

For a rental with its own washer-dryer, they were willing to hike to the subway.



Grymes Hill, Staten Island: an upscale, West Coast vibe.

Helen Gurley Brown's home sells for over \$19 million.

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LIVING IN | GRYMES HILL, STATEN ISLAND

Manhattan Views, West Coast Feel



A view toward the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge from the Wagner College campus in Grymes Hill. The neighborhood has many steep roads.

By C.J. HUGHES

Serpentine may be a type of green rock found in Grymes Hill, a leafy and upscale enclave on Staten Island's North Shore. But the word could just as easily describe the area's thoroughfares.

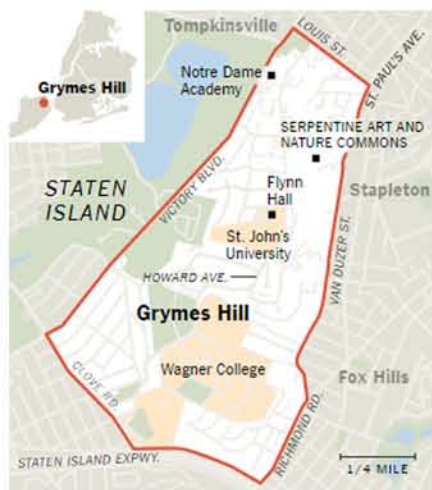
Curving one way, then the other, as they squiggle up slopes that are hundreds of feet above sea level, the nonlinear roads give the area a distinctively non-New York look.

Instead, the West Coast, perhaps Los Angeles, comes to mind as one sees signs warning motorists that "Hill Blocks View." And many of the neighborhood's houses underscore that impression.

Angular contemporaries, with decks offering views of the Lower New York Bay and Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, cling to cliffs. Red tile roofs peeking over hedges suggest Spanish mission architecture. And rustic Craftsman-style bungalows hunker down in the woods.

Reading in a newspaper article that Staten Island had Craftsman houses, in a city where they are rare, delighted Dianne Mitchell, a big fan of the early-1900s style.

Ms. Mitchell, 64, a preschool special education teacher, and her husband, William Martin, 70, a retired lawyer, were so enchanted by a house they found that they decided to sell their three-bedroom co-op in Park Slope, Brooklyn, even though they weren't in the market for a new home, and move to Staten Island, a borough they had rarely visited and knew little about.



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"It really blew us away — the domestic architecture was fascinating," Ms. Mitchell said. "We had thought the mass of Staten Island was townhouses."

The couple's Craftsman, with three bedrooms, original etched and stained glass, multiple porches and a yard with pear trees and roses, cost \$525,000 in 2005, though a recent appraisal suggested it would be worth slightly more today, she said.

The buildings of Grymes Hill, which can contrast starkly with the tract housing of some other Staten Island neighborhoods, also drew Carla Hollywood, who traded a

late-1980s colonial in Prince's Bay, on the densely developed South Shore of the island, for a stucco-and-stone 1930 colonial in Grymes Hill.

The house, which Ms. Hollywood shares with her husband and their two sons, cost \$630,000 in 2010.

While Ms. Hollywood, 52, a retired city worker, did modernize the three-bedroom house, by adding wings for a new family room and dining room, she was drawn to its vintage character. "I guess I'm more of an older-house person, an older soul," she said.

But what lies beyond her home's walls is also compelling. Deer often bound into her yard, she said, and a wild turkey has perched on her car's roof. Her yard and street are lined with mature trees that leave sidewalks dappled with light.

"Sometimes the trees do fall down," Ms. Hollywood said. "But I think they add a lot of character."

Contributing to the parklike setting in her corner of the neighborhood, she said, is Wagner College, with 105 well-groomed acres bordered by a split-rail fence.

Though Wagner, with about 2,200 students, continues to expand with its own buildings, residents say, it and other schools in the area have functioned as a sort of bulwark against wily-nilly development, which in turn has enhanced Grymes Hill's open, verdant atmosphere.

"The campus itself is just so beautiful," Ms. Hollywood said, "even to just drive by it."

THE DETAILS

What You'll Find

Grymes Hill is by one popular definition bounded by the Staten Island Expressway, Clove Road, Victory Boulevard, Louis Street, St. Paul's Avenue, Van Duzer Street and Richmond Road. The focal point is Howard Avenue, which meanders among grand former estates that are academic buildings today.

In addition to Wagner College, institutions include the 16.5-acre Staten Island campus of St. John's University, with about 2,000 students. Its Flynn Hall is the former home of John Gans, a steamship-company owner. And the 13 acres of nearby Notre Dame Academy, an all-girls Catholic elementary and high school, feature a former home of the Dreyfus family, local makers of chewing gum.

Other land is protected as part of the Special Hillside Preservation District, zoning created in 1987 to protect the area's upland Serpentine Ridge. The rock, once popular for fireproofing, was quarried on the island.

Designed to protect against erosion, the zoning rules dictate that any houses built on steep slopes be narrow, so vital soil and trees won't be removed. But a new proposal by the Department of City Planning would change the oversight process. Under the proposal, applications to build on small sites in the zone would no longer go through Planning but directly to the Department of Buildings, speeding up their approval.

Co-ops can be found in the low-slung Grymes Hill Manor Estates. Condos include high-rises like 55 Austin Place, with an outdoor pool, and Nos. 830 and 850 Howard Avenue.

Rentals include the Grymes Hill Apartments, with brick two-story buildings clustering along Arlo Road, and Parkview House, a tower at 700 Victory Boulevard.

What You'll Pay

On June 28, there were 15 single-family houses for sale, at an average price of \$1,029 million; one co-op was for sale, at \$135,000; and four condos were for sale, at an average of \$303,000, according to data prepared by the Staten Island Board of Realtors.

Activity and values have been climbing. In 2013, the 18 single-families that sold traded at an average of \$588,000, while in 2015, the 22 that sold went for an average of \$642,000.

Co-ops showed little growth, with 16 selling in 2013 at an average of \$110,000, while in 2015, 10 sold at an average of \$111,000, the board said. As for condominiums, nine units sold in 2013 at an average of \$188,000, and in 2015, 12 sold at an average of \$200,000.

The median rent, according to brokers, is around \$1,300 a month for a one-bedroom.

What to Do

Because stores and restaurants are almost nonexistent in Grymes Hill, people head elsewhere to shop and eat. Students often go to St. George for bars. For dining, Afternoons Restaurant and Bar on Forest Avenue has a menu that includes steaks and chops, and RoadHouse on Clove Road is a longtime Italian spot.

Wagner's student plays, which this academic year will include "Avenue Q" and "Proof," are well attended by locals.

There is hiking at Serpentine Art and Nature Commons, a 11.5-acre park off Van Duzer Street with trails that pass serpentine outcrops.

The Schools

An option in the neighborhood is Public School 35, the Clove Valley School, with around 370 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. On state exams in 2014-15, 62 percent of students met standards in English, versus 30 percent citywide. On state math exams, 66 percent met standards, versus 39 percent.

For middle school, an option outside the area is Intermediate School 027, the Anning S. Prall School, with around 1,040 students in Grades 6 to 8. In 2014-15, 32 percent of students met standards in English, versus 30 percent citywide. On math exams, 26 percent met standards, compared with 31 percent.

From there, a common choice is Susan E. Wagner High School, with around 3,200 students. SAT average scores in 2015 were 496 in math, 490 in reading and 487 in writing, versus city averages of 466, 444 and 439.

The Commute

Many buses head to the St. George Ferry Terminal, like the S66, which follows Howard Avenue. From the Clove Road intersection, the trip to the ferry, which costs a MetroCard swipe, is about 15 minutes. The 25-minute boat ride to Manhattan is free.

The X14, an express bus (\$6.50), is scheduled to reach Lower Manhattan in roughly a half-hour, then goes to Midtown.

The History

Known at different times as Signal Hill and Castleton Heights, the neighborhood is named for Suzette Bosque Claiborne Grymes, the wife of John Randolph Grymes, a prominent New Orleans lawyer and landowner who built Capo di Monte estate near present-day Grymes Hill Road in 1836, according to historical accounts.

ON THE MARKET



35 STARLIGHT ROAD
A four-bedroom three-and-a-half-bath 1960 raised ranch, listed at \$900,000. (917) 488-4949



28 STARLIGHT ROAD
A four-bedroom two-bath 1920s stone house, listed at \$675,000. (718) 273-3800, ext. 216



41 CEDAR TERRACE
A three-bedroom two-bath ranch with a deck with hot tub, listed at \$558,000. (646) 209-1008