

April 1, 2021

Brick Underground: Buy

# BRICK UNDERGROUND

## Newly comfortable with online tours, some buyers make offers on condos sight unseen

By Jennifer White Karp

Impressions: 504,600



*A rendering of the VU, a new condo building in Kips Bay. Brokers have done over 70 virtual showings since sales launched in January, resulting in some offers. Unmarked Studio*

When New York City shut down a year ago, and real estate showings halted, touring apartments via video became less of a gimmick and more of a necessity. Instead of an afterthought, videos became a necessary part of an apartment hunter's research.

The expectation was that renters would sign a lease after seeing an apartment through 3D videos or Facetime tours—but most buyers—unless they were investors—would not make a move. After all, what buyer would be comfortable paying NYC prices for an apartment they had not seen in person?

And now, a year later, with showings happening in person—in adherence with Covid safety rules, of course—what incentive is there for a buyer to buy an apartment sight unseen?

April 1, 2021

Brick Underground: Buy

Turns out, after a year of living virtually (or so it seems) a handful of buyers—including international buyers of new condos and New Yorkers who have been sheltering elsewhere—feel the market has hit the bottom and want to act quickly. For them, video tours are standing in for the real thing. Several—but not all brokers—that Brick reached out to say they are doing deals this way now. (Some responded with a definitive “no, it’s not happening.”)

But for those who are working with international and out-of-town buyers, now that virtual showings are more popular, “it is a whole new world,” in the words of Malessa Rambarran, an agent at Brown Harris Stevens. She is overseeing sales for VU, a new, 100-unit condo building with interiors by Paris Forino at 368 Third Ave., in the Kips Bay neighborhood. Prices here range from \$829,000 for a studio to \$2,999,000 for a three bedroom.

Sales launched in January, and Rambarran says they have done over 70 virtual showings, which resulted in several offers from buyers who had not seen the apartment or the sales gallery in person.

“A year ago, when the pandemic started, virtual showings were fairly new for many brokers and buyers. But now that everyone is so familiar with using Zoom and similar programs, there's a level of comfort and familiarity that wasn't there before,” she says.

Virtual showings appeal to buyers who are very cautious about Covid exposure and don’t want to miss out on an opportunity to get a deal on a place in Manhattan right now “as New York seems to be heading back to normal,” she says.

In fact, it’s looking better than normal in terms of recent sales activity fueled by lower prices. The Manhattan sales market saw 1,271 contracts signed as of March 26th—nearly double the amount in March 2020, and more deals than any other March since 2007, when 1,624 contracts were signed, according to a report from UrbanDigs.

Jeremy Kamm, an agent at Warburg Realty, says that thanks to wider access to the Covid-19 vaccine—“there’s a light at end of the tunnel.” That has buyers feeling more confident and they are making moves at all price points, he says.

Some are doing so from a distance because they left the city to ride out the pandemic elsewhere, so they are scouring the market digitally and even buying sight-unseen, Kamm says.

April 1, 2021

Brick Underground: Buy

"I am presently working with a buyer who is more than comfortable buying without seeing the property in person. She knows exactly what she wants and is very specific about her apartment criterion and desired neighborhood. We have even submitted an offer well above the listing's asking price to seal the deal," he says.

Parisa Afkhami, an agent at Warburg Realty, is working with out-of-town and international buyers who don't have easy access to New York City due to Covid and travel restrictions.

"The last year has clearly changed the way that real estate is transacted—there is much more understanding and trust in the product that they are seeing online," she says. In some instances, a family member or representative will check out the apartment on their behalf.

Several apartments at One Manhattan Square, a new condo development at 225 Cherry St. in the Two Bridges neighborhood, were purchased sight unseen. For the condos currently available, listing prices range from a one bedroom for \$1,090,000 to a three bedroom for \$4,950,000 and come with a 20-year tax abatement.

Buyers who can't tour the building in person get a very detailed online presentation, says Christina Medina, director of sales at One Manhattan Square. She lives in the building herself.

"As we are over a year into the pandemic, we've all grown accustomed to the virtual world. People are feeling more comfortable with an online purchase, which is definitely a trend we have experienced among international buyers at One Manhattan Square," she says.

These international buyers are "experiencing a sense of urgency and don't wait to wait until travel restrictions are lifted," she says.

<https://www.brickunderground.com/buy/international-foreign-out-of-state-buyers-luxury-condos-comfortable-zoom-video-tours-make-offers-sight-unseen>