

## NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

## A Neighborhood on the Brink (of Trendy)

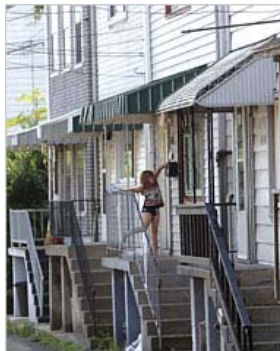


Jeff Swenson for The New York Times

**GREAT VIEWS** A view of the South Side Flats and the 10th Street Bridge along the Monongahela River in Pittsburgh.

By BETH GREENFIELD  
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## Pittsburgh



Jeff Swenson for The New York Times

**GREAT VIEWS** Row houses on the South Side Slopes, built by steelworkers, look out over the South Side Flats.

ASK new South Side Slopes residents to name their neighborhood's biggest draw, and the answer you will undoubtedly receive is, "the view."

It's practically a mantra on the Slopes, an area that rises with steep and leafy grandeur from the edge of the South Side Flats, up to spectacular vistas of the city's downtown skyline, the Monongahela River and its series of majestic bridges.

The view, though, is but one of many perks that come with living in the historic, idiosyncratic and currently en vogue Slopes — a lesson often learned upon arrival.

Sherrie Flick and Rick Schweikert, both writers, moved into their 1880 house two years ago to discover gifts from the sellers: pennies on the windowsills and a bottle of Jim Beam in the kitchen.

When Matt Schaefer renovated his 1900 hilltop home, bought from "an old hippie math teacher," he unearthed evidence of a marijuana greenhouse in the basement and a 70's stereo mysteriously entombed in the house's drywall.

Brad Palmisiano, who renovated an 1898 town house, was delighted to find original pine floorboards beneath layers of orange shag carpeting, 1960's newspapers and asphalt tile.

And Tom Tripoli, who is developing a former church into a collection of high-end condos, found endless treasures, from secret alcoves to the original basement safe.

Despite the current palpable change here, there is a sense of a humble past in this high-up neighborhood. The main thoroughfares are connected by an intricate system of steep stairways and goat-path roads, and cheek-by-jowl houses often stand only one room deep and three high to fit on small clifflike footprints. It's a place that's on the brink in every sense of the word.

"I think the Slopes is an exciting, vibrant neighborhood in transition, and one that has opportunity for all," said Rick Belloli, executive director of the nonprofit South Side Local Development Company. The organization completed construction of eight town houses in the Slopes in 2003, and sold all for more than twice the average home in the neighborhood, which was \$50,000 at the time.

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One buyer was a disgruntled [New York City](#) resident, Maureen Rottschaefer. She moved back to Pittsburgh, where she had grown up, discovered the Slopes on the annual Historic South Side House Tour and bid on her house before it was fully built — much to the surprise of the contractors.

“That sort of thing doesn’t happen here,” recalled Ms. Rottschaefer, a 32-year-old law student. “But I was like: ‘I’m from New York! You don’t understand!’ ”

Those sales jump-started a surge of revitalization in the Slopes, which has continued, thanks its diverse and well-priced housing stock, proximity to the bustling Flats business district and tight-knit community feel. The combination has been seducing many a home buyer and developer. And the influx has brought more new construction — including UUBU 6 (spoken as “double u bee u six”), a soon-to-open chic restaurant, the first in the area— and steadily rising property values to an historic neighborhood that was built by and for immigrant steel-mill workers in the early 1900’s.

“If Pittsburgh’s market were on steroids like New York’s, this would’ve happened a long time ago,” said one developer, Ernie Sota, referring to the recent spark of interest here. “But Pittsburgh’s kind of like an eddy. Things move slowly here.”

Mr. Sota, 56, is a prolific local developer who is constructing a series of nine “green” town houses, called Windom Hill Place, into a lush hillside here. He was drawn to the Slopes by the views and villagelike feel, which, for him, conjure memories of visits to Prague and Budapest.

“It’s just kind of quirky, funky and real, more organic, built by Europeans and other immigrants,” he explained. “The only other American cities that I find as geographically interesting are maybe San Francisco and Asheville, N.C.”

Mr. Sota’s new three-story gems — energy-efficient cubes — offer 2,800 square feet of space with 10-foot-high windows that frame spectacular views. A model should be complete in September.

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