

Westchester Home

Neat Under-the-Radar Neighborhoods

By Rich Mintzer
Photography by Iko

These Westchester neighborhoods might not have the name recognition as some of their larger neighbors, but they're low-key the places to be.

Okay, so you've seen the multi-million dollar estates and read about celebrities buying homes in the high-profile towns and hamlets of Westchester. But what about a home in the \$500- to \$800-thousand range in a serene neighborhood, where kids ride their bikes along quiet streets and neighbors stop to chat? If you thought such neighborhoods could no longer be found in this ever-prospering real estate market, keep on reading. We've tracked down six such residential enclaves, neatly tucked away from commercial ventures, yet not far from the main thoroughfares that crisscross the county. You have very likely driven through, or past, some of these hidden gems without ever knowing they were there.

Truesdale

Town: Lewisboro, Hamlet of South Salem

Location: Slightly northwest of where Route 35 meets the Connecticut border

Rough Average Home Price: \$800,000

School District: Katonah-Lewisboro

Train Station: Katonah, 20-minute shuttle bus ride from South Salem Park & Ride

Description: Rural, wooded, scenic neighborhood with private lake and very active neighborhood associations

The community known as Truesdale sits quietly tucked away in a wooded section of Lewisboro and around a delightful centerpiece known as Lake Truesdale. Surrounding the three-mile perimeter of the man-made lake, constructed in 1920, you'll find gently rolling lawns leading up to a variety of charming homes, mostly Colonials, ranches, and raised ranches.

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“You probably get a better view of the homes from the lakeside,” says realtor Barbara Tremain in the Katonah office of Houlihan Lawrence. Tremain, who has lived along the lake for 11 years, says she loves the community atmosphere. “It’s a very friendly community because of the lake associations,” she says, referring to two property-owners associations that handle the care and maintenance of the lake and that hold parties, clambakes, and social gatherings at the two small lakefront recreational facilities. “There are sailboat races, and kayaking is popular,” adds Tremain. And fortunately, the lake is not big enough for catamarans and other more intrusive, larger vessels.

The neighborhood’s mostly three-bedroom homes sit on higher ground above the recessed lake, on lots ranging from a quarter acre to over one acre. Across the road, a second tier of homes sit perched up higher on the hill, many with clear views of the lake, overlooking the lakeside homes. While most of the homes range from community originals built in the 1920s to those from the 1950s and 1960s, there are some newer ones built in recent years. Piers, patios, decks, docks, and solariums behind the lovely homes enhance lakeside living.

You’ll find homes in the range of \$600,000 to over \$1 million, depending on the additions, acreage, and lakeside views.

Jeff Vreeland, who’s lived with his wife, Ginny, by the lake for 26 years, built his home and those of his seven neighbors. In 1990, he retired from the construction business and has taken up painting in an area rich with scenic subject matter. “We love the community. My wife’s even more active than I am,” says Vreeland. “We’re involved in the library and the church. We’ve made a lot of friends here.”

Poets Corner

Town: Hartsdale

Location: Bordered by Hartsdale Avenue, Ridge Road Park, and the Sprain Brook Parkway

Rough Average Home Price: \$600,000+

School District: Greenburgh Central 7

Train Station: Hartsdale, commuter bus runs regularly, 10-minute ride to station

Description: Safe, green, family-friendly, neighborly, and cozy

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Lush foliage and well-tended gardens abound in Hartsdale’s best-kept secret, the neighborhood known as Poets Corner. Sitting just off the intersection of Dobbs Ferry Road and Hartsdale Avenue, the tiny enclave features 26 romantically named streets, including Keats, Poe, Longfellow, Shaw, and Chaucer. Charming three- and four-bedroom Tudor and stone homes built in the 1930s blend nicely with the more modern styles of the 1950s and ’60s, creating a variety of housing options, most of which are affordable for first-time homeowners and families saddled with numerous expenses.

“It’s a very inviting neighborhood,” says Carol Mayer, associate broker with Houlihan Lawrence in White Plains. She notes that the neighborhood is surrounded by the Ridge Road Park and Nature Center and the newly acquired Ridge Road Gardens, and that its residents have the use of the Town of Greenburgh’s extensive recreation center at Veteran Park. “It’s also a good alternative for commuters, with the number 38 Bee-Line bus taking them directly to Hartsdale Station,” Mayer says.



Daniel Tuck of Coldwell Banker in Pleasantville couldn't agree more, noting that while the neighborhood is thoroughly residential, going shopping is quite easy. "Central Avenue and Hartsdale Avenue"—the two popular thoroughfares, which also include a range of eateries from fast food and pizzerias to fine dining—"are right there with plenty of shopping possibilities."

Once inside Poets Corner, you may not want to leave, and with many of the streets eventually ending at dead ends, you'll soon realize that the easiest way out is the same way you got in: from Hartsdale Avenue. The self-contained pattern of the streets was designed to keep traffic from passing through, thus creating a soothing sense of privacy and security. "It's a wonderful place to raise children, very neighborly," says Honey Sackelman, who has lived in Poets Corner since 1971.

Along sunny streets, you'll spot kids' bicycles lying on the well-manicured lawns or sitting perched upon the front porches. The young bike owners should have a significant advantage in English class when it comes to naming the famous poets.

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Battle Hill

City: White Plains

Location: On the hill between Tarrytown Road and Central Avenue

Rough Average Home Price: \$550,000

School District: White Plains

Train Station: White Plains, within walking distance

Description: Very community-minded, family-friendly, historic neighborhood with a diverse population and old Colonial homes

Once the site of the battle of White Plains during the Revolutionary War, the modern-day Battle Hill is a tightly knit community of private homes lining residential streets, with some interesting condos and rental apartment buildings sprinkled in. "I attended the Battle Hill School from kindergarten through ninth grade," says former Councilwoman Jo Falcone, now manager of the Century 21 Wolff White Plains office. "Today, the school has been converted into a condominium, yet the façade remains. There are ongoing jokes about people living in an apartment that was once the site of their English or science class."

Known as "The Hill" to many of its 5,000 residents, the roughly two-square-mile neighborhood overlooks downtown White Plains. With mostly pre-war half-million-dollar Colonial homes that draw young families, "it's a great place for buying a starter home," says Falcone, a mother of four who grew up on the Hill, then moved to a larger house there when she had children. Although her kids are grown and gone, she never left the Hill. "I love it here," declares Falcone.



A strong neighborhood association watches over Battle Hill, maintaining clean streets and a safe environment. Block parties and bake sales reinforce the community atmosphere. “We know our neighbors and we watch out for each other,” says Ginny Falzarano, a 33-year resident of the Hill and co-president of the Battle Hill Association.

Popular recreation areas can be found on Chatterton Avenue, which features a large playground and picnic tables, and Whitney Park is home to outdoor concerts that draw the locals in the summer. An annual Christmas tree-lighting ceremony creates a neighborly sense of warmth in the winter.

One of the first neighborhoods developed in White Plains, Battle Hill sits conveniently near the stores and restaurants along Central Avenue and within walking distance of the White Plains train station.

Stillwater Lake

Town: Ossining, on the Yorktown Border

Location: Where the Taconic Parkway meets Pinesbridge Road, extending west to before Hoags Cross Road

Rough Average Home Price: \$700,000

School District: Ossining

Train Stations: Chappaqua on the Harlem Line or Croton-Harmon on the Hudson Line

Description: Various-sized homes on large tracts of land in a rustic setting, with private beach and lake privileges for residents on both sides of the Taconic Parkway

The towns and hamlets in the uppermost sections of Westchester are not the only places in the county where homes sit on significant acreage amid thick foliage and rolling hills. You can also find such a setting in the residential community in Ossining known as Stillwater Lake.

On the border of New Castle, this inconspicuous neighborhood posts no signs. The Taconic Parkway cuts through this rural enclave, providing easy access to northern and southern Westchester. Home to more than 200 families, Stillwater Lake was once largely farmland, and two stone pillars stand tall, marking the entrance to what had been a large dairy farm. The residential house from that 19th-century farm still stands. “The area developed after World War I,” notes Gray Williams, New Castle town historian, who refers to Stillwater Lake as a suburban subdivision. “Colonial-revival and traditional-style homes built between the world wars replaced the farms, and some ranch houses were built later on.”

The houses along Lakeview Road sit somewhat closer together on smaller plots of land than do those on the adjoining smaller roads, where clusters of trees offer greater seclusion from neighboring homes. “There are smaller homes on nice-size pieces of land as well as some very large homes,” says Janet Brandt of Houlihan Lawrence in Briarcliff Manor, a real estate broker with 24 years of experience. “There’s an expansive wooded feel to the area.”

You’ll find boats parked in most driveways of the single-family homes. Brandt notes that rights to the lake and beach are restricted to the residents of Stillwater Lake. Winding slowly along Possum Road or any of the narrow roads, you can see the lake peeking out through the trees and behind the houses that sit off its shores. “The one-family homes can cost you \$600,000 or even \$1 million,” adds Brandt.

Suburban Manor

Town: Greenburgh, Village of Elmsford

Location: Along Saw Mill River Road (9A), south of West Main Street, just north of East Rumbrook Park

Rough Average Home Price: \$600,000

School District: Elmsford

Train Station: Tarrytown or White Plains, about 10-15 minutes away by bus or car

Description: Average-sized homes on gently winding streets with plenty of greenery in a suburban setting

If you like split-levels, you'll love Suburban Manor. The well-maintained, three- and four-bedroom homes here, predominantly split-levels, sit along winding tree-lined streets along a gently sloping hillside. Tucked away just off Saw Mill River Road between Elmsford and Ardsley, the well-manicured lawns and lovely flower gardens provide a cheerful suburban atmosphere to the all-residential community.

Most of the homes were built in the 1950s and early '60s, part of the post-war housing boom that resulted in the growth of the suburbs. The homes range from 1,900 to 2,500 square feet and are priced from \$500,000 to \$650,000. There are, surprisingly, listings on a fairly regular basis.

"The split-levels have increased in price in each of the past five years," says Eleanor Rice, real estate broker for the past 21 years with Century 21 Wolff in White Plains. The neighborhood, adds Rice, is "also conveniently located near parkways, stores, schools, and houses of worship," and she notes that the bus stops along Saw Mill River Road (Route 9A).

The location is well-suited to families, with a variety of activities just shy of a mile to the north in the commercial section of Elmsford, which sports the Westchester (Ice) Skating Academy, a modern multiplex cinema, Sportime USA, and a massive Sam's Club for buying in bulk, plus family-friendly restaurants.

"It's a nice place for families," says Rice.

Crestwood

City: Yonkers

Location: Between the Bronx River Parkway to the east and Scarsdale Road to the west, by the Crestwood train station

Rough Average Home Price: \$625,000

School District: Yonkers

Train Station: Crestwood or Tuckahoe

Description: Strong community ties with second-generation residents living in a neighborly, historic area featuring a wide variety of older homes

Rich with history, the Crestwood section of Yonkers offers tree-lined streets and a small-town community environment within reach of big-city amenities. Homes from the 19th century and landmarks, such as the Abigail Sherwood House built in 1774, still stand in the picturesque neighborhood.

Once a farming community, the arrival of the railroad in the mid-1800s marked the beginning of the change from a farming to a residential community. The emergence of the Crestwood Station in 1890, where Norman Rockwell painted his famous *Waiting for the Train*, drew increased attention to the area and accelerated home-building. The opening in 1925 of the Bronx River Parkway, which featured a Crestwood exit, put the charming neighborhood literally on the map.

“People here walk a lot and, because of that, everyone gets to know their neighbors,” says Elizabeth McFadden, a 21-year resident and president of the Crestwood Historical Society (a planned historical neighborhood walkabout is scheduled for October 15th and open to all). “People have very strong ties to the community through the schools, the historical society, and, of course, the library. The library is like the old general store—if you want to know what’s going on in Crestwood, drop by the library.”

The neighborhood, 99 percent residential, is fairly flat, making it conducive to walking. “It’s a short walk to the Metro-North station,” says Jeffrey Landsman of Century 21 Wolff in Yonkers. “There’s also convenient shopping in Tuckahoe, nearby Bronxville, or on Central Avenue, which also makes Crestwood a good choice,” notes Landsman, who says the predominantly single-family homes range in price from \$500,000 to \$750,000. He adds that he has seen prices reach as high as about \$1 million with the remodeling that many of the residents do on their homes.

The diverse architecture found in the houses of Crestwood adds charm to the neighborhood. Tudor, Victorian, Colonial, and some combinations sit side-by-side, with many homes recessed from the street on elevated, well-manicured tracts of land. Large front porches, reminiscent of the older Southern style, provide gathering places for family and friends. Closer to the Crestwood Station, several large homes sit perched upon the hilly ground overlooking the area. Many of the homes of Crestwood are passed from generation to generation.

The trip to midtown Manhattan is less than 30 minutes by car and slightly shorter by Metro-North, making Crestwood an excellent choice for commuters.

*Rich Mintzer is an author and journalist living in Mount Kisco. He edited and wrote the *Living in Westchester Relocation Guide* for 2005. He loves driving around and finding areas with the help of his navigators Eric (11) and Rebecca (13).*