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New York: The Upper East Side's Best Spots



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By Alexandra Wolfe
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The Upper East Side, that most old New York of New York neighborhoods, has become a destination again, thanks to a proliferation of cool new boutiques and restaurants.

Nearly 25 years ago, Bonfire of the Vanities author Tom Wolfe defined the Upper East Side as a place filled with Masters of the Universe and the social X-rays and lemon tarts who loved them. We asked his daughter, writer Alexandra Wolfe, to revisit some familiar territory.

Outside a fluorescent-yellow building, a line of lithe New Yorkers in fur-trimmed jackets files into a white minimalist entryway, letting the chorus of Kanye West's "Power" blare onto the street whenever the door opens. Along the avenue, half a dozen black SUVs wait for sweaty celebrities in tight, shiny clothing to squeeze out.

They're not at a Chelsea nightclub but at an otherwise sleepy corner of the Upper East Side; it's a cycling studio called SoulCycle, and it attracts a bevy of boldfaced names to an area of town most scenesters refer to as "upstate." The opening of **SoulCycle East** (\$32 per class; 1470 3rd Ave.; soul-cycle.com), along with fitness hot spots like **Brownings Fitness** (from \$85 per class; 980 Madison Ave.; browningsfitness.com) and the kickboxing gym **Punch Fitness** (from \$150 per class; 1015 Madison Ave.; punchfitnesscenter.com), as well as a handful of popular new vegan restaurants, design shops and upscale hotel bars, has turned New York's last real neighborhood into a destination. An area once defined by Whit Stillman's *Metropolitan* blue-blood chic, anchored by establishments like Mortimer's, Swifty's and the old-line club triumvirate of Colony, Racquet and Union, is giving way to a nouveau art-set sleek, where Europe and Hollywood meet in the middle to mingle. The Upper East Side for me—a "lifer" at the Chapin School, an all-girls school on East End Avenue—meant wherever my parents would let me go with my bus pass, a laminated card that allowed me across town and perhaps down to Bloomingdale's on a weekend. The stretch of canopied restaurants and independent boutiques on Third Avenue from 72nd to 86th streets was a preppy cafeteria where my friends and I would wear our Barbour coats over pastel cable sweaters to have fluffy omelet breakfasts at E.J.'s diner, chicken Caesars at Luke's Grill on 79th and burgers at J.G. Melon, a hunter-green throwback with dark wood paneling and a four-deep wait at the bar. Later we'd use our fake IDs to convince the dubious bouncers at Martell's to let us get tipsy off one beer.

That Upper East Side still exists—the one where boarding school kids come home from St. Paul's and Taft, file into Dorrian's Red Hand, with its jukebox and red-checked tablecloths, or Lexington Bar and Books, marked by mahogany tables and wafts of cigar smoke, while their parents dine at old-world stalwarts like the cash-only Sette Mezzo and Jean-Georges' JoJo. We still find unique bibelots at the tastefully cluttered William Wayne and rejuvenate old clothes with new closures from Tender Buttons. But now, a decade past our bus-pass days, our old haunts provide a certain retro entertainment. **Three Guys Restaurant** (dinner, \$35; 960 Madison Ave.; 212-628-8108) on 75th Street has changed from the home of the He-Man Special to the only place on Madison that understands eggs "dry, white and light." Instead of going to Lotte Berk's ramshackle townhouse on 67th Street to plié and arabesque with our mothers, we hold the plank in Core Fusion at **Exhale Spa** (\$35 per class; 980 Madison Ave.; exhalespa.com). Smuggling Lepanto's muffins into homeroom has turned into sneaking pink-and-white cups of steaming **Sant Ambroeus** (1000 Madison Ave.; 212-570-2211) coffee into spin class.

Spending a day on today's Upper East Side is not only a chance to sample some of the city's best cuisine, keepsakes and kids' entertainment; it's a glimpse of a neighborhood at a turning point, where old and new are still each other's foils. For a taste of both, start your morning at **Via Quadronno** (25 E. 73rd St.; viaquadronno.com) on 73rd and Madison, and order a cup of Kobrick's coffee and a fresh almond croissant to eat Italian-style at the long wooden bar. Burn it off at MB Regan's 45-minute SoulCycle class, where front-row bikes are reserved weeks in advance. Leave the kids at **Kidville** (163 E. 84th St.; kidville.com), the brightly colored children's club occupying four stories on East 84th Street, where they can take music, gym and yoga. After a shower and steam at Exhale Spa, you can have your makeup done by Shiko Vun at **Valery Joseph** (from \$90; locations at valeryjoseph.com); or for a more extreme (yet outpatient) procedure, try French Lips from Dr. Andrew Jacono on Fifth Avenue, known as much for his patients' pouts as Dr. Frederic Brandt is for his patients' trademark rosy cheeks.

For a casual family lunch on the fly, grab a slice of **San Matteo** pizza or prosciutto panuozzo (lunch, \$25; 1739 Second Ave.; 212-426-6943), or for a healthier option, go to **Slice** (lunch, \$15; 1413 2nd Ave.; 212-249-4353; sliceperfect.com), a few blocks down, and order an organic whole-wheat pie—the Miki is a favorite, topped with pesto, chicken sausage and goat cheese. If the nanny's on duty, dine at vegan mecca **Candle Café** (lunch, \$30; 1307 Third Ave.; 212-472-0970; candlecafe.com), where you might get its tofu club sandwich with tempeh bacon. Try the upscale branch on 79th Street to experience delectable Angel's nachos or seitan piccata. For dessert, walk over to **Lady M.** (41 E. 78th St.; 212-452-2222; ladymconfections.com), a minimalist, all-white cake

boutique known for its flaky mille-feuille, filled with chic gallerists in black slacks and red-rimmed glasses. Walk it off shopping at Lexington boutiques like **Roberta Freymann** (958 Lexington Ave.; robertafreymann.com), where you can find inventive place settings, pajamas with monkey and fish patterns and pastel pashminas, or admire Roman intaglios and baroque pearls at the new **De Vera** (26 E. 81st St.; deveraobjects.com), off Madison. Put your bags down and unwind over martinis and wasabi peanuts at **The Mark Bar** (25 E. 77th St.; themarkhotel.com), or try its croque monsieur. Sip a Wonky Moskin in a plush white booth at Bar Pleiades in the **Surrey Hotel** (20 E. 76th St.; 212-288-3700; thesurrey.com) before heading to dinner. You can tell which restaurants represent the neighborhood's new guard by the wait alone. These days it's easier to get a two-top at Daniel than **Donguri** (dinner, \$45; 309 E. 83rd St.; 212-737-5656; itoen.com), the tiny sushi closet off First Avenue where the corn tempura is a must. **Flex Mussels** (dinner, \$40; 174 E. 82nd St.; 212-717-7772; flexmusselsny.com), a nautical-blue seafood restaurant that imports Prince Edward Island mussels daily and choreographs them into 23 styles from Thai to Acadian, is filled with a rowdy set of singles happy to wait until 10 p.m. for a table for a steaming cauldron of mussels followed by six donut flavors, from salty caramel to blueberry. A night uptown might still end a few hours earlier than the rest of the borough, and loud music is more likely to stream onto the sidewalk from 11 a.m. exercise classes than 11 p.m. dance parties, but these days the Upper East Side is breaking its curfew. And as luck would have it, just as things are getting exciting, after 30 years I've moved over to the Upper West.

The New Upper East Side: Neighborhood Directory

- **MB Regan**, SoulCycle instructor and spinning goddess
- **Mary Ann Browning**, personal trainer to the new Masters of the Universe
- **Adelino Da Costa**, owner of Punch Fitness kickboxing studio
- **Dr. Michael Apa**, who keeps local smiles bright
- **Aida Bicaj**, a facialist the ladies swear will change your skin
- **Dr. Lisa Airan**, the dermatologist known as much for her Lanvin wardrobe as her way around a filler
- **Fred DeVito and Elisabeth Halfpapp**, formerly of Lotte Berk, now the minds behind Exhale Core Fusion
- **Fernanda Niven**, investor in the Organic Avenue juice bar, which just opened on 73rd and Lex
- **Amy** at Danvie, a Korean nail salon only the Upper East Side could spawn—yes, that was Aerin Lauder
- **Alberto Tatti**, maître d' at Amaranth, he of the Borelli blazers and Domenico Vacca ties
- **Jay Jolly**, head of Swifty's catering, who keeps Upper East Side cocktail parties stocked with candied Millionaires Bacon
- **Benay Vynierib**, COO of Candle Café—she feeds power-hungry locals vegan gourmet
- **George**, master of ceremonies at the Viand Coffee Shop
- **Michael Hurd**, personal shopper for the J. Crew Women's Collection boutique
- **Glenn Pennell**, man in charge at the Euro-preppy Paul & Shark
- **Bradford Devens** at Brunello Cucinelli, who swathes locals in oatmeal-colored cashmere
- **Vera Wang**, whose store may be at The Carlyle, but she's always at The Mark
- **Kathy and Tom Freston**, the former Viacom CEO and his wife, at Candle Café over a vegan candlelight dinner
- **Jill Kargman**, neighborhood scribe whose new book, *Sometimes I Feel Like a Nut*, includes a whole chapter devoted to SoulCycle
- **Lyor Cohen and Tory Burch**, the music executive who made East 94th cool and the designer who is opening an uptown store in the old Gardenia diner
- **Daphne Guinness**, fashion icon; she likes to take tea at The Carlyle
- **François Payard**, the pastry chef who recently closed his tiny chocolate bar at the Mauboussin store but is returning to the neighborhood on 76th and 3rd
- **Aby Rosen and Samantha Boardman Rosen**, real estate mogul and his socialite/psychiatrist wife admired for their art collection and questioned over their plans for a tower above 980 Madison
- **Phil and Lisa Falcone**, hedge fund honcho and his moviemaking wife, who bought Bob Guccione's double-wide mansion and who ride around town in a black custom Mercedes van
- **Larry Gagosian**, art dealer—and retailer extraordinaire—with a gallery and store at 980 Madison
- **David and Julia Koch**, prominent philanthropists and institution wing-namers
- **Renée Price**, director of the Neue Galerie on East 86th, beloved by locals for its Austrian art, its excellent gift shop and the *sachertorte* at Café Sabarsky
- **Brooke Garber Neidich**, cochair of the board of trustees at the Whitney Museum and jewelry maven
- **Amalia Dayan**, co-owner of the Luxembourg & Dayan Gallery, which brought Jeff Koons's racy "Made in Heaven Paintings" show to the staid streets of the Upper East
- **Marianne Boesky**, the highly respected gallery owner who opened a branch on 64th last year and whose exhibit "Dwelling" will run through March 26.