

Chinatown: Still the real deal

By Lana Bortolot
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Sleeped in tradition, Chinatown is one of the city's few neighborhoods to fend off gentrification, keeping its cultural fabric intact through a constant infusion of immigrants who keep the neighborhood true to its roots.

"Chinatown's history has always been an attraction," says John Wang, president of the Asian-American Business Development Center, "but it's no more insular than any other ethnic community. People who come here know that it's different. They come here for the food and the shopping because they can't find these things elsewhere."

It's unlikely developers will descend on Chinatown's patchwork of commercial and residential buildings: The center's zoning restrictions prevent high-rise buildings, and family-owned buildings have little turnover. "People want to buy in Chinatown, but because



Chinatown has many draws: a bustling street life, culture, history and endless dining options.

(R)

there are no high-rise buildings, there aren't a lot of affordable apartments on the market," says Sherril Shang of Century 21 NY Metro, who has a large Chinese clientele.

"A lot of the available buildings don't have amenities — just the apartment with the key ... They don't

want luxury—they just want to be surrounded by cultural things and the way of life."

And that's not likely to change any time soon. Wellington Chen, executive director of the Chinatown Partnership Local Development Corp., said, "People have been looking

for housing here, but they have had no success so far, for the simple reason, most of the traditional core of Chinatown is very, very stable." Chen estimates that about 200 rent-controlled buildings are owned by more than 60 associations.

"Those are not going to be touched," he said.



Real estate

Good luck finding a pad in Chinatown's core.

Sales and rentals are tight — and nearly nonexistent in Chinatown's core. No-frills apartments sold out at Hester Gardens (Hester and Mott streets) in record time, to a mostly Chinese clientele. Residential sales average \$1,110-\$1,200 per square foot. Here are recent samplings of available properties around the periphery of the neighborhood:

- Three-bedroom condo at 129 Lafayette St. (Corcoran): **\$3.275 million**
- Loft studio at 175 E. Broadway (Corcoran): **\$750,000**
- Two-bedroom at 44-46 Market St. (Century 21 NY Metro): **\$1.3 million**
- One-bedroom at 185 Park Row (Century 21 NY Metro): **\$529,000**

Rentals

- Three-bedroom rental at 62 Rivington St. (Century 21 NY Metro): **\$3,400** a month
- Two-bedroom rental at 376 Broadway (Century 21 NY Metro): **\$3,600** a month
- Studio mini loft rental at 175 East Broadway (Corcoran): **\$3,250** a month

Find It

The boundaries are ever-expanding, but for now, Chinatown is bounded by Delancey street on the north, East Broadway and Worth Street to the south, Allen Street to the east and Broadway to the west.

To eat

Ten Ren Tea and Ginseng Company Inc.

Translated as "heavenly love," New York's largest Chinese tea shop is known for its green and black teas and traditional tea ceremonies. Drink here then buy at the shop two doors down.

**79 Mott St.,
212-732-7178**

Egg Custard King Cafe

Two locations of Egg Custard King Cafe feature this Chinese version of creme brulee or flan. Strawberry, honeydew and banana are among the best-sellers.

**76 Mott St.,
212-226-8208**

**271 Grand St.,
212-226-8882**

Golden Fung Wong Bakery

A wide selection of lotus-seed paste cakes, moon cakes and other traditional pastries.

**41 Mott St.,
212-267-4037**

Original Chinatown Ice Cream Factory

Bypass the Haagen-Dazs on the corner and head straight here for originals such as red bean, ginger, almond flower lychee and black sesame ice creams. Skip the pistachio and have green tea ice cream.

**65 Bayard St.,
212-608-4170**

Wo Hop

Open and crowded 24/7, at 5:30 a.m. you'll see New York City's finest crowding down huge plates of chop suey, chow fun and other Cantonese dishes.

**17 Mott St.,
212-962-8617**

Ping's Seafood

It doesn't get fresher than here: Your fish will be extracted from its tank and on your plate 20 minutes later.

**22 Mott St.,
212-602-9988**

Congee Village

A little bit of Vegas, a little bit of Pocomos, the decor of this over-the-top temple to congee, a boiled rice porridge usually served at breakfast. Thirty varieties of congee are on the menu as well as 250 Cantonese specialties.

**100 Allen St.,
212-941-1818**

**207 Bowery Congee Bowery,
212-766-2828**

Hong Kong Station

A trio of bright noodle shops make you feel like you're in modern Hong Kong. You can build your own soup bowl here for a modest price.

**45 Division St.
and 128 Hester St.,
212-966-9382**

**45 Bayard St.,
212-233-0288**

Dim Sum Go Go

From the outside, it looks like a fluorescent-lit chain store, but inside is a sleek decor and



Dig into a delicious boiled rice dish at Congee Bowery Restaurant and Bar. (Dennis W.



No longer a "Bloody Bucket," Dive 169 draws hipsters.

menu to match. Twenty-four styles of dumplings with unusual twists and vegan-friendly options.

**5 E. Broadway,
212-732-0797**

Mei Lai Wah Coffeehouse

Chinatown's oldest coffeehouse is a time capsule with hand-lettered menus on the wall, and prices that reflect a gentler time. The pork buns, at 60 cents, are continually sold out — and continually replenished.

The noodle- and steamed-dumpling soup at \$2.80 is best slurped at the counter with the locals.

**64 Bayard St.,
212-925-5435**

New Green Bo

Come early and be prepared to wait in this tiny, busy restaurant. It's nothing to look at, but every thing to taste, renown for its fried dumplings and pork buns.

**66 Bayard St.,
212-625-2359**

The party

The original neighborhood hipster bar, Double Happiness, closed, as did Bear Cafe, but a few watering holes remain.

Silk Road Mocha

The popular Teabag Open Mic variety show has morphed into the Five Points Variety Hour, every Friday from 8 to 10 p.m.

**30 Mott St.,
212-566-3738**

Yello

A sleek, friendly bar in a quiet stretch across from Columbus Park. There are karaoke and drink specials every night with the lychee-shot specialty.

**32 Mulberry St.,
212-964-3410**

169 Bar

Once called the "Bloody Bucket" in the 1940s, now area hipsters and Chinese regulars come for the dance party atmosphere.

**169 East Broadway,
212-473-8866**

The buzz

Division Street east of the Manhattan Bridge shows signs of a hipster invasion. Though it's technically the Lower East Side, new businesses are popping up alongside old-school Chinese storefronts and garages, and Chinatown's ever-expanding borders make this area a de facto part of the neighborhood.

Two restaurants pioneered the area: Les Enfants Terribles (37 Canal St.), a North African bistro, and the Swedish-influenced Good World Bar and Grill (3 Orchard St.), opened in a former Chinese barber shop. Around the block, Bacaro (136 Division St.), a Venetian wine bar and restaurant opened at the end of 2007.

Project No. 8, a monochromatic "concept" boutique, featuring local and international designers, is the first upscale clothing store to break ground in this up-and-coming stretch (138 Division St.)

The basics

Police
Fifth Precinct
19 Elizabeth St.
212-334-0711

Crime

The Fifth Precinct, covering Chinatown, reports one rape, nine robberies, 14 felony assaults, 14 burglaries and 67 grand larcenies so far in 2008. For the same period in 2007: no rapes, 16 robberies, 13 felony assaults, 6 burglaries and 63 grand larcenies.

Schools

Chinatown is in the New York City Board of Education School District 2, but many students also attend public schools in neighboring District 1 encompassing the Lower East Side and areas that are abutting if not becoming part of Chinatown.

To shop

Lin Sister Herb Shop, Inc.

A combined 30 years of Chinese herbal remedy experience and services such as acupuncture, reflexology, colon hydrotherapy and traditional Chinese herbal treatments.

4 Bowery,
212-962-5417
18A Elizabeth St.
212-962-8083

Dynasty Arts

Offers rosewood antique and reproductions. Find painted chests and cabinets at a fraction of the cost uptown.

103 Mosco St.,
212-566-6882

Whole World Fashion Boutique

Excellent prices on traditional silk tops, jackets and dresses. An added plus: exceptionally friendly service.

17A Mott St.,
212-267-4211

Good Fortune Gifts

Located in the former historic Mott Street General Store, Good Fortune has an array of feng shui products in addition to snuff bottles, teapots and



Hong Kong Supermarket has a huge selection of

ceramics.

32 Mott St.,
212-791-9989

Kam Man

The basement of this supermarket has a huge selection of ceramics, teapots and decorative household goods.

200 Canal St.,
212-571-0330

Hong Kong Supermarket

A sprawling supermarket with fresh produce, seafood and meat. Dry goods, frozen fish balls, dumplings, flower rolls and buns, it's worth a visit just to ogle the aisles of snacks.

109 East Broadway



Five men soak in the afternoon sun along Henry Street.

The Museum at Eldridge Street

A glorious restoration has transformed this National Historic Landmark, which just a few years ago looked forlorn with peeling paint and holes in the ceiling. Though focused on Jewish history and culture, the synagogue is flanked by Chinese businesses, testimony of the change in this neighborhood.

17 Eldridge St.,
212-219-0888

Church of the Transfiguration

Also called "The Immigrant Church" for its history of continuously serving the immigrant community since 1801. It was built from the same stone used for St. Paul's Chapel on Broadway.

29 Mott St.

Mahayana Buddhist Temple

The largest Buddhist temple in Chinatown, across from the Manhattan Bridge, features a giant golden Buddha seated on a lotus.

133 Canal St.

Kimlau Square (formerly Chatham Square)

The intersection of seven streets — Bowery, East Broadway, St. James Place, Mott Street, Oliver Street, Worth Street and Park Row — features the Kim Lau Memorial Arch, a 1962 memorial dedicated to Lt. Benjamin Ralph Kimlau and the Chinese-Americans who died in WWII. Also here: a statue of Lin Ze Xu, a 19th-century Qing



An exhibit at the Museum of Chinese in America

Columbus Park

Created in the late 19th century to improve the Five Points slum, this is Chinatown's largest park, and a favored place for playing table games and reading fortunes. Come here to see people practicing Tai Chi or just passing the time with their caged birds.

Between Mulberry and Baxter streets below Bayard

Museum of Chinese in America

The first museum dedicated to reclaiming, preserving and interpreting the history and culture of Chinese and their descendants in the Western Hemisphere. (Moving in fall 2008.)

70 Mulberry St.,
212-619-4785



with
Charles Lai

Charles Lai, executive director of the Museum of Chinese in America, grew up on the outskirts of Chinatown. He was one of the museum's two co-founders in 1980.

What's so special about Chinatown?

The vibrancy of the neighborhood is not only commerce — it's also about the arts and the culture and people having an opportunity to work and live in the area — to have some kind of commonality.



Lai

What are some of the changes you've seen over the years?

Even in 1978, we were still able to see remnants of the historic part of Chinatown — stores that had been in operation for 80 years. But over the years, many new immigrants created businesses that meet the needs of the new populace, so many of the old stores are no longer in existence.

What would you like to see change in Chinatown?

The better question is what do we need to make better? People deserve to live in better conditions than what we see today. We need to look at what we can do to accommodate that without a wholesale community renewal.