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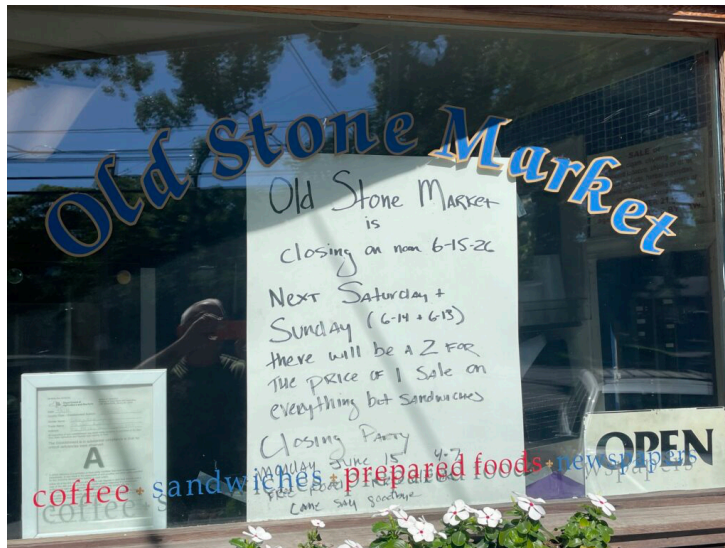
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A West-Sider Goes East — 'Out East'

July 17, 2026 | 11:07 AM in COLUMNS

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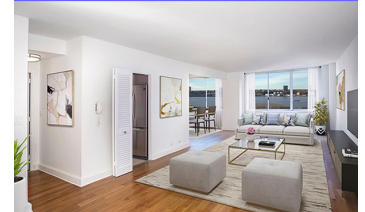
The sale of a country market reveals a less expected side of the Hamptons. Photo by Saul Dennis.

By Saul Dennis

I admit it. For years — many years —I was a Hamptons Hater. The worst kind, too. I questioned the whole idea, without ever even visiting the string of once rural, now rarified, communities dotting Long Island's eastern end and southern fork.

Growing up outside Washington, D.C., we read 'the New York papers'. Publications like New York Magazine, The New Yorker, Details (remember Details?) Vanity Fair and W came just as regularly. Our vision of the Hamptons? Shallow glitz and a glorification of money divorced from hard work or good taste. To the family of a self-made, fiercely proud physician it was all very yuck.

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When it came to New York's islands, Manhattan was the place for me. No question about it.

Moving to the Upper West Side over 34 years ago only added more sance to my looking askance at the playground of the rich and fabulous 90-plus miles away.

Listening to road reports on summer Friday afternoons and Sunday evenings, I smiled ruefully. Suffer endless hours of mind-numbing traffic to enjoy the great outdoors — why? When I craved nature, the man-made glories of Central Park and the maritime romance of the Hudson River were just blocks away.

If, for some reason, I woke up and wanted to flaunt my success (not that I was all that successful), I could always stroll down Columbus Avenue. No greasy suntan lotion or gritty sand required.

Still — the darkened UWS apartments on June, July and August weekends. Central Park suddenly less manic after Memorial Day. The ease of restaurant reservations. There had to be something to The Hamptons' hold on the imagination I just didn't understand.

As is so often the case for men, understanding arrived in the form of a woman. The woman who would become my wife.

Joanna had been going Out East for some time. ('Out East' — my first lesson. Rarely did anyone in the know refer to the collection of towns east of the Shinnecock Canal as The Hamptons.)

With Joanna as my guide, I began to question a vision of The Hamptons that, while right on the money — way too much money? — was woefully incomplete.

For example, why didn't anyone mention the East End's natural beauty? Summer light dancing off the many bays or the ocean. Winter air so clear, it collapses space as you look through the bare trees. Country lanes made cathedral-like by a riot of vines and branches.

And forget all the hubbub about the region's in-season restaurants and clubs — impossibly chic and impossible to get into — farmstands are the real scene. Beyond bountiful, bustling and just plain fun.

Really, if this is a tomato, what have I been eating all these years? (Switch out tomato for corn or cucumber or scallion or countless other foods grown in the soil or caught in the sea and you get the idea.) Out East is where Farm to Table becomes Farm to Why Bother Eating Out?

And how's this for humanity beneath sun-glazed hubris? I've witnessed it many times. You're on a beach. Someone half shouts, hey, is that a whale? A hand points to a not-so-distant spout. Then another. And another. Soon the whole beach is up, shielding their eyes, oohing and ahing with shared delight.

Summer camp for adults. No question about it.

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Finally, a more recent incident reveals a rarely reported truth about Out East. It involves yet another question. I asked it. More importantly, so did many others. To the young woman behind the counter at our local country deli. A place where bankers and baymen nod hello. The establishment had just been sold.

“Are you going to be OK? Are the new owners keeping you and the others on?” I asked, paying for a newspaper.

“It makes me feel so good that so many people asked that,” the young woman answered, her chin bashfully buried against her shoulder.

Better yet, the new owners are keeping the small staff. A reassuring resolution to a question that was also a declaration. Of caring. By the community.

Turns out there’s more to those vulgar, entitled, self-involved folks Out East than my equally unattractive prejudice allowed.

So, fellow Upper West Sider, if you are, like I was, dubious about this whole Hamptons-thing — make that, Out East-thing — without question, come take a look.

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