



## DIANE ARBUS SLEPT HERE

A 126-year-old converted stable in Greenwich Village, once the hideaway home of a famed New York photographer, hits the market.

If you know where to look, Greenwich Village is full of rabbit holes, portals to worlds of splendid peculiarity hidden from the street. One of these charmed gateways is the workaday green door just to the left of 131 Charles Street, a dormered, two-and-a-half-story, Federal-style rowhouse built in 1834 between Washington and Greenwich Streets. Slip through that unassuming side entrance, and through a 33-foot-long tunnel originally intended for horses, and you find yourself in a secret garden, facing a handsome converted stable of mottled red brick. Here the photographer Diane Arbus lived from 1959 to 1967, a fertile period in which she created work that was shown at the Museum of Modern Art.

The hidden back house is evocatively numbered 131 ½, an interstitial address that echoes the rollicking world of imagination in Federico Fellini's 1963 film *8 ½* and also seems appropriate for Arbus, who is known for her portraits of marginal and between-the-cracks individuals. Together with the main house, the former stable, which was built in 1889, is listed for sale with Halstead Property for \$13.5 million.

Arbus was already renting the two-story back house when it was purchased in 1962 by Thomas Bruce Morgan and Joan Tarlow Zuckerman Morgan, who moved into the street-facing front house with their two children. Mr. Morgan was a reporter for *Esquire*, *Life*, and *Harper's* magazines, and later became press secretary to Mayor John V. Lindsay of New York and editor of *The Village Voice*.

The first time the Morgans visited their future home, they brought along their daughter, Kate Tarlow Morgan, who was eight, just a month older than Arbus' younger daughter, Amy.

"It was a spring day, and Diane was there," Ms. Morgan recalled. "I remember very clearly being outside on the street with Amy on the stoop, and the sun was shining on her hair; she had really thick, curly hair, and I thought it was beautiful."

Amy Arbus and her older sister, Doon, slept upstairs in the former stable, where the hay-loft opening in the facade had been partially

bricked up and fitted with a double-hung wooden window. Diane slept on the first floor, with her sleeping area separated by a hinged, driftwood screen on which she hung her photographs. The kitchen, renovated today, was at that time a simple affair marked off by diaphanous curtains.

Once the Morgans moved in, the front and back houses became permeable. "Amy and I would flow back and forth between the two homes," Ms. Morgan recalled. "I would look at Diane's tear sheets pinned to her board or screen in her house, and she would take us places and I'd watch her photographing humanity. She taught me how to talk to strangers."

Judith Stonehill, an author and preservation advocate who bought the two

buildings from the Morgans in 1968 with her architect husband, John, said that an old man appeared at their doorstep in the early 1970s and announced that his father had been the horseman for the stable.

"He showed me where the horses were kept," Mrs. Stonehill recalled during a recent tour of the former stable, pointing to vertical scars on the eastern wall of the first floor, where the side walls of stalls once attached to the brick. "He said the family lived upstairs." It must have been pretty snug up there, as the human residents shared the second floor with the hay loft. The beam that hoisted the hay still projects into the garden from the facade.

Behind an interior staircase on the northern wall is another vestige of the building's earlier life: a section of bricked-up archway. Where that opening led is a mystery. The arch aligns with Charles Lane, an idiosyncratic thoroughfare paved with time-burnished stones, which survives today only for a one-block stretch between West and Washington Streets, ending a half-block west of the converted stable. Although Charles Lane once did extend past the spot the structure now occupies, 19th-century maps show that the lane was gone, replaced



The hidden former stable at 131 ½ Charles Street



# EDIFICE COMPLEX

The front parlor of the Federal-style front house at 131 Charles Street

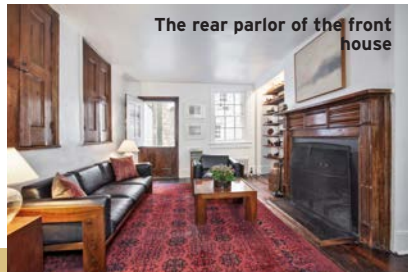


The front-house library

The first floor of the former stable, where Diane Arbus slept in the 1960s



The front house's kitchen, in the English basement



The rear parlor of the front house

"I remember Sidney Poitier coming to dinner. He walked like a man wearing a cape with a cane and a top hat."

by buildings, by the time the stable was built. Charles Lane marks the northern boundary of Newgate State Prison, opened in 1797 and torn down in the late 1820s, shortly before the brick Federal house at 131 Charles Street was constructed for David Christie, a stone cutter. The house is spiffily restored, with a brownstone stoop and wrought-iron railings leading to a door flanked by slender wooden Ionic columns. In the late 19th-century, it appears, an owner came into a bit of money and added a Victorian lintel above the door.

Today's eye-popping price tag notwithstanding, the house was built for only about \$2,600, and such rowhouses were considered nothing fancy at the time; almost all of them were the homes of stonemasons, builders or carpenters, according to a city report issued when the building was designated an historic landmark in 1966. Early tenants included a cooper and a dry-goods merchant. One resident, Martin O'Boyle, achieved notoriety in 1903 when he was arrested as a ringleader of 200 affronted Irishmen who disrupted the

performance of an Irish-lamponing play by hurling "bad vegetables and worse eggs" at the actors, one of whom, *The New York Times* reported, was playing a "red-headed Irish policeman with green whiskers."

By the 1950s, the house was subdivided among three families, including a public relations professional named Ray Hoffman and her husband, a newspaperman for *The New York Post*. The building was so poorly heated that Ms. Hoffman and her guests sometimes sat huddled by the fireplace wearing blankets. But the problem was eventually solved by an old policeman from the station house next door. "One cold day I mentioned to him that we had no heat," Ms. Hoffman wrote in a 1979 letter to Mrs. Stonehill. "Shortly afterward we were astonished to see a file of uniformed New York's finest walking into the house, each carrying a thick log. Where they got them and how 'Kelly' organized the parade, we never knew. But after that, about once a week, there was a file of policemen silently walking through the house carrying logs on their

shoulders for the fireplaces. It was impressive and moving — like some sort of ritual."

Life was more comfortable when the Morgans occupied the entire house a decade later, often receiving visits from cultural luminaries. "My father was quite close to Julie Andrews, and I remember Sidney Poitier coming to dinner," Ms. Morgan said. "He walked like a man wearing a cape with a cane and a top hat."

Through the years, the diaspora of residents of 131 and 131 ½ have kept in touch to an uncommon degree. Several have come back to visit, and in July Ms. Morgan, a choreographer and urban archaeologist who now lives in Vermont, accepted Mrs. Stonehill's invitation to sleep over in her childhood home.

The recollections the visit evoked came to Ms. Morgan in the unfurnished, transitional spaces of doorways and hallways. "In the *tabula rasa* of a doorway, I could feel, 'Oh, I'm walking into my parents' bedroom,' or 'I'm being chased by my brother,'" she said. "It's a very palpable way of having memories in the in-between spaces of an old house."

One of those memories was of Diane Arbus, heading out through the property's most vivid in-between space of all, the rabbit-hole tunnel, to photograph the characters who inhabited the margins and interstitial spaces of the city. "I remember seeing her with two or three cameras crisscrossed across her chest," Ms. Morgan said, "going through that alley to work." ♦