

Chelsea flowering as new inn place

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Hotels are the only thing blossoming in Chelsea's Flower District.

Since 2008, 1,877 rooms in nine hotels have opened or started construction in a 12-block area that once teemed with wholesale florists. And at least three more hotels with 203 rooms are planned.

Decades of development pressure have mostly relegated the century-old district to one lush corridor of exotic flowers and leafy trees — 28th Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues. But hotels are quickly eclipsing even that block.

"I really believe that area will become, or has already become, the hotel row in New York City," said Morris Moinian, developer of Hotel Indigo.

The 18-story, 122-room hotel opened on that block last month, boasting hallways enveloped by the aroma of lavender and eucalyptus that wafts in from the neighboring shops.

Two other hotels also replaced plant purveyors on the strip — the Hilton Garden Inn, which opened last year, and the under-construction Fairfield Inn. Plans have been filed with the city for two additional unnamed hotels on the same block

that would also replace low-slung flower shops.

"We have nowhere else to go," said John Rivera, an assistant manager at Fischer & Page. The orchid and Myrtle Topiary specialist is one of roughly a dozen florists still operating on the block, but another developer bought one of their buildings last year. "I'm pretty sure it's going to be hotels or condos," said Rivera.

With Midtown already filled to capacity with hotels, low-rise Chelsea "became the next-door wave in development," said John Fox, a senior vice president with PKF Consulting.

Despite the weakened economy, Manhattan's average occupancy rate is above a healthy 80 percent this year, meaning there's still room for more hotels, said Fox.

"The fact that there's a number of hotels in the Chelsea area sort of puts Chelsea on the map as a destination for hotels," said Troy Furbey, senior vice president of Kimpton Hotels.

The company is a partner in the posh, 54-story Eventi hotel and condominium under construction at 29th Street and Sixth Avenue, expected to be finished next spring.

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