



NEW YORK CITY GAVE LAW & ORDER
THE GRIT AND AUTHENTICITY IT
NEEDED TO MAKE THE CRIME SHOW
NOT ONLY BELIEVABLE,
BUT OUTRAGEOUSLY SUCCESSFUL.

BY PATTY ADAMS MARTINEZ

hen Law & Order began filming in New York in 1989, it was the only series shot entirely in the Big Apple. Most others that were supposed to be set in the gritty city that never sleeps gave Manhattan a slick, Hollywood makeover. Series creator Dick Wolf—a born-and-bred New Yorker—was not having that. He fought NBC to have the series filmed in his hometown, even though, in the early days, it cost the network \$25,000 more per episode than it would have if it was made in Los Angeles. As Wolf has said, "New York City is as much a part of every Law & Order ensemble as the actors."

From rundown apartments with peeling paint and the darkest of drug dens to the poshest of prewar Park Avenue palaces, the shooting locations were 100% authentic, which added to every scene. "You get glimpses of the buildings through windows," Joseph Stern, an executive producer on the show, told *The New York Times* in 1992. "And you know you can't be anyplace else. And you're

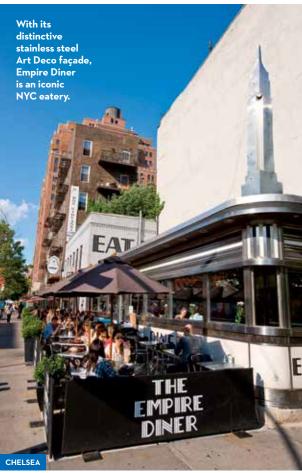
always hearing the city. The traffic. The voices. The cops have a New York accent."

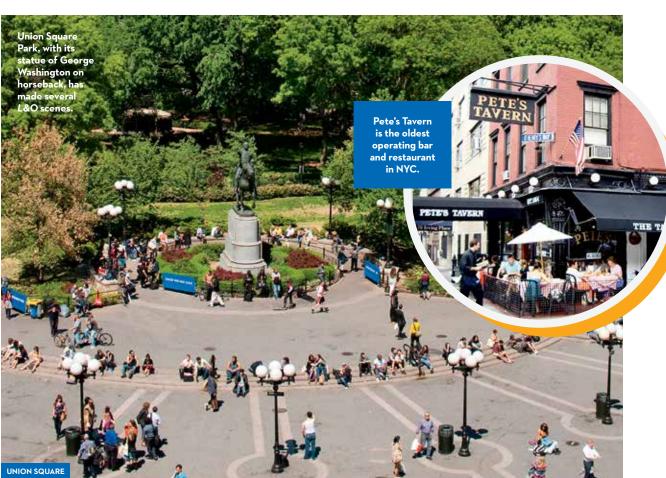
Here are just some the New York City neighborhoods where the power dynamic between law enforcement, lawyers and criminals unfolded.

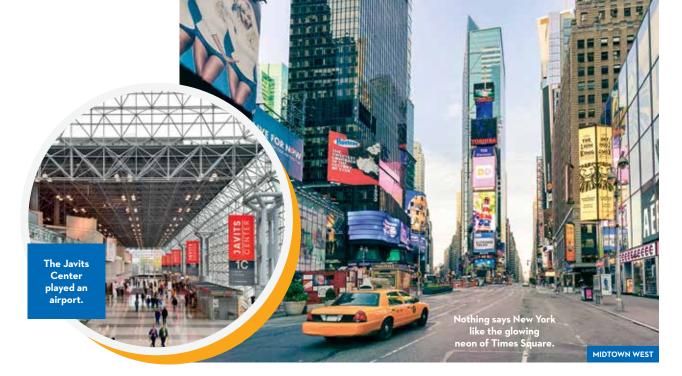


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• FIDI (AKA THE FINANCIAL DISTRICT)

Lower Manhattan is where much of the legal side of the series was filmed. Though the area saw massive changes post-9/11 with the collapse of the original World Trade Center towers and the subsequent construction of the **National September 11 Memorial & Museum**, the most recognizable areas on the show remained intact.

The New York State Supreme Court at 60 Centre St. is most identified with the series. Built in 1929, the stairs leading up to the pillars of the Guy Lowell–designed courthouse appeared in the show's intro and served as the backdrop for many of the final sequences of episodes (Sam Waterston told the *New York Post* in 2015 that he estimates he filmed 150 scenes there).

Foley Square, in front of 60 Centre St., as well as Zuccotti Park—on Broadway between Cedar and Liberty streets—are familiar sights for legal walks-and-talks among attorneys. Nearby, the interior of Tweed Courthouse at 52 Chambers St. was a constant in the early years of the show, where the court scenes were filmed (but for more shooting flexibility, a replica of the courtroom was later built at Chelsea Piers).

CHELSEA

Silver Screen Studios at Chelsea Piers (West Side Highway at 22nd Street) was home to all of the legal offices on the show and eventually the place where they filmed courtroom scenes. Back in the day, Waterston—who lived in Chelsea during his 17 seasons—could often be seen napping on benches around the neighborhood between takes.

Local establishments captured on the show include **Empire Diner** at 210 Tenth Ave., which is said to be an old favorite of Julia Roberts, who guest-starred in Season 9; **Westside Tavern** at 360 W. 23rd St., a neighborhood watering hole complete with a jukebox and pool table; and **Leo House**, an affordable alternative to pricier hotels, at 332 W. 23rd St.

UNION SQUARE/GRAMERCY PARK/ EAST VILLAGE

These downtown neighborhoods encompassed a mix of seedy and tony on the series. Attorneys were seen strolling through **Union Square Park** at Park Ave. South, while officers were more often chasing down a perp in Alphabet City's grungier **Tompkins Square Park** on East 10th Street.

Low-key Manhattan mainstays, like **Pete's Tavern** at 129 E. 18th St., a landmark bar and restaurant opened in 1864; **Reservoir** at 70 University Place, a gastropub for sports fans; and **New York Adorned**, a renowned piercing shop in the East Village, were briefly spotted by those in the know.

In stark contrast, the opulent **National Arts Club**, which has been housed in the Tilden Mansion at 15 Gramercy Park South since 1906, received its close-up in Season 4's Episode 5, aptly titled "Black Tie."

MIDTOWN WEST

The Clinton/Hell's Kitchen area of Manhattan appeared in the series often due to **Times Square** and its many nearby playgrounds. **The Mathews-Palmer Playground** at West 45th Street between Ninth and 10th avenues and the **DeWitt Clinton Park** on West 52nd Street between 11th and 12th avenues—with its basketball courts, baseball and soccer fields and dog run—were both featured.

Other neighborhood places making cameos were dining hot spots **Becco** at 355 W. 46th St., an Italian restaurant opened by Lidia and Joe Bastianich in famed **Restaurant Row**; **Molyvos**, a rustic Greek eatery at 871 7th Ave; and **West Bank Café** at 407 W. 42nd St., which is known for drawing theatergoers as well as Broadway performers after a show. Oddly enough, the **Javits Center** at 655 W. 34th St., often doubled as JFK or Newark airport on the show since the sprawling event space—built in 1986—shares similar architecture to both.

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UPPER EAST SIDE

The immaculately manicured apartments and townhouses on the well-to-do Upper East Side quickly signaled a victim or suspect on the show was wealthy, and the famed **Metropolitan Museum of Art** at 1000 Fifth Ave. popped up on more than one occasion. But it was **Central Park**—between Fifth and Eighth avenues from east to west and 59th to 110th streets from south to north—that received the most screen time in the enviable neighborhood. The 843-acre park stretches 6 miles and contains 26 baseball fields, seven bodies of water and 58 miles of pathways, lending itself to countless plot possibilities (including being the sight of an immigration reform rally in Season 18's "Illegal" and the place where many a murderer dumped the victim's body including in Season 1's "Kiss the Girls and Make Them Die").

UPPER WEST SIDE



Clockwise: The largest art museum in the Western Hemisphere, the Metropolitan Museum of Art—aka The Met—houses more than two million works in its permanent collection. Rao's is famed for its Lemon Chicken, giant meatballs and the wiseguys, like John Gotti, who've eaten there. St. Paul and St. Andrew United Methodist Church has a reputation for being open and accepting to all.

spots. Avid viewers will recall glimpses of **Frederick Douglass Playground** at West 101st Street; **St. Paul and St. Andrew United Methodist Church**, the 1,200-seat house of worship, at 263 W. 86th St.; **Scott J. Aveda Salon** at 257 Columbus Ave.; Irish pub, **the Emerald Inn**, on Columbus Avenue (which moved to 250 W. 72nd St. after being featured); and the Louis E. Jallade–designed architectural gem, **I House**, at 500 Riverside Drive.

• UPTOWN MANHATTAN

Law & Order's fictitious 27th precinct was revealed to be located at 204 W. 119th St. in Season 17's "Community Policing" episode, but all exterior shots were filmed at the side entrance of Manhattan's Surrogate Court downtown at 31 Chambers St.

Other Uptown locations—that are actually uptown—include **J. Hood Wright Park** at 174th Street and Ft. Washington Avenue in Washington Heights; **Riverside Church** at 490 Riverside Drive, which houses a beautiful 22-story tower, and **Grant's Tomb**, an impressive memorial to Ulysses S. Grant, across the street (both in Morningside Heights); and the famously hard-toget-into Italian food mecca, **Rao's** at 455 E. 114th St. in East Harlem (which served as the fictional namesake restaurant, and sight of a suspected mob-ordered murder, in the Season 14 episode "Everybody Loves Raimondo's").

NEW YORK NOTABLES

These city staples also made appearances on the hit TV show.



RUDY GIULIANI

From 1994 to 2001 (before he got involved in Donald Trump's 2020 election shenanigans), Giuliani was a relatively popular mayor who guided New York City through its darkest hour on Sept. 11, 2001. A year earlier, he appeared as himself on the Season 11 premiere of Law & Order, "Endurance," in which he appointed former colleague Nora Lewin (Dianne Wiest) as the interim DA for Manhattan (replacing Adam Schiff, portrayed by Steven Hill).



MICHAEL BLOOMBERG

The real-life mayor of New York City from 2002 to 2013 made several cameos, holding press conferences in 2004 episodes "Nowhere Man" and "Paradigm." Under actors' union rules, the billionaire mayor was paid \$678, but he revealed in a public statement that he donated it to the New York Police and Fire Widows' & Children's Benefit Fund. Off-camera, in 2009, Bloomberg declared Sept. 23, "Law & Order Day" in New York City.



WILLIAM KUNSTLER

The controversial attorney and civil rights activist—known for defending members of the Revolutionary Communist Party, Black Panthers and Chicago Seven—portrayed himself in the Law & Order Season 5 episode "White Rabbit" in 1994. In the show, Kunstler took on the case of a fugitive political activist who had been running from the law for 20 years.



JOSÉ SERRANO

In 2005, the congressman who served his constituents in the South Bronx from 1990 until his retirement in 2021, played Judge Luis Rodriguez in Season 5, Episode 11 titled "Guardian." In his big TV moment, Serrano ruled on a case where a financial adviser was implicated in the drug overdose death of one of his client's children.



FRAN LEBOWITZ

The well-known satirist—who confessed that she was such a huge fan of Law & Order that she begged her way into her role—appeared as Judge Janice Goldberg, presiding over arraignments, in 12 episodes from 2001 to 2007.



DONNA HANOVER

The journalist, who was married to Mayor Rudy Giuliani for 18 years until 2002, had a recurring role as Judge Deborah Bourke from 1997 to 2004. Hanover said she based her character on Judge Leslie Crocker Snyder, who served on the State Supreme Court in Manhattan—and coincidentally, also appeared on *L&O*!

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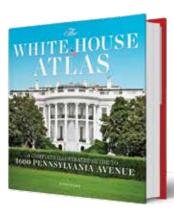
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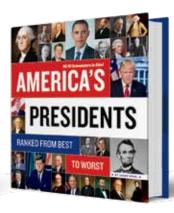
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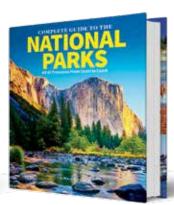
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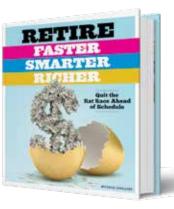
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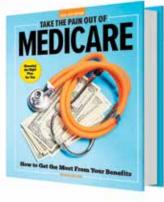
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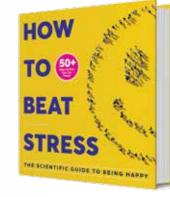
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