

NEW YORK REAL ESTATE

December 6, 2009

The Williamsburg Elixir

Can moving to a new neighborhood be the fountain of youth?



(Photo: Hannah Whitaker)

Laurie Pollock and her husband were ready for change. Their sons were long gone from their seven-room Upper West Side co-op, which was beginning to feel too quiet. “We have a family saying: *Drive a truck across Africa*. It stands in for adventure,” Laurie (pictured) explains. “We’ve been working hard all these years”—raising children, building careers—“and we want to drive a truck across Africa. And we want to do it without leaving New York.” They considered moving downtown, where they lived decades ago, “but the Village we left wasn’t there anymore.” So they took the next, maybe-not-so-logical step: Move to Williamsburg.

Some moves are more paradigm-shifting than others, and this one kept the Pollocks in a comfort zone while opening up their world. “We liked the little restaurants and shops and bars and music places,” says Pollock. “We were tired of being old... We want to be our inner selves again.” (She also admits to “thigh envy. The young women walk around in very revealing clothes.”)

Roberta Benzilio, Halstead Property’s executive sales director in Brooklyn, says she’s seen an uptick in the number of boomers at Williamsburg open houses in the last year. Carrie Salter, who came from Chelsea, was unsure at first. “I thought Bedford was really young,” she says. “I didn’t want to be fish-out-of-water.” Now she lives at 80 Metropolitan, which, she says, “makes me want to be creative again.” Corcoran broker Sharon Held says when she moved from 67th and Park to the Gretsck Building—one of the earliest luxe conversions in the area—in 2006, she went from being “one of the youngest to one of the oldest.”

It’s early to say if this is a major trend or just a (baby-)boomlet; NYU’s Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy says that the area’s population aged 45 to 64 barely changed between 2000 and 2008. But locals say they’re seeing more grown-ups than they used to. Taylor Erkkinen, co-owner of the Brooklyn Kitchen, a cookware shop, says, “It’s certainly anecdotal, but we’ve been seeing new empty-nesters come in to get their knives serviced in the last year.” Mark Firth, who co-owns Marlow & Sons, a popular café-gourmet store, agrees: “We definitely have a crew of older regulars. When we first opened, it was mostly under 30.”