

A New York State of Mind

story & photography by Sean Francis Martin

In New York City, everyone has a dream. Everyone wants to be something more than they are.

New York City is big; 301 square miles to be exact. When most of us think of NYC, though, we think of Manhattan, one of the city's five boroughs. The others – the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island – have their own stories. Manhattan is Central Park, Broadway, Times Square, Madison and Park Avenues, Harlem, Greenwich Village and more, all crammed on an island roughly 23 miles long.



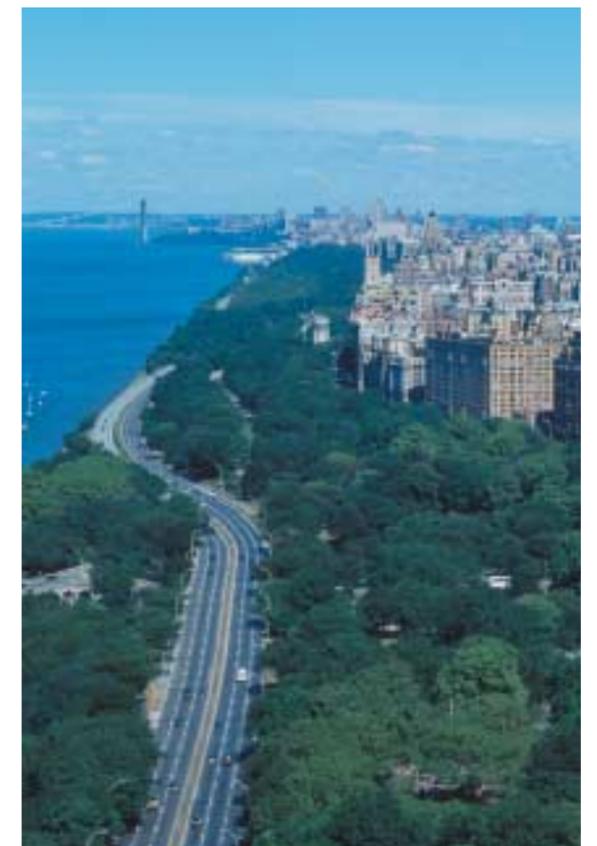
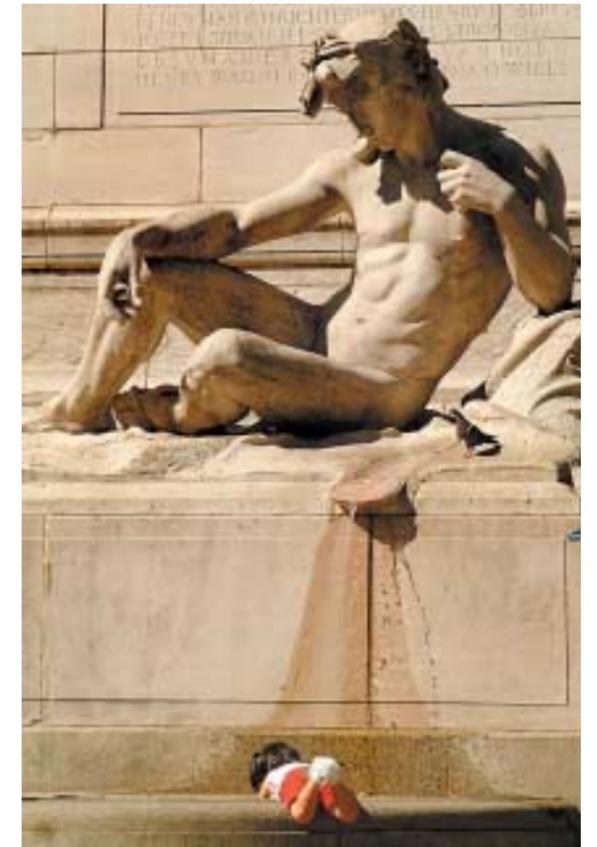


Visitors come to Manhattan to see the landmarks – the Empire State Building, Flatiron Building, Grand Central Terminal, Ground Zero of the World Trade Center.

They come to follow in the footsteps of the famous, to see the world's best museums, theatre and restaurants. It is the centre of fashion, arts, music and entertainment.

But New York is really about people. Everyone here is an actor, actress, model, artist, musician – something. There's the cab driver with his own fashion line, the street vendor hawking his hand-designed hats. New Yorkers act blasé about celebrities, but everybody wants to know someone, or at least to know someone who knows someone.

Clockwise from upper right: Fountain at South West entrance to Central Park, view of Manhattan and Hudson River, Grand Central Station, Times Square





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Clockwise from above: Umbrella on Poet's Walk, Angel of the Waters Fountain, Flatiron Building, Brooklyn Diner, NYPD on patrol, music in Central park.

New York is the place people come to make their biggest dreams come true; Manhattan is the address of choice. In fact, talk to people and you quickly begin to see the importance they put on address. Here, the status of your accommodations is a direct reflection of your success. It's like a game of 20 questions in which every answer takes you higher up, or lower down, the social hierarchy.

What's your address, how many square feet, do you have more than one room, do you have a bedroom, kitchen and living room, does it have a balcony, do you have a doorman? Notch yourself up the ladder with each 'yes' you give.

The list goes on. Do you have a car? Do you have a view of the park? Central Park, of course, but now you're getting into the million dollar apartment range. For renters, a one-room apartment in a rent-controlled district of Manhattan can cost you upwards of \$1,000 a month. If you're in the market to buy, you can pay anywhere from \$400,000 to \$12 million for an apartment. But a million dollar apartment with a hip address, great view and uniformed doorman – that's the dream everyone is chasing.

Another status symbol is your telephone number. What's your prefix? If it is 212, then you've been living here longer than 10 or 12 years and that means you're a die hard New Yorker. You automatically earn a level of respect and prestige. Other New Yorkers recognize that just surviving in the city is a reflection of grit.



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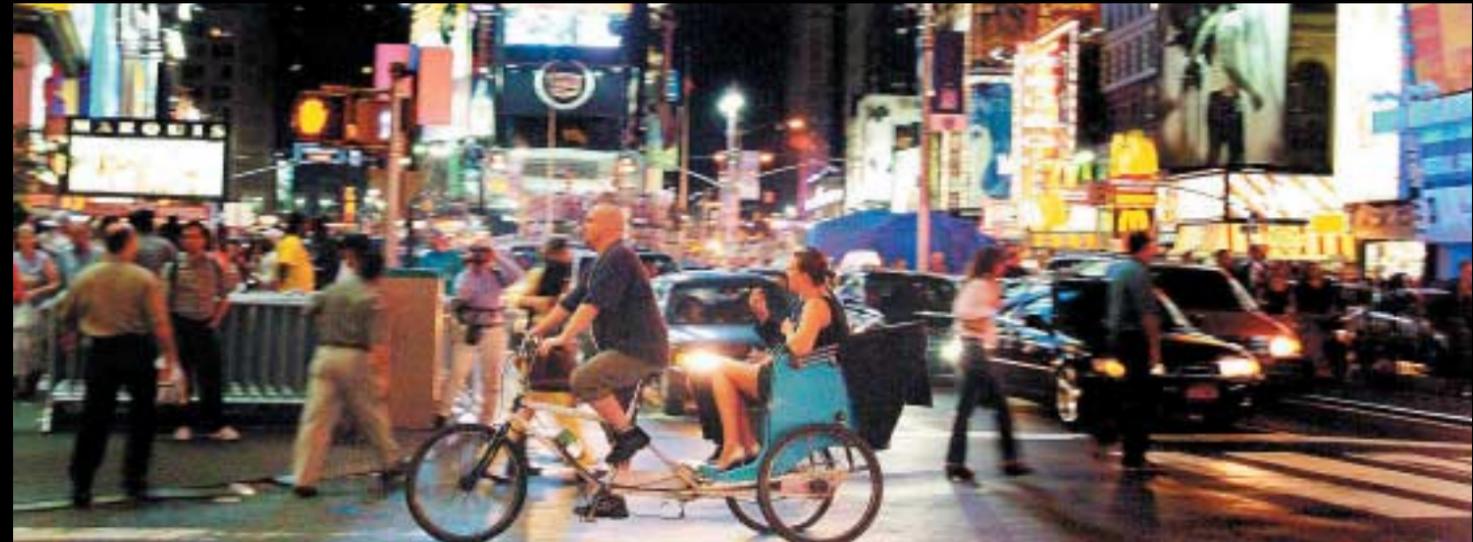
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New York is built on the hopes of immigrants. It's got to be the most international city in the world. There is probably someone of every nationality, every religion, every country and every major city living here at any given time. Can any other world city say THAT? But there's also a place for everyone.

Over the past hundred and fifty years, millions of people have come here to start a new life. They were running away from political, racial, social, spiritual or artistic oppression. And they're still coming. New York is life without boundaries. Standing on a street corner or watching the flamboyant roller dancers in Central Park, you think to yourself, these people are free.

You'll never feel like an outsider here because there are societies within societies within societies.

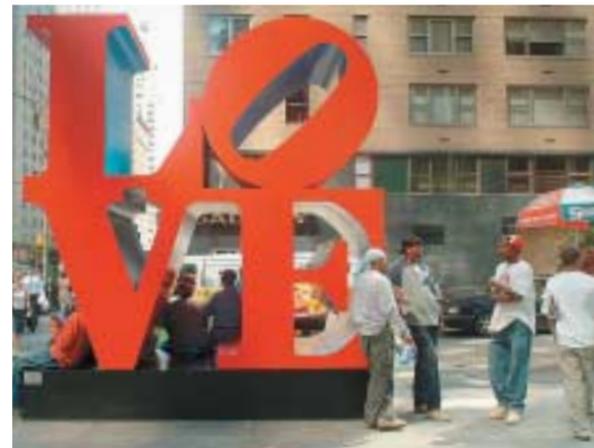




Central Park is where the parade of humanity all comes together. It's 843 acres of green lawns, landscaped gardens, tree-lined trails, ponds and lakes. New Yorkers call it the 'yard.' It's really a sanctuary for the soul. Your financial status doesn't count here, everyone uses Central Park. It's the only place you can really escape the constant noise of the streets. You go to sun, to think, to be alone (in a crowd), to listen to music, play music, read, skate – you name it. It's also one of the most beautiful parks in the world. There's the ethereal Poet's Walk, Strawberry Fields, The Ramble, Cherry Hill and Angel of the Waters Fountain.

At any given point, you feel you've stepped out of the real world and onto a movie set. In a way, you have.

Scenes from *When Harry Met Sally*, *Home Alone II* and Woody Allen's *Hannah and Her Sisters* were filmed here, among countless others. This sense of déjà vu happens a lot in New York City. The landmarks are so familiar, it's surreal. The hustle and bustle soon brings you back to reality.





Every city has a different noise, but if you played a tape of New York street sounds to someone, chances are they'd be able to identify it right away. It has its own beat and melody – the sirens, taxi horns, voices yelling. It's a confusing kind of music but it still has energy, life, a pulse.



Clockwise from above: Avenue of the Americans, domino players, emotions at Ground Zero, NYPD, window washer.

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That pulse is the people. New York is more than concrete and steel, it's people of passion and determination. That was evident in 9/11. Everybody has a story about that day. Chris van Duyne, a crane operator who hoisted us up to the heights for some skyline photos, tells how he and his brother and friends went down to Ground Zero after the towers collapsed and started to work.

They weren't paid and they didn't ask to be. Cranes came from as far away as Ohio to help out, gratis. That was the prevailing mood – anything to help.

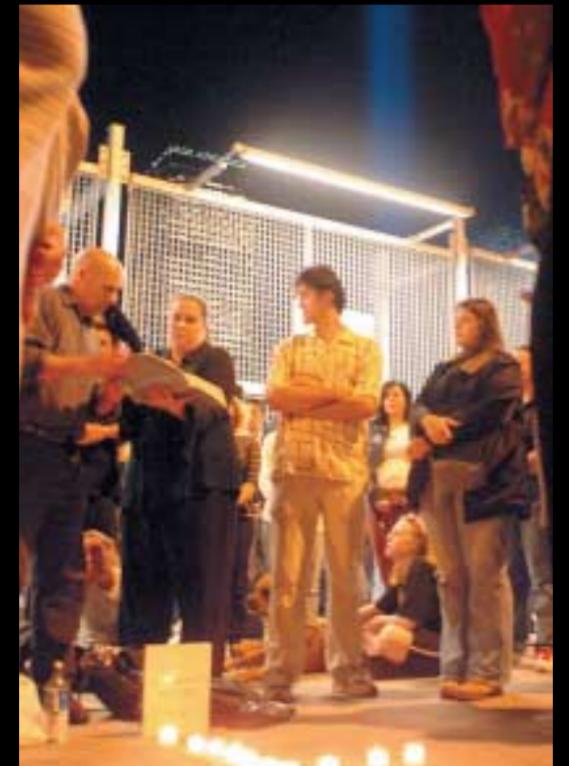


Musician Jon Ballantyne had flown in from Chicago the night before. When he got up late that morning, he found a note from his wife saying his sister had called about a plane hitting the World Trade Center. "Initial reports were a small plane had hit. I turned on the TV and see all this smoke coming from one of the towers and I say to myself, where's the other tower? I didn't know at first that it had collapsed. Then I saw the second one go down."

Designer Michael Kaye has vivid memories of the day. "I remember going up to St. Ignatius Loyola Church, where Jackie Onassis' funeral was, and praying. Later, I saw a man leaving a hospital. He was okay but he was covered in that white dust. It was freaky."

Emotions run high at the Ground Zero site.

The list of victims, all 2,792 of them, are mounted on a wall along with an informal guest book. It is not a pristine, tidy memorial – it's covered in photos, wreaths, flowers, notes from loved ones and other tributes. It's almost too real. At night on the second anniversary of the attacks, makeshift tributes popped up all around the site.



a slice of The Big Apple

There is a LOT to see in Manhattan, too much for any one visit. Wear good shoes because you're going to walk a lot.

When even good shoes don't prevent stiff, sore joints and back, book a massage at Osaka 56 (or its sister Osaka 46). Like everything else in New York, it's open late (till 3a.m.) but it's legit. Late night clientele are mostly theatre actors, dancers and models coming in after curtain call. If you want the massage of a lifetime, try the shiatsu-Swedish head-to-toe massage with steam and sauna. 50 West 56th Street, 212-956-3422.

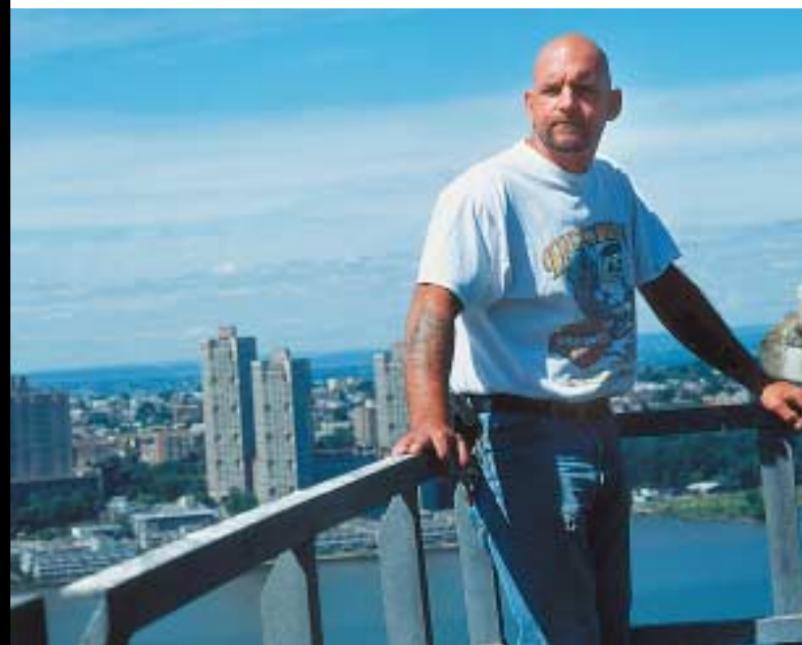
If massage isn't the cure for what ails you, then food must be. Try Monte's of Greenwich Village. Great Italian and seafood, but what you're really going for is the atmosphere. The people and sense of place makes it feel like you're sitting down in a movie set. Just sit back and enjoy watching the colourful characters. 97 MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village, 212-228-9194.

New York is a city of many world class museums. One you may not have heard of is the Museum of Sex. Through December it's showing NYC Sex: How New York City Transformed Sex in America, a detailed history of the city's sexual subcultures from 1825 to the present. 233 Fifth Avenue at 27th Street, www.museumofsex.org

In mid-range accommodations, Gershwin Hotel is a trendy choice. Located in Downtown Manhattan not far from the Empire State Building, it features a funky pop art décor, including an original Campbell soup piece by Andy Warhol. Rates start at \$99 US per night. 7 East 27th Street, 212-545-8000, website: gershwinhotel.com.



After 9/11, Chris van Duyne, a crane operator, his brother and friends went down to Ground Zero and started to work.



New Yorkers are a spirited people.

The terrorists underestimated that spirit. People here have a history of valuing their freedom. They won't ever forget 9/11 but they also haven't let it stop them. They're still building skyscrapers, pushing the skyline higher and higher. That, to me, shows there's much more to New York City than its landmarks and museums. See them, enjoy them, but talk to the people in the restaurants and on the streets because New York is all about the people. 🍷



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