

CITY **LIVING****+FIND IT**

**FLATIRON** The boundaries often include parts of Chelsea and Union Square, but the Flatiron District is anchored between Sixth Avenue and Broadway, from 23rd Street to 14th Street.

# Flatiron's fanciful flight

The toy biz is gone, but the fun has just begun

BY LANA BORTOLOTT  
Special to amNewYork

The toy industry may have largely vanished from the neighborhood, but there's still plenty of play going on in the Flatiron District.

Boasting some of the city's most renowned restaurants and iconic architecture, and anchored by two neighborhood parks, Flatiron is shedding its wallflower reputation and becoming a downtown neighborhood of choice.

"We're seeing a resurgence of blocks that were desolate after 6 p.m. now with new restaurants

and different ground uses coming on line," says Jennifer Brown, executive director of the Flatiron/23rd Street Partnership, the area's two-



Flatiron has fine shopping set amid great architecture, such as the Met Life tower, below. (PHOTOS: R.J. MICKELSON/AMNY)

year-old business improvement district (or BID). "Everyone in the neighborhood is excited about the growth and that people are making it their home. It's a really relevant neighborhood with a lot of access."

The restoration of Madison Square Park, ringed by stately architecture, set the gears in motion here, and the improvements keep coming. The area has been spruced up with trees and other plantings, and a new pedestrian plaza around the Flatiron Building may eventually include a concession stand and a flower or holiday market.

The BID's social services program has addressed the quality-of-life issues that long plagued the area with a dedicated Clean Streets and Public Safety program.

A mix of upscale national brands

**+DID YOU KNOW?**

The Flatiron Building, constructed in 1902, was considered one of the first skyscrapers. It was eclipsed in 1909 by the neighboring Metropolitan Life Insurance Building.

and independent businesses line the retail corridors of Broadway and Fifth, many of which cater to the home-design market. And now, a number of luxury condo conversions will ensure that those businesses thrive as Flatiron becomes a full-on residential neighborhood.

Though residents welcome the changes, there are concerns about the neighborhood losing its character and becoming another shopping mall or Meatpacking District. Community Board member Jen-

nifer Kozel, herself a Flatiron resident since 1999, says that while most of the changes are good, others are "problematic."

"As the neighborhood becomes more residential, there are more amenities, and that's very exciting if you live here," she said. "But as some of the buildings are converted to other things, you whittle away at a district."

The influx of residents into a traditional manufacturing district also creates a need for elementary schools, which Flatiron lacks. And as the area becomes more popular with young families, quality-of-life economics — especially in current conditions — will become more of a factor in deciding who can afford living here.

**REAL ESTATE**

A mansard roof crowns this Broadway edifice.

Though conversions are on the rise here, the housing inventory is low in Flatiron, making the neighborhood high in demand.

**To rent**

**\$3,200**

Studio apartment in new luxury building, 511 sq feet

**\$6,500**

Two-bedroom in same building, 1,079 sq feet

**\$2,299**

One-bedroom, one-bath duplex apartment with a terrace in a prewar building, 1,200 sq feet

**To buy**

**\$3.6 mil**

Three-bedroom, three-bath condo in post-war high rise. Two balconies. 2,100 sq feet

**\$1.275 mil**

Two-bedroom, two-bath condo in same building, 850 sq feet

VERED GEORGE, HALSTEAD PROPERTY, 212-381-4206; GREG R. ANNUNZIATA, 212-381-2366; AND INES RODRIGUEZ, 212-381-2354; BARBARA LICALZI, HALSTEAD PROPERTY, 212-381-4228; LIOR LEV, CITI-HABITATS, 212-777-7757.

**TO SHOP**

Two types of retail are here: fashion for your body and for your home. National brands dominate many storefronts, but city favorites keep this from feeling like a shopping mall.

**Fishes Eddy**

899 Broadway, 212-420-9020

Leave your backpack at home so you can browse this stocked-to-the-ceiling emporium of vintage and reproduction china and glass for the table top.

**Environment Furniture**

876 Broadway, 212-780-0051

You can't live off the grid in New York, but you can

**ESSENTIAL FLATIRON****Abracadabra Super Store**

10 W. 21st St., 212-627-5194

You can shop here, of course, or you can come for the sheer spectacle of this magic store, one of a few reminders of the mystery and magic of New York vaudeville. The top gag gifts purchased by police and firemen: stink bombs and flatulence spray, says sales associate J.P. Groth. Free magic shows on Friday nights 7-9 p.m. and magic classes start in January.

make your home eco-friendly with furniture from this chic and simple store.

**Ricky's Outlet**

893 Broadway, 212-677-5462

Get your groove on here at

reduced prices. Ricky's first outlet in the city features bath and hair products and accessories, hip totes, cool Doodolls and colorful boas.

**ABC Carpet & Home**

888 Broadway, 212-473-3000

The granddaddy of all New York City design stores, ABC mixes up all your fantasies about castles, souks and English manors in a multi-floored emporium experience.

## TO SEE

Flatiron has attracted, in recent years, a quiet gathering of cultural and restful spots where you can experience the New York not for tourists.

## Walking tours

The Flatiron/23rd Street BID sponsors free walking tours of the historic Flatiron district every Sunday year-round. Tours meet at 11 a.m. at the southwest corner of Madison Square Park at 23rd Street and Broadway.

## Madison Square Park

23rd Street between Fifth and Madison avenues

Once a down-and-out patch, and now a jewel box after a major restoration, old-growth trees, flowering gardens, a playground and dog run provide a respite in the park-starved neighborhood. In warm weather, cultural programming includes free concerts and family programs. The de rigueur activity, however, is queuing up at Shake Shack.

## AIGA Gallery

164 Fifth Ave., 212-807-1990

When not contemplating the role of Helvetica in design society, the professional association for designers hosts public events and shows in its gallery. Two design exhibitions — the AIGA annual competition, and the National Biennial Awards from the Australian Graphic Design Association — are on display through February 2009.

## Daryl Roth Theater

20 Union Square West, 212-375-1110  
The longtime home of international Off-Broadway hit *De La Guarda*, this non-traditional theater, located in a landmark former bank building, now hosts *Fuerzabruta*, from the same creators. Also here: *DR2*, a smaller theater that often hosts kids' shows.

## The Museum of Sex

233 Fifth Ave., 212-689-6337  
The museum exhibits more than 15,000 objects including artifacts, historical ephemera, media and fine art that explore current discourse and the history of sex in cultures across the world. On right now: *The Sex Lives of Animals*.

## TO PLAY

There's no shortage of options here, from elegant lounges to playful pastimes.



Think classic luncheonettes are gone from Manhattan? Think again. Eisenberg's is alive and well. (PHOTOS: R.J. MICKELSON/AMNY)



You can now get your Shake Shack fix in winter.

## 230 Fifth

230 Fifth Ave., 212-725-4300  
From the creators of *Palladium* and the *Roxy* comes this nightclub in the sky (on the 20th floor). Drinks are pricey, but the view is, as they say, priceless. An outdoor lounge is open in the summer with 360-degree views.

## Duvet

45 W. 21st., 212-989-2121  
Designed by Andres Escobar and billed as a "dining boudoir," *Duvet* features 30 customized "dining beds" on which good friends can party, eat and engage in pillow talk. Custom slippers, European bed linens and flat-screen TVs complete the scene. What you won't find anywhere else: an aquarium of exotic jellyfish.

## Flatiron Lounge

37 W. 19th St., 212-727-7741  
This neighborhood favorite is known for its Jazz Age atmosphere and refined cocktail menu, which changes with the season. Fresh juices, inventive

## FACT SHEET

■ **Get there:** Three subway lines serve Flatiron: N/R/W; F/V and 6 stop at 23rd street. The M23 bus runs crosstown.

■ **Police Precinct:** 13th Precinct, 230 E. 21st St. 212-477-7411

■ **Crime stats:** The 13th Precinct reports one murder, 10 rapes, 242 robberies, 341 burglaries for the year to date. In the same time period last year, there were three murders, six rapes, 225 robberies, and 332 burglaries.

■ **Schools:** Manhattan Village Academy High School, 43 W. 22nd St., public (9-12); School for the Physical City, 55 E. 25th St., public (8-12)

twists and kicky things like martini flights make this popular with downtowners who want to play like uptowners.

## Live Bait

14 E. 23rd St., 212-353-2400  
There's a kitschy down-hominess of this place that people seem not to tire of. More frat boy than hipster, more backyard than front of house, it's a reliably loud

place to throw back a few beers with some Cajun munchies.

## TO EAT

Flatiron boasts some of the city's most famed dining — from brand-name chefs to notable sandwicheries. Come hungry when you come here.

## Bar Stuzzichini

928 Broadway, 212-780-5100  
Named for the small pickings of Southern Italian food (*stuzzichare* means "to pick"), come here to sample fare beyond the usual pasta on a platter. Take advantage of the small-plate philosophy here with Roman-style artichokes and lightly crisped rice balls. But if you must have pasta, try the *pistachio* with *pecorino* and *lemon*.

## Boqueria

53 W. 19th St., 212-255-4160  
This small Iberian restaurant occupies a culinary craving somewhere between *tapas* and the usual *paella* palaces. The menu weighs heavily toward *pork* — artisanally prepared and as much a part of Spanish food culture as

*paella* (which you can also get here).

## Eisenberg's Sandwich Shop

174 Fifth Ave., 212-675-5096

Since 1929, working-class New Yorkers have raised their cholesterol level here. Along with your sandwich (the egg salad deserves note), you get a serving of old-style New York. Don't ask for a check: You won't get one. Owner Josh Konecky keeps it all in his head; that's part of the charm of the place.

## Q&amp;A

WITH  
JOSH KONECKY

Konecky owns Eisenberg's Sandwich Shop.

## How long have you been in the neighborhood?

I grew up in Peter Cooper Village, worked here in the printing business, and ate here (Eisenberg's) for 15 years before I bought it.

## What are some of the changes you've seen?

Major industries are gone — the toy industry and the printing business. And national stores make it seem like

we could be anywhere in the country, not New York City.

## What would you recommend doing here?

Other than eat at Eisenberg's? (diner *Debbie*, sitting at the counter, looks up from her tuna sandwich, "Where else are ya gonna eat?") Go to the park. Eat at other places. Shop independent merchants in the area.



Konecky

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