

NEWS [/NEWS]

HEAR IT: The Incessant Mansion Swimming Pool Construction Noise Driving One UWS Block Off The Deep End

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 BRAHMJOT KAUR/GOTHAMIST

The NY Times is *especially* good at poking around and finding stories that impeccably depict (<http://gothamist.com/tags/brunchhatereads>) the depthless depravity of the ultra-wealthy. And they came up with a doozy today (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/05/nyregion/gentrification-one-percent-manhattan.html>): construction of a swimming pool in the basement of a multi-million brownstone at 48-50 West 69th Street, located between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue, is driving neighbors (and dogs, and children) insane. It is a perfect illustration of how New Yorkers have to come to terms with "everyday existence in New York, where the rich run rampant and the rest of us have to deal with it."

The whole Times story (written by reporter David Margolick, who lives in the neighborhood and has been experiencing the noise first-hand) is worth reading, but the gist is this: a married couple bought two brownstones (No 48 and 50) on the block over the last decade (through the "Erzuli Corporation"). That couple was later revealed to be Malou Beauvoir, a Haitian-American jazz singer (who has described herself "as a *mambo*, or voodoo priestess"), and Pierre Bastid, a 64-year-old Moroccan-born Frenchman "who made a fortune in energy, and recently dabbled in Alpine hotels, restaurants and pharmaceuticals."

Last summer, the couple knocked down the brownstones to create a giant 37 foot, 11 ½ inch hole in the ground as they build their new mansion, which will come with quite the amenities: "The finished mansion will feature an underground theater and a recording studio, a Jacuzzi and a sauna, free-floating elliptical stairs (whatever that might be) and a wall of sculpture depicting trees, animals and birds of the jungle." And of course, the swimming pool, which will measure 10 by 60 feet, and "will be clad in marble, and surrounded by columns, and softened by recessed lighting."

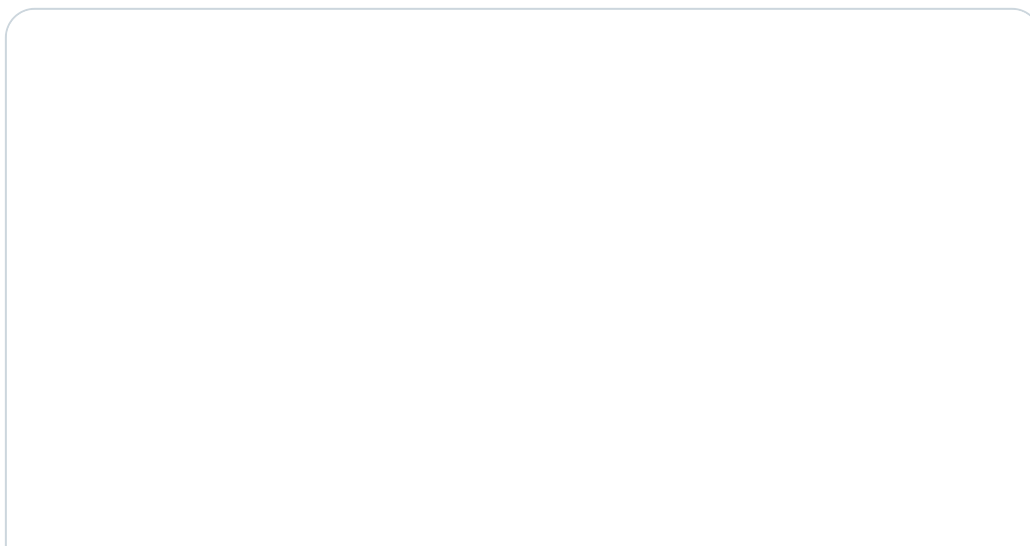


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I walk by this site every day and feel visceral loathing. Now I

know why. (One thing some non-NYCers don't get is that there are many streets on which zillionaires can live one brick wall away from middle-class/fixed-income people. This is one of them.)



That Noise? The Rich Neighbors Digging a Basement Pool in Their \$100 Mil...
The extremely loud and incredibly expensive renovations that have shattered a formerly quiet residential block in Manhattan.

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11:53 AM · Apr 5, 2019



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So every morning around 8 a.m. for the last several months, the jackhammering has started and gone on until 5 p.m. It was supposed to be done by last December, then by February, and now, it could last all summer. It's estimated that the entire project won't be done for another four years.

Neighbors and locals say they're frustrated and upset by the disruption to their lives, particularly because of the constant noise: "It's horrendous," Marjorie Cohen, who has lived on the block since 1972, told Gothamist about the sound. "I live in the front, and it is really hellish, it was scary [hearing it] before 8 o'clock in the morning." She said it's made living on the street rougher than ever before: "It makes me extra nervous, I sort of want to hide in the bathroom."

Robert Vasquez, who is visiting from California and staying on the block, told Gothamist: "There's typical New York noises that you get used to, but this construction is just mind-boggling. It's noisy all the time, early in the mornings."

Some neighbors told the Times they had no choice but to stick it out and try to live with the noise. But others, including violinist Gabrielle Fink and Tamar Gongadze (whose apartment was directly above the pit), couldn't take it, and left their homes in recent months.

Sounds Of The Noisy 69th Street Block



And it's not just humans who are upset by everything: so are the dogs of the neighborhood. That's what Deborah Brown, a retired editor who for over 50 years has lived two doors down from the construction site, told Gothamist about her 10-year-old mini-poodle named Dorian Gray, who has been prescribed a tranquilizer because of all the noise. "My dog has been upset by the sound, he paces and jumps down from the bed to floor, he's just uncomfortable, so I had to get veterinarian to prescribe a form of tranquilizers for him," she said. We were shown the medication bottle, and the label reads: "for construction."

Brown said the noise is both indescribable and relentless: "It combines diesel-fueled jackhammers who work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day, and the residue from that being transported into dumpsters, and it is indescribable. Some days, it sounds like the jackhammer is inside [my] apartment. I have had to buy noise blockers to be able to stay at home and work." She said that about six months after drilling started, she had her hearing tested and was diagnosed with moderate to severe hearing loss, and has had to get hearing aids as a result.

"The takeaway for this is this should never have happened," she added. The sound is like "you're having a terrible migraine headache with pounding. There has to be some way that this could have been modified."

Eileen Vazquez, the president of the 69th Street Block Association, has lived on the block for eight years (her family has owned the brownstone across the street from the construction site since the 1940s). At the start of March, she and her sister/upstairs neighbor Kara Kelly finally reached out to Beauvoir and Bastid about the noise with a letter, which she also sent to assorted local politicians. "The sound is torturous, and it has actually caused physical problems for my neighbors," she told Gothamist. "It's not just noise. It's emissions, it's dust, it's debris, it's trucks idling at 6 in the morning for two hours while they wait for the site to open."

"This is a very tight-knit community, there are residents who have lived on this block for 50 years, when this was a horrible neighborhood. They have invested their time and their energy to make this block what it is. It's not just a band of rich people being angry about stuff," she added. "I always say we're like Mayberry in New York, this street is like Mayberry...we all really do know each other, we're all very engaged with each other."

Vazquez did end up having a phone conversation with Beauvoir, who she said seemed nice and genuine, and the couple also sent a letter "pledging remedial measures," measures Vazquez called "damage control" more than anything else.

The couple also sent this statement to the Times:

“Pierre and I deeply regret the inconvenience caused to the neighborhood, despite our efforts to limit it from the onset,” Ms. Beauvoir wrote, in a statement forwarded by her construction manager. “Unfortunately, we have all experienced the disagreeable aspects of construction and the unpredictability of the process.”

There's still a question of how exactly the completed mansion is going to be used, and whether Bastid is planning to turn it into another of his boutique hotels. Brown noted that the couple claims they'll be living there full-time once it's done, whereas many on the block had assumed this was going to be their pied-à-terre.

"So if they're gonna be here full-time as a neighbor, if they want to invite me over for a swim, I would accept the invitation," Brown said with a laugh. "I'd like to meet them. This [has all been] word of mouth about them. I think they have been made aware of what's going on, and I would think they would want to be as good a neighbor as they can be now."

With additional reporting by Brahmjot Kaur

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