

CURBED

The Townhouses With Doormen, Pet Spas, and Pickleball Courts A new crop of condos promises the perks of a townhouse with none of the hassle.

For decades, New York’s residential developers have been faced with a puzzle: What to do with ground-floor space? “Typically people don’t want to buy on the first floor. It’s a hard sell,” says developer Bill Caleo, a co-founder of the Brooklyn Home Company. Putting a storefront there is the best solution, but it’s not always possible, whether because of local zoning, a less-than-ideal location, or the high chance of scaring away luxury buyers. In the past, a first-floor doctor’s office was a popular workaround, but as private practices go the way of live-in maids, some developers have hit on another solution: turn them into townhouses. “If you sell the first floor in combination with two or three bedrooms upstairs, a rec room downstairs, a backyard, and maybe parking, suddenly it’s good enough,” says Caleo. Throw in the amenities of a condo development, like a concierge, a gym, and a roof-deck, as Caleo has for the two townhouses at [524 Halsey Street](#), a Bed-Stuy stable conversion, and you have something that’s not just good enough but quite compelling. Given their size, they also tend to be among the most expensive units in the building — often on par with the penthouse. These new construction townhouses have been popping up for a while now. While they don’t make sense for a lot of sites, and there can only be a few per development, brokers and developers say when they do get built, buyers are delighted by what they offer: a townhouse without the hassle of townhouse ownership. “Townhouses are amazing — they give you a lot of space and privacy, but you kind of have to grow up and take care of your house,” says Tamara Abir, a real-estate agent at Compass. She currently has a listing for [537 Pacific Street](#), the last of two townhouses that share services with a Boerum Hill condo, where “the super takes out your garbage and does snow removal,” she says. Also, unlike with a traditional Brooklyn brownstone, you’re not dealing with the upkeep on a creaky, century-old home or hiring an architect to add bathrooms, central air, a blown-out back wall, and a showplace kitchen on the parlor level. It’s all taken care of for you.



A number of townhouses that are part of larger condo developments are currently on the market. Photo-Illustration: Curbed; Photos: 17 Gane, Corestan Group, Compass, Douglas Rillman, Linden Lane

524 Halsey Street

Price: [\\$2.5 million](#)

Amenities: Rooftop terrace, gym, part-time doorman, storage, bike storage

More details: The townhouses at this Bed-Stuy stable conversion are priced lower than most renovated brownstones in the neighborhood.



The historic stable conversion in Bed-Stuy has two townhouses, one of which is in contract. Photo: Travis Mark/Douglas Elliman

537 Pacific Street

Price: [\\$7.49 million](#)

Amenities: Doorman, gym, parking, four terraces, pet spa, private roof-deck, common courtyard.

More details: Thanks to an unusual setup, the two townhouses that are part of this Boerum Hill condo are built on their own block and lot, but because of an easement through their properties, owners get access to the condo’s amenities, which include a doorman and gym.



The two townhouses at 537 Pacific Street are 28 feet wide, measuring 5,671 square feet, with parking. Photo: Compass

The townhouse-condos are, in many ways, the descendants of maisonettes — the two- or three-story homes that were incorporated into the bottom floors of full-service prewar buildings and could be accessed from either the street or the lobby. Although maisonettes have a reputation for being a little fusty — a lot of the surviving ones are somewhat dollhouse-like and dark — “the best of them were quite luxurious,” says Andrew Dolkart, an architectural historian and professor at Columbia’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation. Take the one at [998 Fifth](#), which comes with a 42-foot-long living room, wood-burning fireplaces, and a private garden (it last sold in 2012 for \$18.5 million). “These apartment buildings were built by speculative developers, so they wouldn’t have built maisonettes if they weren’t popular,” Dolkart says. People were drawn to them, in part, because it was increasingly difficult to maintain the full staff needed to run a private mansion, and with these, you didn’t have to. Most were built between the turn of the century and the 1930s, Dolkart says. After that, apartments started shrinking and it became more expensive to build a bunch of different layouts. Developers picked a few cookie-cutter floor plans that turned ground-floor units into single-story apartments or office space. But in the early aughts, a handful of developers decided it might be worth the hassle to carve townhouses into their buildings, especially as expectations for amenity spaces increased. Developers used to be able to get away with sticking the lesser spaces like libraries, playrooms, or pet-wash stations down on the ground floor, but then it became standard to put big-ticket amenities, like gyms, pools, and lounges, on higher floors, where they’ll get better views. Not all of the houses were tucked into larger structures, either; a few were separate structures next to the condo development, and one in the West Village, [Superior Ink](#), even had an underground corridor connecting it to the main building. A few did astoundingly well, like the Abingdon, in the West Village, where the 9,600-square-foot “mansion condominium” sold for \$23.4 million in 2013. (Four years ago, it traded again, this time for \$33.5 million.) While they’ve gone up all around the city — the [Upper East Side](#), [Williamsburg](#), [Park Slope](#) — it’s a form that’s done particularly well downtown, where there’s high demand and a limited number of renovated townhouses: Superior Ink, [Printing House](#), Greenwich Lane, One Morton Square, 150 Charles, and 443 Greenwich all have them. “Typically, they’re more downtown than uptown,” says Jim St. Andre, an agent at Compass who has sold a number of townhouse condos, including the ones at 17 Jane. St. Andre is currently selling 125 Perry, also in the West Village, where one of the two townhouses, [asking \\$32 million](#), is currently in contract and the other is asking \$35 million. “The appeal historically has been if you’re the type of buyer who likes privacy and having your own entrance. At 125 Perry, there’s private parking off the street and you can go straight into your townhouse. That’s super special.” For that reason, he says, they’ve become popular with celebrity buyers. In 2020, [the New York Post reported](#) that Jennifer Lawrence had paid \$21.9 million for one of the townhouses at 17 Jane. The ones that really do well are in traditional townhouse neighborhoods that, because they’re carved out of industrial spaces or ground-up new buildings, can offer things the traditional townhouses can’t, says St. Andre: 13-foot ceilings, huge windows, and vertical living that isn’t quite so vertical — at 125 Perry, the 7,000 square feet are spread out over three floors, not five, as they would be in a traditional townhouse, which many buyers prefer. Some of them also incorporate unusual features: The 74, on the Upper East Side, was able to offer not just a backyard for the stand-alone, [five-story townhouse](#) that’s part of the project, but balconies and a rooftop terrace, according to El Ad chief operating officer Alex Olsen. You won’t find that in many historic townhouses — either because the roofs are too sloped, access is through a ladder in a top-floor closet, or historic district rules forbid it.



At 42-feet, The Henry townhouse is unusually wide. Photo: Naftali Group

The townhouse is located in an Upper East Side townhouse block, situated between a historic townhouse and the condo tower. Photo: Elad Group



The townhouses at The Henry come with access to bonkers amenities like a bocce court, an indoor pickleball court, and a two-lane bowling alley. Photo: Naftali Group

The 74, 201 E. 74th St.

Price: \$14.5 million

Amenities: Fitness center, lounge, doorman, concierge, live-in super, children’s playroom, garden, package room, storage, bike room, 1,605 square feet of private outdoor space.

More details: A stand-alone townhouse designed by Pelli Clarke & Partners, the firm that did the condo tower, the five-story home is just over 5,000 square feet and has 14-foot ceilings.

Not everyone is a fan of the form. “It’s a pretend townhouse,” opined one townhouse broker I spoke with. “But if you want the romance of living in a house, but also the doorman and the garage, I guess I can see the appeal.” Brokers point out that buying a condo mansion means missing out not only on the historic charm of a townhouse, but also, often, the charm of living on a townhouse block, with your back windows looking out over a row of gardens. In fact, you might even have a tall tower — the rest of the condo — looming over your backyard. Another downside is that access to all those lovely amenities can be expensive, especially since townhouses are big and maintenance fees are often based on the size of the unit. “Some of the monthlies are really quite high,” says Richard Pretsfelder, a senior partner at Leslie Garfield, a brokerage that specializes in townhouses — the old-fashioned kind. The in-contract townhouse at 125 Perry, for example, has a spa, a gym, a Pilates room, and a doorman, but also common charges of \$18,000 a month. “Also, the very nature of townhouse living is that you can fully amenitize a townhouse if you want to — if you want to put in a swimming pool, you can do it. If you want to put in a gym, you can do it,” Pretsfelder adds. And a lot of the services that come with a condo can be hired out to professionals arranging for trash and snow-removal services, as many townhouse owners do now, and for packages, installing a lock box or using a Ring camera to buzz delivery drivers into the vestibule. A few developments have managed to skirt the problem of high fees — as the Boerum Hill townhouses on Pacific Street are on separate blocks and lots than the condo, in exchange for allowing an easement through their property, the owners get the condo amenities for free, according to Abir. But that’s the exception to the rule.

The Henry, 211 W. 84th Street

Price: \$16.75 million

Amenities: Private garden, concierge, doorman, live-in super, children’s room, gym, indoor pickleball court, bocce court, two-lane bowling alley, media room, storage, package room.

More details: The 7,719-square-foot western townhouse, designed by Robert A.M. Stern, is an astonishing 42 feet wide.

Some developments also miss the mark, failing to capture the expansiveness that makes townhouse living so appealing. “They really need to have the right ceiling height, a garden feel, and the right location, or you’re not going to enjoy being on the ground floor,” says St. Andre. This being New York, there are buyers who are willing to forgo light and views, but you have to make up for it somehow, adds Kane Manera, an agent at Corcoran who sold one of the townhouses at 150 Charles. These days, a lot of developers are offering volume — ceiling height and square feet — as compensation. “People love to be in a grand space,” says Manera. He recently sold a loft-style townhouse at 200 Mercer Street at the \$3.3 million asking price in only two weeks — its ceilings go as high as 25 feet. “It lacks a lot of things: There’s not great light, it faces onto Broadway, and it has sleeping chambers, not bedrooms, because the rooms don’t have windows. But the space is so grand, people are blown away by it.” Despite some downsides, townhouse condos seem likely to become more popular in coming years. As prices for all types of properties rise in New York, brokers and developers say that more and more buyers prefer the “we’ll take care of it for you” model — they want to move in without renovating or worrying about plumbing snafus, packages, or what happens if they’re out of town for six months. Howard Glatzer, the founder and president of Cadence Property Group, which is selling three “garden triplexes” in a Hell’s Kitchen condo project, Linden Lane, starting in the high \$3 millions, says that in addition to the demand for unique spaces with special perks, the alternative — retail and office space — has never been less appealing. “What else are you going to do with a ground-floor space that’s not going to lease?”



720 West End Avenue

Price: \$8.5 million

Amenities: Doorman, concierge, live-in super, parking, gym, bike room, children’s room, media room, library, pet spa, residents-only private dining room and bar, music practice room, and a multipurpose area for squash and indoor basketball.

More details: A southeast-facing corner duplex in a 1927 Emery Roth building on the Upper West Side redesigned as a condo by Thomas Juul-Hansen.

The Upper West Side redevelopment includes basketball and squash and on-site parking. Photo: VMI Studio



The Hell’s Kitchen development has three garden triplexes on the south side of the building. Photo: VMI Studio

Linden Lane, 349 W. 51st

Prices: Starting at \$3.7 million

Amenities: Private gardens, doorman, fitness room, yoga room, package room, bike room, storage.

More details: The Hell’s Kitchen development will have three townhouse-style triplexes, expected to hit the market in the fall.