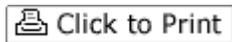


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Real Estate

Outsider Appeal

Its ruins are becoming rentals, but Roosevelt Island is hanging onto its remote city-within-a-city vibe.

By [S.Jhoanna Robledo](#)



The Octagon in 1900. (Photo courtesy of Roosevelt Island Historical Society.)



The Octagon's rotunda today, under reconstruction. (Photo credit: James Leynse/Corbis)

As a child on Roosevelt Island in the eighties, Rebecca Shaw spent hours with her friends exploring the Octagon, the ruined Victorian tower of the old New York City Lunatic Asylum. “It was always mysterious,” remembers Shaw, who also happens to be the first baby born to residents of the island’s housing complex. In the spring, she expects to return to the Octagon—but not for nostalgia’s sake. The Octagon is being expanded and turned into high-end rentals, its long-demolished dome is being re-created, and Shaw plans to move in.

After years of agita—partners Bruce Redman Becker and Gotham Construction redrew their plans several times to pacify locals—the development, only the second to bring market-rate rents to the island, is nearly done. Twenty-one tenants are onboard to sign “pre-leases,” lured by amenities like tennis courts and day care. (The prices are middling, with studios starting at \$1,400 and three-bedrooms at \$4,100.) “It’s the most important project we’ve ever done,” says Becker.

For years, Roosevelt Island has hidden in plain sight; despite its 212 area code, it has 9,500 mostly middle-class and multiethnic residents, open space, and small-town services. But anything close to midtown gets noticed these days, even this two-mile knob of land with an eerie reputation. (Most of its apartments were built under the Mitchell-Lama plan, and some will likely go private soon.) A century ago, it housed prisoners and smallpox victims; the recent horror-thriller *Dark Water*, depicting it as a ghost town, didn’t help. What really creeps out the locals, though, is the prospect of change. “They’re going to destroy the quality of life if they keep building like that,” frets fourteen-year resident Naomi Imbrogno. Yet for some old-timers like Shaw, it’s simply a step

in their evolution—and the island’s. “I’m in a fifth-floor walk-up on the Upper East Side,” says Shaw. “Moving [back], I’ll feel like I’m on vacation.”

Movers

The Perks of Perkins

Looks like the 6,700-square-foot Soho duplex that talk-show host **Kelly Ripa** and her husband, actor **Mark Consuelos**, bought as

raw space this past spring may be ready for moving-in day. Sources say the couple have put their current residence, a 5,000-square-foot loft a few floors below the new place, on the market for \$7.5 million through Corcoran's Alida Rubin. Unsurprisingly, given that Ripa and Consuelos have three kids, it's tailor-made for a large family, with an enormous eat-in kitchen that has double Gaggenau ovens and two Sub-Zero fridges, as well as a separate family wing with two children's bedrooms and a playroom. (Private elevator landing, too.) The building has attracted a steady stream of celebrities, from Nicole Kidman, who lived there several years ago, to Harvey Weinstein. "It's been very active—a lot of showings," says Rubin.

Same Space, Different Place

A Tale of Two Co-ops

These postwar apartments in midtown are only two blocks from each other, yet their asking prices are miles apart—\$94,000, to be exact. The more expensive unit has a slightly bigger bedroom, says listing broker Fred Taubner, which matters when you want that new armoire. But the real difference between the two can't be discerned from floor plans: 211 East 53rd Street is, like 245 East 54th Street, a co-op, but it has condo rules, meaning applicants need not stress out over the prospect of a fierce board interview. (Subleases are also allowed.) "You'll definitely pay a premium for that privilege," says Taubner—in this case, almost 21 percent more.

211 East 53rd Street, Apartment 11L

The Facts: One-bedroom, one-bath, 625-square-foot condop.

Asking Price: \$549,000.

Charges and taxes: \$1,099 per month.

Broker: Fred Taubner, Bellmarc.

245 East 54th Street, Apartment 18K

The Facts: One-bedroom, one-bath, 650-square-foot co-op.

Asking Price: \$455,000.

Charges and taxes: \$1,058 per month.

Broker: Rita Friedman, Bellmarc.

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