twice named “the greenest block” in Brooklyn—on the other, the tract of contrasting yet cohesive townhouses reflect much of what’s happening in the neighborhood.

Even the adjacent back lot facing Schermerhorn Street embodies the neighborhood’s new wave. At 160 Schermerhorn, Ms. Hamlin developed 217 affordable housing units, and created street-level space for the Brooklyn Ballet and the Actor’s Fund Arts Center.

Down the street and around the corner from the townhouses at the corner of Hoyt and Schermerhorn streets is Brooklyn Fare, an upmarket grocer that begins the progression along Hoyt to other stylish businesses: BJan’s, a Persian cafe; the Cloak & Dagger boutique; and Layla, a home decor shop.

Also on Hoyt is the Little Sweet Cafe, which Masoud Soltani opened 16 months ago. He said he wanted to make a living in a “safe and laid-back” neighborhood and signed a five-year lease for his store.

His strip on Hoyt leads to Atlantic Avenue, where well-established and newer independent businesses are flourishing.

The block between Hoyt and Smith is evolving from old businesses to new, mirroring the trendy stretch of Atlantic

with highly curated design stores such as Jonathan Adler and the new Primary Essentials.

Karin Schaefer and her partner, Diane Crespo, were early pioneers on the less fashionable block when they opened Acorn Toy Shop in 2004. At the time, their stretch of Atlantic Avenue was largely defined by dusty antiques stores, but they hoped to catch some of the momentum of the lively Smith Street, one block away.

“We chose Atlantic because it’s more of a destination shopping area from other neighborhoods and we liked some of the other shops that were [already] here. We didn’t know if that was going to work, but it has,” Ms. Schaefer said.

Though not prescient of the arrival of the townhouses, she said it didn’t surprise her that people discovered this nook of the neighborhood.

“I think it’s a desirable place to live, and I think people are moving here because they want more of a community neighborhood experience,” she said.

Jordan Cooper, a real-estate agent familiar with the area, says the in-between patch—not quite Boerum Hill and not quite downtown—reflects a new willingness to explore the unexpected.

“I think It gets overlooked because it’s small and it gets overshadowed by your Park Slopes, Carroll Gardens and Downtown Brooklyns,» he said.

“But as prices continue to rise, people will keep looking for new territory.”

Cafe owner Mr. Soltani said. “Three or four years ago it wasn’t like this, but everyone says the neighborhood is picking up and getting better. I’m going to work hard and stay positive and we’ll see what happens.”