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[WHY ROBERT SMALL LIVES ON THE UPPER WEST SIDE](#)

Posted on July 26, 2016 at 2:34 am by West Sider



Robert Small with his MTV Video Music award.

By Eileen Katz

Robert Small is the president and executive producer of RSE (Robert Small Entertainment) and the director of The Macaulay Honors College New Media Lab here on the Upper West Side. Robert has won numerous Peabody and Video Music Awards as well as Emmy nominations for his co-creation of MTV's "Unplugged" series. For such an accomplished guy, it's nice to know you can still find him most mornings walking his dog Beans in Riverside Park, heckling joggers.

Why the West side, Robert?

I moved here in 1980 maybe, and in those days you moved where there were apartments available. I got a rent-controlled apartment where I lived until my wife was 8 months pregnant (twin boys – surprise!). It started at \$300/month and by 1995 it was up to \$512/month for a one bedroom. I kept saying to my wife: "Do we really have to move?" And one look from her later and we were packing. At that point we made the choice to stay up here rather than look around because we both felt it just had so much character compared to other neighborhoods in the city. Architecturally, etc. It's a little less pretentious than other places. It was very fun in the '80's up here. It was so interesting to witness the transformation, gentrification really, of this part of the city. I think the West side surprises people. It doesn't seem the place where you would just pass by well known writers, authors or actors. It seems to be trying to hold on, as hard as it can, to some sense of history. To maintain its original integrity some how. It's hard!

Believe me, it can't be easy going up against all these banks and chain drug stores! And that appeals to me as a person. As someone who lives here.

What do you think the best part of living up here is?

It's a combination of things: it's not claustrophobic as some other neighborhoods can feel. There's a sense of space. I love the Riverside Park area!

So, which is your favorite: Riverside or Central Park?

Oh it's gotta be Riverside for me. It's the dogs! I love dogs. And it feels less touristy. Certain parts of it almost feel like a private park. I love the promenade in there. Do you believe I lived up here 20 years before I discovered it? I couldn't believe how beautiful it was! It felt like being in France in the Spring with the tulips coming up and all the flowers in bloom. And it seems they're always shooting something there. I think that's kind of cool when I am watching a movie or show and I'm like: "Hey! That's my park or block or whatever."

What's best about living up here?

The West side can amaze you. You can go in to a building that looks seemingly insignificant and the interior is just magnificent. Some of the greatest architects, Irwin Chanin, Emory Roth created beautiful buildings here. Did you know the Zabar's are big property owners up here? But they don't seem to be interested in destroying the essence of it, which, you know, kudos to them, it's unusual for property owners.

Leading me right to: If you're stuck on a desert island and could only have one thing from Zabar's, what would it be?

Well, I am a Zabar's fan, though I gotta be honest and admit I'm a Citarella fan too. I would have to go with the sable. At that price though, I don't know if I could afford it on a desert island. Does your offer include shipping?

What do you think are the worst parts of living up here?

I don't know. I really like it up here! I guess the political correctness can be a bit much. The liberalism. But I use it to my advantage. If I need a laugh, I just say something to whoever is closest to me about Trump maybe not having it all wrong, and the reactions you get are priceless! Funny stuff for sure. I am fearful of all the building going on. All these huge buildings may start to change the open complexion and feel that makes this neighborhood so great. I hate to say it, but the bikes are starting to get to me. I'm all for less cars, more exercise, but the racks take up parking spaces and then the people riding the bikes are mostly really scary. Rarely wearing helmets, breaking most laws and creating situations that need new ones. And aren't they the ugliest bikes in the world? That bugs me, that stuff.

What are some of your favorite places to go up here?

I used to love Amsterdam Billiards! This is my fear for so much of the city though. So many of the wonderful places that made this neighborhood unique just can't cut the rents and so you lose them. Now it's an Equinox. The Dublin House still survives somehow. I think they own the building, God bless them. Like look at La Caridad across the street (we are having coffee and Robert ordered a corn muffin, butter on the side, at the New Wave Café, a neighborhood favorite of his.). How long before that's a Verizon? It closed recently with some cryptic note on the window and I was sure that was the end, but it came back! ... but for how long? H&H Bagels, also sadly gone. This is the stuff that makes me sad. But there are plenty of nail shops! One for every pair of hands up here, I'm pretty sure. I'm a fan of The Boat Basin. In Spring and Summer it's a cool place to go. Very social, inclusive. They don't kill you on prices. Beautiful use of public space. You can be part of something there.

Describe, in your mind, what a typical Upper West Sider is like.

Well, the crowd I roll with isn't as young as in some neighborhoods...40+ to be kind. They have liberal politics, smart, curious...perhaps a bit hypocritical. If they have kids, they're worried about them 20 years from now..."What will they do? What will they eat? How will they live? Will they have jobs?" Oy.

When they declare "Robert Small Day" on the Upper West Side, how would you like people to celebrate?

With alcohol! I've always been a fan of celebrating at funerals, rather than crying. That's why the Irish have it right! I think I would just go to the park with my dog and have everyone join me with theirs. And there would be one special area where the dogs could poop and just for that day, nobody would have to clean it up. There would be a special crew who gets a bonus for cleaning it all up afterwards. That would be my gift to the neighborhood on Robert Small Day. I don't know. It's all I can think of right now!

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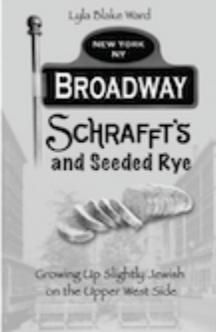
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