

Special Advertising Feature

WESTCHESTER AND FAIRFIELD COUNTIES

Region That Promises A Range of Communities

URBAN APARTMENT, COLONIAL HOUSE OR WATERFRONT ESTATE? THEY'RE ALL HERE

By Joseph Dobrian

While many people think of Westchester County as one big upscale suburb, in reality it's a collection of towns, small cities and communities-within-communities that can vary dramatically in terms of ambiance, walkability, remoteness—and prices. Homebuyers will find an enormous selection of options, from country estates to modest apartments, but some might sacrifice a few “nice-haves” in order to get the “must-haves.” Real-estate professionals agree that inventory isn't abundant, but the selection is currently a little bigger than usual, as it often is during a Presidential election year, when buyers tend to be cautious.

Wendy Alper, sales associate at Julia B. Fee Sotheby's International Realty in Rye, N.Y., mainly covers the communities of Harrison, Purchase, Rye, Port Chester, and White Plains, and says it's hard to compare one of these locations with another.

SENSE OF PRIVACY

“Harrison/Purchase is an extremely scenic area of about 22 square miles,” she says. “It has great landscapes, with lakes, streams and brooks. The majority of what I work with are one- to two-acre properties, where you have a sense of privacy. This is one of Westchester's wealthiest communities, with a wide countryside feel, and quite a few corporate offices are located there. Purchase is a hamlet within Harrison, where you'll find a 500-acre college campus—State University of New York at Purchase—and we also have Manhattanville College. Purchase also has a Community House, one block away from an elementary school, where your children can be part of clubs, classes, a library and a day camp.

“In Harrison/Purchase, we have many wonderful residential communities, like Sterling Ridge, Sunny Ridge, the Trails, and Purchase Estates. Architecture [styles range] from colonial to contemporary to country estates. There is a vast price range in homes, appealing to many types of buyers. Currently, homes are available from \$475,000 to \$8,775,000, but can go as high as \$22 million.”

Ms. Alper says her own highest priced offerings in Purchase are a 15-acre brick estate that's over 100 years old, priced \$8,495,000. She's also listing a three-acre farm for \$4,899,000.

Rye, she continues, is considered the smallest city in the State of New York: 5.5 square miles in size, with 15,000 people living in it. Rye's popularity comes from its lying only 25 miles from Manhattan, and from having 34 miles of public beachfront.

SMILING COMMUNITY

“Rye has a New England lifestyle with tree-lined streets, dining, and a casual chic vibe,” Ms. Alper says. “Everyone is always out; it's a smiling community. You'll find very expensive waterfront estates and many walk-to-town homes that are in high demand. Rye has its own library, a marina, nature center, bird sanctuary, a marshland conservatory—and a very convenient commute. Homes available today range from \$629,000 to \$22.75 million.

“Port Chester is extremely rich in ethnic diversity, both as to food and people. It's a melting pot; it's on the water; you'll find homes in all price ranges, as well as some big-box stores and a 14-screen movie theatre. You can live within walking distance of the train to the city, and currently homes range from \$209,000 to \$5.9 million,” she adds.

JULIA B. FEE SOTHEBY'S INTERNATIONAL REALTY



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Clockwise from top-right: Rye's nature center; 15-acre brick estate in Purchase, price \$8,495,000; White Plains is a popular choice for buyers seeking a more urban experience; Three-acre farm in Purchase, available for \$4,899,000.

**“YOU CAN HAVE ANY KIND OF LIFESTYLE YOU WANT,
FROM FRONT-PORCH-AND-SIDEWALKS SUBURBAN
TO VERTICAL DEVELOPMENTS DOWNTOWN.”**

White Plains is Westchester's big city, with the Westchester Mall as its hub of activity, and a wide selection of clubs and restaurants. It's a popular choice for homebuyers who want a more urban experience, at lower prices than they'd find in Manhattan. Apartments, townhomes and free-standing houses are all available.

“Apartment life in the center of White Plains is popular with many demographics,” Ms. Alper says. “We have young singles living there; young married couples with no children; families with children; and empty nesters who are downsizing. The current [price] range is \$289,000 to \$2.95 million.”

Fran Klingenstein, agent at Julia B. Fee Sotheby's International Realty in Rye, says the community is popular for its variety of country clubs, beach clubs and yacht clubs. Rowing equipment and instruction draw watersports enthusiasts in summer, while an ice-skating rink is the main winter facility.

Rye has a popular golf club, which offers memberships to residents who pay annual dues, no initiation fee, she adds. “It's a great way to meet people. The

public schools here are excellent and some first-rate private schools are available. It's an easy to commute to Manhattan: roughly 40 minutes, with trains running frequently, especially during peak times. The commute to Greenwich, Stamford, or White Plains is even easier.”

NEW OR RENOVATED

What seem to be selling fastest in Rye and Harrison, Ms. Klingenstein says, are new constructions or older homes that have been totally renovated.

“This has led to builders buying homes to tear down and replace with new ones,” she says. “The inventory of these new homes is large and buyers have a lot to choose from, so they can afford to wait for the right situation.”

Jim Gricar, general sales manager of Houlihan Lawrence in Rye Brook, N.Y., agrees that tremendous variety can be found in communities on either side of the New York/Connecticut state line, from more densely developed, pedestrian-friendly downtowns to large-lot rural environments, all within an hour's commute of Manhattan.

“Every town, village and hamlet we serve has its own identity,” he says. “Two neighboring towns offering an ostensibly similar lifestyle might have entirely different energies. You can have just about any kind of lifestyle you want, from front-porch-and-sidewalks suburban to vertical developments in downtown White Plains. You'll find dozen-acre equestrian estates, heading north, and waterfronts up the Hudson River and Long Island Sound. If you want it, you can find it north of the city.”

Inventory is tighter in certain areas and price points, Mr. Gricar admits, but by prioritizing their needs, most buyers can find a home that works for their lifestyle.

HOLDING VALUE

“You can live where the sound of seagulls wakes you up and the lapping of tides sends you to sleep, or high on a mountaintop where you can't see any of your neighbors, yet still be able to hop a train to work in Midtown every day,” he says. “Something like that never loses its novelty.”

Pricing may seem high, Mr. Gricar concludes, but properties in these suburban counties tend to hold their value and appreciate if they're well maintained.

“Besides the lifestyle benefits, I find the markets north of the city to be generally stable,” he adds, “without the wide fluctuations that can sometimes occur in the city market.”