

Welcome to the Neighborhood

Bucktown & Wicker Park

by Brett Ashley McKenzie

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Chicago REALTOR® magazine will profile one Chicago community per issue and highlight the major draws of buying and selling property within that community, as well as local perspectives on the neighborhood and interesting facts for you to share with your clients.

As the holiday season descends, savvy Chicago shoppers flock to Wicker Park and Bucktown for one-of-a-kind gifts that can't be found anywhere else. It is with the same desire for one-of-a-kind living that savvy Chicago homebuyers have approached the adjoining north side neighborhoods. Strolling by the Armitage shops and admiring the edgy architecture along Milwaukee Ave., one might have trouble imagining Wicker Park as a former industrial stronghold or Bucktown as little more than a sprawling goat farm. But it is a rich and culturally diverse history that distinguishes these unique communities from other urban hotspots, and each other.

Wicker Park

Flashy bars and boutiques, a commuter-friendly location, and the combination of renovated and new construction properties attract Chicagoans to the increasingly popular Wicker Park neighborhood. But in the 1870s, moving to Wicker Park wasn't just an option for many Chicago families—it was necessary.

The Great Chicago Fire in 1871 destroyed residences and businesses throughout the downtown and surrounding areas, leaving four square miles scorched, hundreds dead, and thousands displaced. Wicker Park (named for Charles and Joel Wicker, who purchased the 80-acre plot of land in 1870) provided land for homeless, as well as new immigrants looking to assist in the rebuilding efforts, to construct new homes and businesses.

Initially settled by Irish steel laborers in the 1850s, Wicker Park attracted an ethnically diverse population of immigrants, namely Germans, Norwegians, Poles, and Jewish workers. Elegant, late 19th century-style mansions attracted some of Chicago's wealthiest families, such as the Pritzkers, author Saul Bellow, and Universal Studios founder Carl Laemmle.

Modern Wicker Park still owns a great deal of celebrity. The popular MTV reality series "The Real World" filmed its 2001 season in a Wicker Park loft, which has now been converted to a Cheetah Gym (1934 W. North Avenue). Formerly a dressmakers' shop, this three-story brick renovation is a perfect example of Wicker Park's industrial history colliding with its chic, modern present.

Swanky nightclubs, upscale restaurants, and nationally-recognizable specialty clothing stores like American Apparel (1563 N. Milwaukee) have transformed Wicker Park into arguably Chicago's trendiest neighborhood. Many musicians and starving artists who once flocked to Wicker Park have since relocated to more affordable parts of town,

but remnants of its history as an artist's haven remain. The Double Door (1572 N. Milwaukee) night club, which has showcased artists from the Rolling Stones to the Smashing Pumpkins, in addition to countless local acts, is just steps away from Piece Brewery & Pizzeria (1927 W. North) which is co-owned by Rick Nielsen of Cheap Trick (a band that, in a circular twist, played at the Double Door).

The contrast between Wicker Park's charming original buildings and the establishments that occupy them are noticeable. A Potbelly Sandwich Works (1623 N. Damen) in an old fire house, Zen Noodles & Sushi (1852 W. North) in a vintage brick two-flat. While the fusion is anything but seamless, the availability of any and every cuisine, shop, and service gives the whole neighborhood a never-sleeps, almost Manhattan-like bustle.

Bucktown

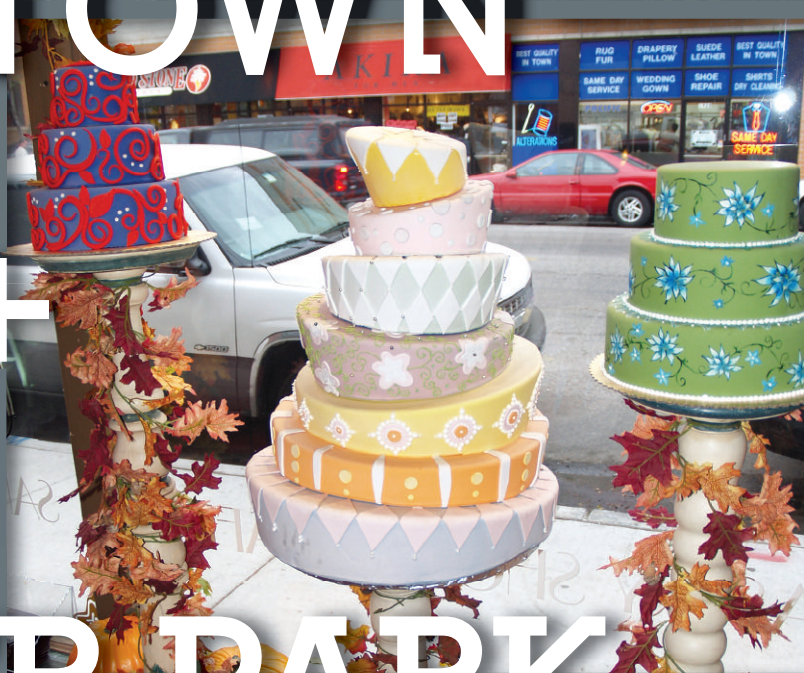
Wicker Park may have traded traditional for trendy, but Bucktown remains true to its roots as a working class community with affordable residences that appeal to less affluent artists and young professionals. Thought to have been named Bucktown for its time as a goat-farming community (a "buck" is a young male goat), this growing neighborhood was initially settled by Poles in the early 1830s. Germans, Jews, and Latin Americans would soon follow, lending to the overwhelming appreciation for diversity evident in Bucktown today.

Among the diverse ethnic establishments still thriving today is Café Laguardia (2111 W. Armitage), a top-notch Cuban restaurant that pairs fresh, home-style Cuban food with a thriving nightlife scene. The walls are adorned in animal print, gorgeous mural paintings of Havana, and even framed portraits of Chicago's most famous ex-pat, Ernest Hemingway. Sizeable mojitos, mouthwatering Cubano sandwiches, and fresh seafood top the best-selling orders at this fun, friendly, and fabulous Bucktown location.

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Goddess and Grocer



Cafe Laguardia

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When Café Laguardia closes at 11:00 P.M., head east on Armitage to a Bucktown legend, the Map Room: A Traveller's Tavern (1949 N. Hoyne). This favorite establishment, with bookshelves boasting decades of National Geographic back issues and walls adorned with flags from around the globe, welcomes you to come in for a beer—but not just any beer. Regulars and bartenders alike unceremoniously heckle newcomers who dare to order your run-of-the-mill Miller Lite. And with 200 unique brands representing 36 brewing styles, why would you? Map Room even offers an original gluten-free beer for those with special dietary needs.

Bucktown embraces the arts as eagerly as it embraces diversity, and the annual Bucktown Arts Fest (typically held in late August) showcases this appreciation. Art, poetry, music, theater, dance, and film are among the “art in all its forms” exhibited during this two-day festival. But recognizing exceptional art is a 365-days-a-year thing for Bucktown residents. Pagoda Red (1714 N. Damen) showcases unique Asian collectibles, from 18th and 19th century Chinese furniture to garden décor to temple artifacts. Reputable Chicago artist Carlos E. Jimenez also keeps a gallery in

Bucktown (2301 W. North, 1st Floor), where his own abstract work mingles with other provocative artists’. The Fine Arts Center of Chicago encourages budding artists to unlock their own talents, with traditional courses in sculpture and drawing as well as innovative stone carving, metal furniture design, and armor forging classes.

If you’ve got a craving for a big, hearty Reuben and some patience, grab a spot in line at the Goddess and Grocer (1646 N. Damen). This gourmet café and grocery store offers some of the best sandwiches in Bucktown as well as

favorite desserts and specialty wines and beers. If you’re not feeling too full after the generous “Big Nosh” sized sandwich, pop just across the street into p.45 (1643 N. Damen), a chic women’s boutique recently featured in *In Style* magazine.

Who Wants to Live Here?

Wicker Park’s hipster scene undoubtedly appeals to a young crowd. Anastacia Mason of Baird & Warner, Lincoln Park, lives and works in Wicker Park/Bucktown. “Wicker Park is younger than Bucktown,” she says. “The Double Door is right there, there are great new restaurants and bars geared towards college kids, plus boutiques and plenty of transportation.”

Demand has kept property value healthy in Wicker Park. Vintage one bedroom condominiums and apartments can run anywhere from \$230,000 - \$280,000, and in the heart of Wicker Park, two bedroom condominiums tend to start in the low \$400,000s. For that reason, Wicker Park inventory includes more vintage condos and rental units. Sophia Klopas of Koenig & Strey GMAC, Gold Coast, says that one bedroom units in Wicker Park are definitely in the minority of inventory. “For people with roommates, Wicker Park is ideal,” she says. “Wicker Park has a lot of rehabbed Graystone buildings.

What’s selling in Bucktown?

FastSTATS 3rd Quarter 2007 (Area 8022)

Attached Single Family	Detached Single Family
Units: 179	Units: 49
Median Price: \$305,000	Median Price: \$670,000
Market Time: 111 days	Market Time: 119 days

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Check out neighborhood stats for all 77 Chicagoland neighborhoods at www.ChicagoREALTOR.com.

What’s selling in W.P.?

FastSTATS 3rd Quarter 2007 (Area 8024)

Attached Single Family	Detached Single Family
Units: 440	Units: 41
Median Price: \$388,250	Median Price: \$690,000
Market Time: 86 days	Market Time: 142 days

Units: 440

Units: 41

Median Price: \$388,250

Median Price: \$690,000

Market Time: 86 days

Market Time: 142 days

FastSTATS consists of average sales price, median sales price, market time, units sold and percent change for Chicago and the suburbs.



Map Room

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Because of lot restrictions, it doesn't make sense to do one bedrooms."

Bucktown, on the other hand, offers more new construction and properties "geared towards families," Mason says. "There are a lot of parks and dog parks... it's very family-oriented." Whereas the hum of life in Wicker Park might overwhelm a more senior crowd, Bucktown remains relatively low-key.

According to Klopas, both Bucktown and Wicker Park appeal to another population of Chicagoans: commuters. "The area has become very attractive to people who might want to be on the Blue Line," she says. "It's so easy for people to get to work or O'Hare."

REALTORS® looking to sell in Wicker Park and Bucktown are fortunate in that these neighborhoods have "something for everyone,"

with better parking than Wrigleyville and more affordable options than Lincoln Park. One thing is for certain: these trendy communities have come a long way from their humble roots as factories and farms! **CR**

Photos by Kali Loader.

Hyde Park Bank announces recent commercial real estate financing transactions

Mixed-use building on three lots, Chicago—Irving Park

\$2,700,000 acquisition/construction loan

Mid-rise condominium property, Chicago—Near North

\$1,700,000 construction loan refinancing

Retail building, Schererville, Indiana

\$1,400,000 acquisition loan

Vacant land for single family residential, Valparaiso, Indiana

\$1,500,000 acquisition/improvement loan

Retail building, Kenosha, Wisconsin

\$650,000 acquisition loan

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