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## HISTORIC MILE HIGH: MATURE NEIGHBORHOODS WITH NEW CHARM

By AMY SPAGNOLA

With a laid-back attitude and a recreationally charged culture, Denver has become a refuge for families and singles alike. The true charm of Denver is alive and well in its older neighborhoods, giving the City its history, depth and character.

Sandy Sauer, a Vice President for US Bank's Real Estate Banking division, makes her home in East Washington Park. She savors living in a more historic neighborhood for the "diversity of architecture, people and events."

Relishing her residence is easy for Sauer, saying, "The Park is like having the biggest, best, most active back yard in the City without any weed pulling responsibilities. [It has a] central location to everything you want to do."

Washington Park is now one of Denver's most sought after neighborhoods by young professionals, empty nesters and Denver newbies. Part of the park's appeal is its unique and classic architecture. Filled with early-century Craftsman-esque bungalows and duplexes as well as many larger Tudor and Victorian homes, built from the late 1890s to the 1940s, Wash Park is symbolic of Denver's appreciation for history and its reverence for revival and renewal.

There are benefits to buying in an established neighborhood, says Elizabeth Hotz, a licensed buyer's broker for the Kentwood Company in Greenwood Village. "Besides getting to be close to the hub-bub of the city, buying in a Denver neighborhood can mean larger lots, developed trees, varied architecture, historic charm, better appreciation and more diversity,"

says Hotz. In addition, she says, "More established neighborhoods are more likely to be pedestrian friendly with local shops and amenities."

Clare Cavanaugh, co-owner of Premier Trade Solutions, Inc., is very familiar with the perks of living in an older neighborhood setting. Cavanaugh, who lives in Mayfair (which is located south of Colfax and north of 6th Avenue from Colorado to Holly), a burgeoning neighborhood in particular for its modestly priced homes, sums up the nostalgia and significance of living in a desirable older neighborhood home, "I can't imagine living in a new neighborhood. In part because I really like foliage and trees."

Cavanaugh goes on to say, "The new areas, particularly in Colorado with our climate, struggle for years with growing anything of size. I love being able to walk around a block or two and see what others are doing with their homes and yards. I love being in the city." Cavanaugh may be ahead of the game in appreciating an aging neighborhood for its access to downtown, its natural setting and its overall ambiance.

"I think many 'fix and flippers' and investors have been profiting from getting in early to these [established] neighborhoods, turning

around distressed properties and selling them for a profit. However, the other side to this is that now, with all the incentives and low interest rates, the investors are competing with first-time homebuyers for these lower priced properties. And the demand just keeps hiking the prices up in these desirable neighborhoods," says Hotz.

In 2009, close to 70 percent of all the homes sold

"There has been a definite trend of gentrification & revitalization in the urban core... It is happening throughout Denver, but the ones that are doing the best are neighborhoods that are close to the commercial districts, offer interesting architecture and [are] affordable...buyers live in Bungalows, Tudors, Victorians, Lofts, Condos & even new construction in and around these neighborhoods." -Jennifer Apel, Broker/Owner, Nostalgic Homes

in Denver had been priced from zero to \$250,000. Price appreciation has become a trademark of homes starting in the "entry level" category. And an \$8,000 Tax Credit for first-time homebuyers is giving the biggest jump to moderately priced homes. Denver is seeing a diminishing starter-homes marketplace and thus, the inventory is low and the number of potential buyers is high.

"Buyers [in older neighborhoods] have the advantage of living in areas that seem resistant to the economic turmoil that is going on around them, and in some cases are seeing prices increase. There is a finite amount of inventory that is available and it is simple supply and demand," says Jennifer Apel, co-owner and broker of Nostalgic Homes in Denver (Apel, a North Denver native, and her husband, Corey Wadley, bought the firm from the original owners three years ago).

Denverites are coveting homes in "classic" city neighborhoods. They're also renovating, upgrading and shunning suburban sprawl for homes centrally located to the city, with modern appliances and upgrades.

Esther Hammond, who is a manager and Vice President for Wells Fargo Bank Trade Services, and originally hails from Switzerland, loves her older Colorado neighborhood (Platt Park) for its sentimentality value.

"We love this established neighborhood with older homes and tree-lined streets. Our house is almost 100 years old," explains Hammond. "The houses on our block were built around the same time and look very much alike from the outside but people have renovated their houses over the years and every house is unique once you step inside," she says.

And Hammond is not alone in spotting the trend of giving the old house a new face. It can serve as a measure to preserve the home, to increase the home's market value or simply a way for the owners to enjoy an aging neighborhood with conveniences of modern living.

Denver residents love a comeback. Whether an old house gets a new face or a simple upgrade, economic times be damned. The City of Denver and its real estate market has no black cloud. And many area homeowners are finding must-haves in neighborhoods where there are elements of yesteryear tattooed onto the community. Old Victorian mansions, nostalgic Denver streets and historic buildings offer the perfect menu for the anti-suburban stomping ground; the un-new neighborhood is a fun and fruitful choice for new home buyers.

"Buyers seek established neighborhoods because they enjoy what these areas have to offer [in terms] of interesting commercial districts that have diverse dining and

## DENVER'S HOT HOODS

While it is always been glamorous to live in the trendy, yet established, neighborhoods within the city limits of Denver, the recent spike in gas prices only increases the attractiveness of being "close-in." We predict that home values in close-in Denver Neighborhoods will continue to climb as gas prices increase.

Denver has a plentiful selection of hot neighborhoods that are simply thriving in an otherwise stagnant real estate market. Lowry is always a good bet for a solid return on your investment, since the price of a single-family home has increased an average of eight percent a year from 2000-2007. Other prosperous Denver neighborhoods that have experienced solid home appreciation over the last few years include: Bonnie Brae, Cherry Creek, Denver Country Club, Park Hill, Washington Park, Belcaro, Five Points, Highland, Hilltop, Lincoln Park and Stapleton.

-INFORMATION FROM: BONNIE COX, RE/MAX MASTERS TEAMCOXREALTORS.COM

nightlife experiences, boutique shopping, proximity to downtown Denver, front porch neighborhoods, mature landscape and great parks," says Apel.

Apel, who purchased her first home in the heart of the Highlands in 1989, turned a \$59,000 profit on the old Victorian (that later became the Garden Café at 32nd and Perry). She thinks the most important considerations for deciding on 'home sweet home' are, "Location, location, location," she says, "areas that are close to downtown Denver are seeing good returns."

Apel goes on to say, "The [areas] doing the best are neighborhoods that are close to commercial districts, offer interesting architecture and they're affordable, such as, Highland Square, Old South Gaylord, Pearl Street, Tennyson Terrace and Potter Highlands."

But before going on a "home shopping" spree, Apel recommends looking for aesthetic appeal in structure and construction in any home purchase.

"Some people are inspired by location, some are inspired by architecture but most are inspired by both," she says. And when looking to put down the welcome mat, make sure there's no money pit potential. "It's important to consider the condition of the property and if it has not been renovated, the cost of bringing that up to standard," insists Apel.

And Apel's final words of wisdom for those seeking their Denver dream home (old or new)? "Seek an area that makes your heart pitter-patter."

ONLINE HOME SEARCH  
trulia.com  
housingtracker.net  
hotpads.com

## DENVER BY THE NUMBERS

The median home age in Denver is currently 43 years old. As of May 21st 2009, there were 21,545 active combined Residential and Condominium listings on the market in the Denver Metro. The current range of prices in the Denver Metro area is \$10,000 to \$38,000,000. The median price is \$315,000 and average price is \$481,875. The average price per square foot is \$166. On May 21st there were 430 new home listings.

## WHAT AREAS ARE TRENDS OF BUYING AND RENOVATION DOMINANT IN DENVER?

The Highlands, Baker, Congress Park, Platt Park, Mayfair, Park Hill and City Park

## BEFORE BUYING — THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- Research Crime Stats
- Investigate Schools
- Good Inspection of the Property (especially a sewer scope inspection as the majority of older homes in Denver have older sewer systems)

## Reader Resource:

[denverrealestate.com/search](http://denverrealestate.com/search)

To search homes by area, address, nearby schools, square feet and other property information

-INFORMATION FROM: ELIZABETH HOTZ

## More Things to Consider:

- Good Size Lot ("land is part of the investment")
- Good Floor Plan
- Good Location (not a busy street)

"Older homes don't depreciate during a recession. The benefits of an [older home] are supply and demand. A small supply equals a high demand," says

Amy Bachelder Bayer.

-INFORMATION FROM: AMY BACHELDER BAYER, PORCHLIGHT GROUP

## Breaking it Down by Neighborhood

### THE HIGHLANDS

The Highlands neighborhood extends from Federal Boulevard to I-25 and from 38th Avenue to Speer Boulevard. This charming neighborhood is conveniently located just minutes from downtown Denver and a variety of attractions such as Six Flags Elitch Gardens, Invesco Field at Mile High, Coors Field, Colorado's Ocean Journey, Pepsi Center, the Denver Children's Museum, and many more.

### BONNIE BRAE

In the 1870s, the Kansas Pacific Railroad owned the lands that would become Bonnie Brae. Today, Bonnie Brae is one of Denver's most desirable neighborhoods, thanks to its proximity to Washington Park and Cherry Creek, as well as its own small district of quaint shops, ice cream parlors and restaurants.

### WASHINGTON PARK

Washington Park wasn't much in 1898, when the city began designing the landscape. Imagine "thirty acres of bare land, lying above the city ditch, with no tree or even shrub upon it," too far east of most residences, not connected with a major street, and hard to find. Although settlement in South Denver had begun nearly a quarter century earlier, around the park remained sparsely populated at the turn of the century. Beautiful Washington Park, located between East Virginia and East Louisiana Avenues and between South Downing and South Franklin Streets, is a local recreational haven. Built in 1899, "Wash Park" (as it is affectionately called) lures visitors from throughout the city to its 162 acres where they can swim, lift weights or take classes at the recreation center; jog or walk along the crushed-granite outer trail; play tennis, volleyball or soccer; bike or rollerblade on the paved inner pathway; and catch fish in Smith and Grasmere Lakes.

### CONGRESS PARK

In the 1880s and 1890s, founders used the name Capitol Heights to denote an easterly area even higher than elite Capitol Hill. Yet it certainly wasn't a respectable area at the time, and no one would have called it Congress Park until at least 1946, when a neglected for-

mer cemetery became the area's second to be so named. Like Cheesman Park, which had earlier been named Congress Park and was a cemetery for some time, these lands rose to respectability. Congress Park today boasts some of the most prominent historic landmarks in Denver, with the graceful homes of the East 7th Avenue District and the unique lot design of Snell's Resubdivision.

### CHERRY HILLS VILLAGE

Cherry Hills Village in the south suburban area, population 6,000-plus, is one of Denver's premier upscale communities. Two country clubs, Cherry Hills and Glenmoor, offer fine amenities. Cherry Hills homes for sale run from \$850,000 upward to \$6 million. Recent average sold price was \$2+ million. On average, homes in Cherry Hills sold at 96.3 percent under list price.

### STAPLETON

When Denver built its new international airport in the early 90's, the Stapleton Colorado real estate old Stapleton Airport became available for development. Close to the newly developing Lowry Campus, the development of Stapleton was taken over by Forest City Development. Forest City began building infrastructure for this vast new urban infill project in 2001. It is now the largest urban development of its kind in the nation. The first homes were available for occupancy in 2002, and the new Town Center opened in 2003. New home building will continue at Stapleton for the next 15 years. Resale homes are also available at Stapleton from the high \$200,000s for 3 bedrooms, 2 baths, and 1,350-plus square foot homes to nearly \$2 million for plush, English Revival custom home with 5 bedrooms, 8 baths and nearly 4,000 square feet. Average home price is \$495,000 for 4 bedrooms, 4 baths, and 2,400-plus square foot home with a full basement. Condos and townhomes range from near \$120,000 to \$345,000. Average price is \$235,000 for 2 bedrooms, 2 baths and 1,000-plus square foot condo with a detached one-car garage.

INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM:  
BUYERS-ADVANTAGE.NET  
DENVERS-REAL-ESTATE.COM/DENVER-NEIGHBORHOODS.HTM

### DENVER REAL ESTATE---FACTS AND FIGURES:

1. Serious sellers have spiffed up their offerings and reduced prices to move their homes. These prices can be very tempting!
2. Less than serious sellers have either withdrawn their homes or let the listing expire. This has radically cleaned up the marketplace with less than saleable properties. Our inventory is down almost 7.5% in the past 30 days.
3. Interest rates are still near historic lows. It is virtually impossible to time the market at the very lowest rate, but close to bottom is not a bad place to be.
4. Forward looking investors have a sense that there is a change in momentum. They usually have an innate instinct most buyers do not have.
5. Denver has been on a hiring binge. We are leading the nation in new jobs created.
6. Denver wages are up well over inflation.
7. Lockheed-Boeing (ULA) is bringing in 500-750 families from CA. These are high-paid employees that will be arriving this spring.
8. Commercial real estate has been on a two-year tear. Historic prices have been made on many large commercial real estate transactions. Much of the downtown and metro Denver available rental space has been aggressively leased. Often this is a precursor to a change in the residential marketplace.

-INFORMATION FROM: BONNIE COX, RE/MAX MASTERS TEAMCOXREALTORS.COM

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### CHARACTERISTICS OF A CITY THAT COULD REBOUND

1. Job growth
2. Growing population
3. Location with good weather
4. Lots of first-time home buyers
5. No overbuilding of condos or office spaces
6. Vital downtowns where people can live without a car
7. Well-educated population
8. Large number of foreclosures early

#### Top housing markets:

1. Denver, CO
2. Raleigh, NC
3. Austin, TX
4. Seattle, WA
5. San Francisco, CA

Information From: [thehomecart.com](http://thehomecart.com)