



LIVING THE HIGH LIFE

As the final section of New York's most innovative green space opens later this year, we take a look at the glories of the High Line

WORDS *Jo Caird*



From 1934 trains chugged their way at rooftop level through New York's Meatpacking District, picking up and dropping off cargo at the huge factories built close to the vast St John's Park Freight Terminal, feeding the US's growing appetite. For 50 years these trains were part of the atmosphere of downtown Manhattan until, losing business to road and sea freighting, the 'High Line' closed forever in 1980. Parts of it were torn down until only a short section of 20 blocks from Gansevoort Street to 30th Street on Manhattan's West Side remained.

Then, as it always does, nature found a way. Plants bedded in between the rusting tracks creating a 'meadow in the sky' – grasses, roses, Queen Anne's lace, creepers and more entwined in a wild garden alongside the city's top floor windows. When the

State of New York announced its intention to tear down the last section, two men, Joshua David and Robert Hammond, decided that this rare piece of Americana had to be preserved. They fought the city and won, and in 2009 New York's newest park quietly opened to the public.

Unlike Central Park, which is designed to be a slice of wilderness in the city, the High Line is an elegant urban walkway that showcases the glories of the Big Apple. Winding its airy way through the jostle of buildings – some redbrick 1930s, some ultra-modern – it offers a new perspective on one of the world's great cities and some startling vistas of the Hudson river. There are now nine entry points along the way (the second section of the park opened in 2011) plus plenty of benches from which to take in the view. ➡

📍 **Overlooking one of Manhattan's busiest roadways, the amphitheatre at the 10th Avenue Square turns traffic-watching into a leisure activity, focusing walkers' gaze on the city and neatly encapsulating the philosophy behind the High Line**

📍 **The glowing frame on the 26th Street Viewing Spur recalls the billboards that used to line the track in the days when it was still operating as a railway. The spur is part of the Woodland Flyover, a catwalk suspended 2.5m above the old railbed**



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 The Washington Grasslands is an open, frequently windswept area of the park right at the heart of the Meatpacking District between W 12th and W 13th Streets

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 The Wildflower Field, which runs between W 27th and W 29th Streets, has been planted to ensure that there's always something blooming throughout the growing season



The challenges of planting in such a hostile environment have been immense. With just 30 centimetres of soil in which to take root, only the toughest plants and trees can survive. Influential Dutch garden designer Piet Oudolf was brought in: he went big on grasses – hundreds of different varieties in different shades and textures rustle in the wind, their constant movement adding to the sense of the High Line as a living, breathing space.

You'll find a woodland at the southernmost point of the park, plus a wildflower field above W 27th St and a lush area of lawn in the vicinity of W 23rd. A map of the park, with the various areas explained, is available to download for free from the High Line website, and more detailed information can be found in Annik LaFarge's excellent guide to the green ↻



space, *On The High Line: Exploring America's Most Original Urban Park*, published by Thames & Hudson.

The superb planting is enhanced by architectural creation such as the Diller-von Furstenberg Sundeck, with its modernist water feature; plenty of innovative lighting design; and High Line Art, a programme of site-specific commissions and exhibitions that includes murals, sculpture, performance, videos and more.

The third and final section of the High Line, known as the Rail Yards (from 30th-34th street) will open this year, and an additional green space over 10th Ave, dubbed the 'Nest', is due to complete in 2016. In the meantime, in a city famous for its rush and bustle, the High Line meanders, forcing visitors to slow down and take a proper look at the city around them. 🍷

📍 Pier 57 (right of picture) was an engineering marvel when built in 1952; its concrete bulk is due to become a shopping and entertainment destination. Until then this part of the High Line is a great place to see the sun set over the Hudson River

STEP OFF THE HIGH LINE

Eat Celebrate the Meatpacking District's foody past with a dry-aged steak at Italian eatery *Macelleria*. Meat dishes are the speciality but there are excellent fish and vegetarian options too. This buzzy, informal place serves breakfast, brunch, lunch and dinner, making it a good option for whenever hunger strikes. 48 Gansevoort St.



Drink *Blue Bottle Coffee* is one of several charming food and drink spots on the High Line itself. Sip a single-origin or blended coffee from a deliciously shady spot above W 15th St.



See The Chelsea gallery district is home to hundreds of art galleries, including some of the biggest names on the international art scene. Check out *David Zwirner* (533 W 19th St) and the *Gagosian* (555 W 24th St) or the *Pace Gallery* (510 W 25th St) and *Flowers* (529 W 20th St).



Stay All the sleek modern rooms at the *Standard Hotel* (pictured) boast floor-to-ceiling windows showcasing spectacular views over the city or the Hudson River. The building was the first to be designed specifically in response to the High Line. 848 Washington St.

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