What's your favorite NYC secret?

Nick Carr, founder of Scouting NY (scoutingny.com)

"There's a 150-foot hole in the sidewalk on Park Avenue between 36th and 37th Streets. It's fun to watch New Yorkers walk over it, completely unaware they're a sewer grate away from plunging 15 stories into Manhattan's depths."

Esther Crain, founder of Ephemeranew York (ephemeranew .wordpress.com)

"The next time you're lounging around Washington Square Park, Madison Square Park or Bryant Park, remember that these wonderful green spaces started out in the mid-18th and early 19th centuries as burial grounds for indigent New Yorkers. Eventually they filled up with bodies, and after being reused as farmland, were turned into a park to celebrate the centennial of the American Revolution. It's a reminder that we're all mortal, and our problems are small compared to the Dutch and British who used to live here."


"There's about a dozen abandoned observation decks, mostly in prewar office towers. Some are office spaces or apartment terraces now, but many are just sitting there, unused, like on the Paramount Theatre building in Times Square, 22 William Street and the Williamsburgh Savings Bank building in Brooklyn. There are all these lost views, just sitting up above the city, that used to be there for anyone. Hopefully we can open some back up to the public."

Laura Itzkowitz, editor for Untapped Cities (untappedcities.com/newyork)

"I think New York's best secrets are the ones hidden in plain sight, like remnants of the Metropolitan Museum's original facade or a portrait of Vladimir Nabokov's uncle in a mural in the American Museum of Natural History. These landmarks are essential to the fabric of New York City, and their secrets are accessible to anyone who looks hard enough.

Nathan Kensinger (kensinger.blogspot.com), photographer and urban explorer

"I like the fact that New York City is so large, it once contained its own vacation getaways."

Elevated Acre

This little tract of heavenly green is an unexpected retreat within the gray bustle of the Financial District. And you’d never know it was there, situated as it is behind 55 Water Street, one of the largest office buildings in the city. To access the oasis, take the stairs or one of the elevators adjacent to the building’s Chase bank. There’s a plank walkway and benches, a la the High Line, plus trees and bushes to give you a breath of fresh air. 55 Water St off Old Slip (55water.com)—Jenna Scherer

The Slipper Room

When this downtown staple reopened last fall, most of its amenities were brand-new, but a few items from the old club remain. "Our mascot, Howdy Doody—a statue with the head of Howdy Doody and the body of Buddha—was with us at the old Slipper Room, and it felt like the new theater wasn’t finished until he was brought in and installed on a shelf over the bar," says club owner and creative director James Habakker. "Along with his wingman, Bruce Lee, he has been a talisman of good luck for the place." (167 Orchard St at Stanton St, 212-253-7246, slipperroom.com)

The Bell House

Given its location—on a slightly desolate block not too far from the Gowanus Canal—it's fitting that one of this venue's secrets concerns a ghost sighting. "Our cleaning crew sometimes reports sounds coming from the catwalk," notes Andrew Templar, one of the co-owners, referring to the main room's mezzanine. "I heard it through someone who heard it through someone else that people have seen a little girl watching shows from the upper catwalk, sitting just past the railing." (149 7th St between Second and Third Aves, Gowanus, Brooklyn (718-643-6510, thebellhouse.com)

City Reliquary Museum

One of the Brooklyn institution’s prized possessions is a bust of Theodore Roosevelt, whose NYC bona fides are solid: He was the only U.S. President born in the city. "It's a plaster cast sculpted by the world-renowned Czech artist Josef Kratina," says museum founder Dave Herman. "He lived and worked in Brooklyn during the 1910s and is the great-grandfather of the City Reliquary’s first resident geologist, Nik Sokol." (370 Metropolitan Ave at Hasbroucker St, Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-782-4042, cityreliquary.org)—Amy Plitt

For secrets from Benjamin Kabak of Second Avenue Sagas and others, visit timeout.com/newyork.