

Real Estate



THE NEW 'IT' PARKS
 Watch out Central Park: Families are flocking to more intimate neighborhood parks around New York City

Living within blocks of Central Park is the New York City dream, reflected in literature, in movies, in advertising campaigns—everywhere, it seems, except reality. Only those who live here know the deep, dark secrets of the most famous city park: that its size and breadth can make planning play dates a pain; that adjacent Upper West and East Side real estate can be more like unreal estate; and that, like the sidewalks they head into the green to escape, this park is packed. In recent years, New Yorkers in the know have turned away from the center to smaller parks that combine a quiet accessibility with familiarity and a neighborhood feel. New development projects near today's It parks allow growing families to turn away from the ubiquitous Upper East and West Sides and find themselves at home in luxury buildings with New York City parks that serve as their backyard.

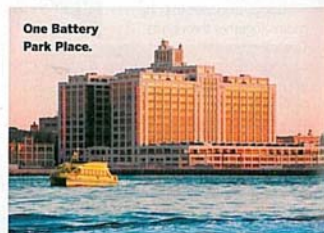
Park-adjacent living has been a green dream come true for the Fishman family. They use their neighborhood park all the time. Use? Well, sort of. "Use" is not the word," laughs Mya Han Fishman. "Since we have three children, we practically live at the park," the park

in question being Gantry Plaza State Park in Long Island City, 12 acres spanning the Queens waterfront where children of all ages enjoy manicured gardens, a mist fountain and playgrounds galore. Mya and her husband, Lev, started renting at the View, a luxury condominium blocks from the park, when Mya was pregnant with their third child; they fell so in love with the proximity to the park that they ended up buying their unit. "Sometimes going to the park can be a big outing," says Mya, "but for us, it's right outside our door—it's literally our backyard." Since every apartment at the View has its own outdoor space, the Fishmans have a backyard, too—but "we usually go to the park more than we use our backyard." At Gantry Plaza State Park, the Fishmans' son, Joshua, 10, rides his bike while Briyana, 2, and Chloe, 16 months, play in the lush grassy areas. "The only place I can think of in New York City with grass is Central Park," says Mya, adding, "Don't get me wrong—I love Central Park. But this is more neighborhood friendly—we're always bumping into people we know and my son's friends." Buyers at the nearby L haus have found the same pleasure in the area, combining luxury living at a brand-new condo with the award-winning Gantry Park just a hop, skip and jump away. Karen Mansour, the executive vice president of marketing and sales for the Development Marketing Group at Prudential Douglas Elliman, who works with the condo-

minium, told *Playground*, "I have worked in the residential real estate market for over 25 years, mainly in Manhattan, and was pleasantly surprised by life in Long Island City and all it has to offer," most of all, Long Island City's park-side living that New York families are finding more and more appealing.

New green spaces are attracting families in Brooklyn as well—like in Brooklyn Heights, where Pier 6 has just opened at the Brooklyn Bridge Park where Pier 6 has just opened. One Brooklyn Bridge Park, Brooklyn's largest condominium conversion, looms above the park: "We always knew this building was truly a one-of-a-kind development," said the building's developer Robert Levine, president of RAL Companies, the building's development, "but with the opening of Brooklyn Bridge Park in our backyard, buyers have finally realized what park living really means." At Brooklyn Bridge Park, a kids-only playground teems with happy tots a stone's throw from Brooklyn's largest sandbox and a variety of wading pools. And in nearby Williamsburg, the loftlike 80 Metropolitan condominium is within a few short blocks of the L train—but also the East River State Park, a newly opened 7-acre park on the side of a 19th-century shipping dock. With open views of Williamsburg Bridge and Manhattan, the East River State Park is also home to concerts that Williamsburg residents love.

It's not just outer-borough parks that are competing with Central Park: right in Manhattan is the jewel of downtown, Battery Park, which stretches along the Hudson River, and on sunny days, evokes a Southern California vibe. Towering above Battery Park is the Visionaire condominium at 70 Little West Street. The 35-story high-rise condo has 246



One Battery Park Place.



residences, having from one to three bedrooms: Not only does it overlook the green, but it is green—the greenest, in fact: It's platinum LEED certified. For Nicole Schaffer and Jay Hirschon, who moved to the Visionaire from the West Village, Battery Park is a neighborhood perk that they use weekly with their

4-year-old daughter and 16-month-old son—"in the summer I feel like it's all the time!" says Nicole. "Central Park just seemed so crowded to me, especially on weekends," says Jay, a native New Yorker. "Bike riding is a totally different experience" in Battery Park. "Instead of it being a huge square," adds Nicole, "you have a feeling of it being different parks all the way along—there's a lot going on all the time," like fishing, preschool classes and tai chi. For residents of Battery Park City, like Jay and Nicole, and recent buyers at buildings like the Liberty Luxe and the Liberty Green, Battery Park is a very good neighbor.

And uptown, at 1485 Fifth Avenue, there's a park right outside the door for residents of Fifth on the Park. Not that park, though—while the majestic, window-walled, 28-story FX-Fowle-designed condominium does offer sweeping views of Central Park ("The views are breathtaking no matter where you are located within the building," said a representa-

tive of the building), its studio through four-bedroom residences are just steps away from Harlem's Marcus Garvey Park, which boasts a farmers' market, a dog run and designated areas for children. So important is Marcus Garvey Park to Fifth on the Park residents that they've created a committee to help with keeping the green clean and planting flowers; recently, a Fifth on the Park representative tells *Playground*, "some of the residents got together for the first-ever Mahatma Gandhi Health and Peace Walk in Mount Morris Park. It was organized by one of the first residents of the building... as a health enhancer and another way for people to meet each other." Rainy clouds overhead? No worries. Fifth on the Park residents can enjoy the park from the comfort of their own spectacular windows—as well as a brand-new children's playroom off the lobby.

We're green with envy of these park-proximate places!

—Rebecca Morse