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59th St. is New York City's new High St. for fashion - by Joseph Aquino

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Joseph Aquino,
JAACRES

A generation ago, if you thought of 59th St., you probably thought “traffic.” A mental picture would come to mind of an impossibly time-consuming traffic line-up that would start around Columbus Circle at about 3 p.m. every afternoon, and stretch to the Queensborough or Ed Koch Bridge till about 7 p.m. Sure, 59th St. had retail, but it certainly wasn’t a shopping destination.

More recently, though, developers have managed to change this arterial street’s image. Retail condos now occupy the stretch of 59th St. that has Central Park views. Anchoring this stretch of real estate is the incomparable Plaza Hotel—where Eloise is probably saying, “Here’s what I like: Shopping!”

corner of 59th Street - Manhattan, NY

Balenciaga, Madison Avenue at southwest corner of 59th Street - Manhattan, NY

Directly across the street from The Plaza stands the Fifth Ave. Apple Store, with its iconic cube, and its elevator that takes you for a ride to a subterranean full-service showroom. Also nearby, you'll find Bergdorf Goodman's ladies' and men's department stores.

Adjacent to the Apple cube, we recently saw Richemont's Cartier store open while its 90,000 s/f Fifth Ave. Mansion was being renovated. Sales were so strong on Fifth Ave. that once The Mansion opened, Cartier decided to stay at its temporary location for a few years. That store finally did close, but LVMH's Dior recently announced a commitment to open a boutique there.

The real miracle on 59th St., though, is what has happened on the four corners of Madison Ave. Balenciaga, owned by Kering, built, and designed a beautiful store at the southwest corner. The product is so well-placed that you can practically window-shop the store's whole offering. The boutique is designed somewhat like a German car showroom—and it works!

Celine, another division of LVMH, occupies the northwest corner of Madison Ave. and 59th St. with a brilliantly lit shop. Moschino, a division of Aeffe Group, took a 100-ft. long storefront (wrapped with seven-foot-high lettering) on the northeast corner: one of New York's favorite Instagram corners. Seven For All Mankind squeezed its way into the southeast corner, replacing another jeans store, Diesel.

Celine, Madison Avenue at northwest corner of 59th Street - Manhattan, NY

Moschino, Madison Avenue at northeast corner of 59th Street - Manhattan, NY

Balmain—a division of Mayhoola Investments, which also owns Valentino—made a great leap of faith with a 59th St. store next to Celine, with no corner exposure adjacent and now alongside Balmain will be Bathing Ape a longtime favorite amongst the young. Now hipsters can shop and interchange fashion with the lux houses and the super-hip apparel store.

Farther east, at 59th St. and Lexington Ave., Bloomingdale's still stands as Manhattan's magnificent retail castle. Louis Vuitton's store-within-a-store—5,000 s/f at the corner of Bloomingdale's—is one of the highest-grossing stores in the Vuitton system: Just as busy as their flagship store on Fifth Ave. and 59th.

Muji just took a 10,000 s/f store at 59th St. off Lexington Ave., placing itself adjacent to Zara (which has a corner) and Banana Republic (directly across the street). Finally, we can't forget Delvaux, which has opened a corner boutique at the posh Sherry-Netherland Hotel.

That's our new 59th St.: It ain't just a traffic jam anymore!

Joseph Aquino is the president of JAACRES, New York, N.Y.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540