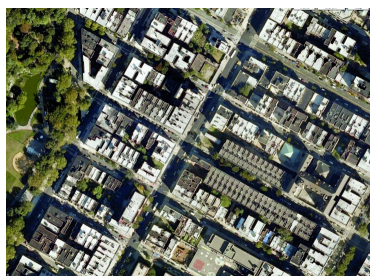


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Real Estate

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IN THE NEWS



Harlem's Ghosts As Mood Lighting

Even to the locals who've watched it happen, the hyperkinetic transformation of Frederick Douglass Boulevard is still a one-two punch of baffled awe—part time-lapse metamorphosis, part coy erasure. The south Harlem thoroughway of brownstones and anonymous bodegas suddenly speckles with glass condos, blank-faced and steely purposed. It has yielded to the sort of eating and drinking establishments that prefer their décor minimal and their ambience heavily encoded.

Many of these invoke the ghosts of Harlem past, when Prohibition turned the neighborhood into a cultural spark plug of jazz and nightlife, dense with dance halls, supper clubs and speakeasies. The fancy way station of mixology, 67 Orange Street, for instance, taps into a continuum of black history in New York that begins in the Five Points area, the city's first free black settlement, and eventually moves uptown to Harlem. The name was the onetime address of Almack's Dance Hall, among antebellum New York's most prominent black-owned businesses. Five Points spots like Almack's, where the dance styles of blacks and Irish immigrants merged to form tap-dancing, are considered precursors to Harlem's Prohibition-era "black-and-tan" cabarets.

Of course, while edgy new restaurants are often the harbingers of good things to come, they don't exactly equate to cultural ferment in and of themselves. As the condos continue to rise, the so-called coming Harlem renaissance could gain from revitalizing its past as more than restaurant mood lighting.

2082 Frederick Douglass Boulevard

Behind its wine-dark drapes, 67 Orange Street is intended to summon a speakeasy cool, though the legacy of its name goes back even further. It's taken from the address of the notorious 19th-century bar, Almack's Dance Hall. Smack in the middle of the Five Points slum, the venue was among antebellum New York's few prominent black-owned businesses. Almack's music attracted governors, legislators and Charles Dickens, who noted a "corpulent black fiddler" and a dancer "spinning about on his toes and heels like nothing but the man's fingers on the tambourine."

2099 Frederick Douglass Boulevard

Bier International, South Harlem's new beer garden, is emblazoned with the word for "beer" in a far-flung smattering of languages, and its draft offerings are about as diverse. Though the focus is on the brews, on warm summer nights, the spot has also been known to host a pig roast or two.

2072 Frederick Douglass Boulevard

Ryan Skeen, the roving chef best known for his undaunted affection for all things pork, opened 5 & Diamond earlier this year (though he soon left). The restaurant is among the crop of downtown-sleek restaurants opening above 110th Street.

316 West 115th Street

Though no one is entirely certain, it is believed that the 25 wax figures of famous African-Americans that once constituted the townhouse's museum—everyone from Harriet Tubman to Magic Johnson to Fannie Lou Hamer—are stored away inside. The statues were the life's work of Raven Chanticleer, a fashion designer, a dancer, a storyteller and an all-around eccentric, who died in 2002.

2136 Frederick Douglass Boulevard

On Friday afternoons, Juma prayers at the narrow, brick Masjid Aqsa mosque often spill out onto the sidewalk, where women peddle West African DVDs, prayer mats and bags of dried fruit. Presiding over the scene is Imam Souleimane Konaté, who founded the mosque close to 15 years ago in the heart of what has become known as New York's Little Senegal. The congregation is raising the money to move to a larger space.

301 West 115th Street

Harlem has never exactly lacked for religion—by 1928, 160 churches had sprouted in the neighborhood—but the grand opening of the Livmor luxury condo-cum-church is a new development. The flat-screen-bedecked building, with amenities like a state-of-the-art gym and a flashy media lounge, will also host a 17,500-square-foot African Methodist Episcopal church.

278 West 113th Street

Just off Frederick Douglass Boulevard, in 1904, escape artist Harry Houdini paid \$25,000 in cash for this 26-room townhouse—"the finest private house that any magician has ever had the great fortune to possess," he claimed. He added an 8-foot mirror to the bathroom, as well as a sunken tub for refining his underwater endurance.

