

# WEST SIDE STORY

Ready to explore one of NYC's most vibrant neighborhoods? Here's the inside scoop on West Chelsea from those who know it best: the people who've lived there for years.

by *Rima Suqi*



**I**T'S HARD to imagine that as recently as 20 years ago, West Chelsea was considered a sketchy neighborhood. Tenth Avenue was lined with parking lots, gas stations, and prostitutes who had sauntered up from the meatpacking district, just a few blocks south.

How times have changed. Almost every single parking lot and gas station is now gone. Instead, there are about 20 buildings currently in various stages of construction, with some heavy-hitter architects attached, including Bjarke Ingels, Norman Foster, Peter Marino, and Zaha Hadid (this is in addition to existing buildings by Frank Gehry, Jean Nouvel, Deborah Berke, and Annabelle Selldorf). Most are straddling or adjacent to the High Line, which now draws an estimated 20 million visitors a year. Chelsea Market, the food hall that was built in a former Nabisco factory, debuted in 1997; approximately 6 million people walk/eat their way through its various culinary offerings annually.

All this development means West Chelsea (which for our purposes will be defined as 14th to 30th Streets west of 8th Avenue) is a neighborhood in flux, straddling the old and the new. We spoke with some notable residents to find out how they navigate their ever-changing community.





## RICHARD LAMBERTSON CO-DESIGN DIRECTOR FOR LEATHER GOODS SHINOLA

I live next to the Highline (1), which I love to walk to work on in the early morning.

My all-time favorite restaurants are all on 10th Avenue. There's The Red Cat (2) (227 10th Ave., 212.242.1308, [theredcat.com](http://theredcat.com)). I've been going for 20 years, and it's still great! My other favorite is Bottino (246 10th Ave., 212.206.6766, [bottinonyc.com](http://bottinonyc.com)). It has been around forever but I still enjoy it, and both restaurants make me feel like I'm at home. If I'm up for a short walk, I love Cookshop (3) (156 10th Ave., 212.924.4440, [cookshopny.com](http://cookshopny.com)). The food is always good, and they have a terrific selection of wines. Their wine expert Richard always has great recommendations of new wines to try.



## PAVIA ROSATI FOUNDER AND CEO FATHOM

Chelsea Market (75 9th Ave., [chelseamarket.com](http://chelseamarket.com)) has become such a clogged tourist attraction that most locals now disregard it. But it remains an indispensable stop on my grocery rounds for Buon'Italia (212.633.9090, [buonitalia.com](http://buonitalia.com)), the old-school Italian shop where I stock up on my Italian pantry essentials: salami, cheeses, capers, dried beans, and giant tins of olive oil. I also love newcomer Mokbar (646.775.1160, [mokbar.com](http://mokbar.com)) for the Korean soups.

## MICHAEL JENKINS PARTNER SIKKEMA JENKINS & CO.

While the Chelsea Market (75 9th Ave.) still has good shops, it has become hard to handle the crowds. So I was happy to see the new, quieter downstairs area called "Local," (4) devoted to food shops, including a new shop, Saxelby Cheesemongers (646.892.3077, [saxelbycheese.com](http://saxelbycheese.com)). Everything I have tried there has been delicious. And upstairs in the crowds, the Lobster Place (212.255.5672, [lobsterplace.com](http://lobsterplace.com)) has the best fresh seafood selection in the neighborhood.

My favorite coffee spots are Blue Bottle (510.653.3394, 450 W. 15th St., [bluebottlecoffee.com/cafes/chelsea](http://bluebottlecoffee.com/cafes/chelsea)) and Intelligentsia at the Highline Hotel (212.933.9736, 180 10th Ave., [intelligentsiacoffee.com](http://intelligentsiacoffee.com)). Both also have good little baked sweets. Intelligentsia is especially nice in good weather for meeting a friend, because of the hotel's quiet back terrace.



## VANESSA VON BISMARCK PARTNER BPCM

My life is pretty much in Chelsea: My office is on 25th Street, my kids' school is on 10th Avenue, my gym is Equinox on 10th Avenue, and I found an amazing yoga studio on 20th called 216Yoga (511 W. 20th St., 212.337.3530, [yoga216.com](http://yoga216.com)). I do my shopping at Chelsea Market, where I can get the best meat at Dickson's Farmstand (212.242.2630, [dicksonsfarmstand.com](http://dicksonsfarmstand.com)), the best fish at the Lobster Place (212.255.5672, [lobsterplace.com](http://lobsterplace.com)), and the best vegetables at Manhattan Fruit Market (212.255.2242). On the weekends, I take my kids to Chelsea Piers (212.336.6666, [chelseapiers.com](http://chelseapiers.com)), or for a walk on the High Line, or on a bike ride all the way down the west side through Hudson River Park. The restaurants in the area have also improved, and you can find any food you want any day, whether Naoki for Japanese (311 W. 17th St., 646.861.0086, [naokinyc.com](http://naokinyc.com)), or Papa Kebab for Turkish (361 W. 17th St., 646.998.4597, [papakebab.nyc](http://papakebab.nyc)), or the new fish restaurant Seamores (161 8th Ave., 212.592.9222, [seamores.com](http://seamores.com)). Finally, the galleries allow for a daily dose of culture and beauty.



## BENJAMIN NORIEGA ORTIZ ARCHITECT

We live on 23rd and Ninth, and for brunch we like the Empire Diner (5) (210 10th Ave., 212.335.2277, [empire-diner.com](http://empire-diner.com)), a neighborhood classic, which recently reopened under chef John DeLucie. After that, one of our favorite places to visit is Garber Hardware (207a 9th Ave., 212.242.9475, [garberhardware.com](http://garberhardware.com)). It's like a hardware modern art museum. Everything is styled flawlessly. We always buy something or learn about new tools and objects beautiful enough to display on our coffee table!

I have my beard trimmed by Rudy at Chelsea Gardens Barber Shop (255 W. 23rd St., 212.255.6327, [chelseagardensbarbershop.com](http://chelseagardensbarbershop.com)). He trims all the best beards in the neighborhood, for models, actors, and so on. I would never allow anyone else to touch my beard, especially because one doesn't want to upset Rudy. You have to make an appointment because he's always booked. One day I forgot my appointment and I was almost dropped from his client list. He's a true artist!



PREVIOUS AND THIS PAGE (HIGH LINE): IWAN BAAH; EMPIRE DINER: QUENTIN BACON





## CARLA WEISBERG SURFACE DESIGNER

On warmer weekends, I usually start my day with a trip to the Farmer's Market (23rd St. between 8th Ave. and 9th Ave.), where I head straight to the American Pride stand—they have great fish. If I want to treat myself to breakfast afterward, I go to Sullivan Street Bakery (6) (236 9th Ave., 212.929.5900, [sullivanstreetbakery.com](http://sullivanstreetbakery.com)) for eggs. I try to go to the galleries if I haven't been able to go during the week. There are so many good ones, including Sikkema Jenkins & Co. (530 W. 22nd St., 212.929.2262, [sikkemajenkinsco.com](http://sikkemajenkinsco.com)), David Zwirner (525 W. 19th St., 212.727.2070, and 537 W. 20th St., 212.517.8677, [davidzwirner.com](http://davidzwirner.com)), and Cheim & Read (547 W. 25th St., 212.242.7727, [cheimread.com](http://cheimread.com)). Sometimes I get a coffee at Underline (511 W. 20th St., 917.477.9476, [apesandpeacocks.com](http://apesandpeacocks.com)), since it's right near the galleries. El Quinto Pino (7) (401 W. 24th St., 212.206.6900, [elquintopinonyc.com](http://elquintopinonyc.com)) and Tia Pol (205 10th Ave., 212.675.8805, [tiapol.com](http://tiapol.com)) are both Spanish tapas restaurants and both great places to get a glass of wine post gallery-hopping. If I need to buy a present, I might go into 192 Books (192 10th Ave., 212.255.4022, [192books.com](http://192books.com)) or My Little Sunshine (177 9th Ave., 212.929.0887, [mylittlesunshinenyc.com](http://mylittlesunshinenyc.com)), which has adorable, unusual kids clothing and toys. I cook a lot, but if we decide to go out, we might go to Jun-Men Ramen (249 9th Ave., 646.852.6787, [junmenramen.com](http://junmenramen.com)) or Sushi Seki (208 W. 23rd St., 212.255.5988, [sushiseki.com](http://sushiseki.com)).



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## RON LAXAMANA FASHION STYLIST

I love Bottino (8) (246 10th Ave., 212.206.6766, [bottinonyc.com](http://bottinonyc.com)). I was there for the first time years ago, during the preview week. Back then we called it Boytino because all the cute boys were there; now we call it the London Terrace Cafeteria. It's like our Indochine or Odeon, but it's still under the radar because there's no giant publicity machine behind it, and it has good food. Parke & Ronen (176 9th Ave., 212.989.4245, [parkeandronen.com](http://parkeandronen.com)) has that sexy, kitschy Palm Springs meets Chelsea with a little Tom of Finland thrown in aesthetic. Their swimwear is great, plus they have cute sunglasses and really cool sneakers.

## MARK RICKER PRODUCTION DESIGNER

THE HELP; THE WAY, WAYBACK;  
TRUMBO; JULIE & JULIA

I love Co. (9) (230 9th Ave., 212.243.1105, [co-pano.com](http://co-pano.com)). There's a crackling fire constantly projected on the wall and a cozy bar for the perfect artisanal pizzas. There's always a special on the menu worth investigating, but for my money, Ham & Cheese is the way to go.



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CO & SULLIVAN BAKERY: SQUIRE FOX

## JAMIE DRAKE INTERIOR DESIGNER

Nest Interiors (10) (172 9th Ave., 212.337.3441, [nestinteriorsny.com](http://nestinteriorsny.com)) is a treasure chest of decorative furnishings, well edited by the owners, Lana and Henry. Every lamp, vase, dish, pillow, box, and stool is chic, chic, chic. It would be easy to accessorize your new Chelsea apartment in one stop here; just bring the right designer (me)!

I've been using Chelsea Frames (197 9th Ave., 212.807.8957, [chelseaframes.com](http://chelseaframes.com)) as a resource for personal and client framing for years. The large selection of styles, finishes, and custom capabilities makes selecting the best easy—or hard.

Story (144 10th Ave., 212.242.4853, [thisisstory.com](http://thisisstory.com)) is a store with endless chapters, a fantastic retailer with no fixed point of view. Mutating every season, the themes are well thought out and deliciously merchandised. The price points vary, but are strong on the highly affordable. It's the perfect place for picking up gifts, I always end with some new socks or tea towels for myself.

Berry/Campbell (530 W. 24th St., 212.924.2178, [berrycampbell.com](http://berrycampbell.com)) gallery focuses on prominent late and midcareer artists in the modernist tradition. It's especially strong in bringing into focus painters like the late Perle Fine, Syd Solomon, and Dan Christensen, whose vibrant work is so current yet somewhat lost to time.

I don't even cook breakfast at home, so thank goodness for Trestle on Tenth (242 10th Ave., 212.645.5659, [trestleontenth.com](http://trestleontenth.com)). Their crispy, grated potato cake rösti and house-made sausage are perfectly Swiss, like the charming owner, Ralf.

To reach Rocket Pig (463 W. 24th St., 212.645.5660, [rocketpignyc.com](http://rocketpignyc.com)), go through the Dutch door of a tiny sliver of a brick building. You'll be rewarded with a succulent-beyond-belief, smoked, spice-rubbed pork sandwich topped with an untutored red-onion jam and a subtle mustard sauce. Gluttony at its best. Round this take-out sandwich out with chips, slaw, soup, and drinks. There's a counter if you can't wait.

For the best croissants in New York—truly buttery and flaky—go to La Bergamote (177 9th Ave., 212.627.9010, [labergamotenyc.com](http://labergamotenyc.com)). and that's just one standout in this great pâtisserie. The almond and chocolate variations are equally lip-smacking.

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