

TriBeCa Penthouses Prove Easy Prey for Manhattan Burglar

By Christie Smythe - Jun 5, 2013 12:00 AM ET

TriBeCa, the super-wealthy [Manhattan](#) enclave sprinkled with movie stars, has attracted a daring criminal who exploits the roof gardens of its converted industrial and distinctive cast-iron buildings to make off with jewelry and electronics, sometimes with residents still at home.

A man with climbing skills has been preying on penthouse-dwellers, letting himself in through unlocked terrace doors and windows, according to the New York Police Department. The incidents, coming at a time of historic lows in city crime, have shaken some inhabitants of TriBeCa, which has been home to celebrities such as [Meryl Streep](#), [Gwyneth Paltrow](#) and [Justin Timberlake](#), according to [Zillow.com](#). The neighborhood is the site of the [TriBeCa Film Festival](#), co-founded by actor [Robert De Niro](#) who is also one of the area's best-known property developers.



Short for the Triangle below Canal Street, TriBeCa has the second-highest median residential rent, at \$8,000, in Manhattan, according to [StreetEasy.com](#). Photographer: Brad Barker/Getty Images for Tribeca Film Festival

With its century-old industrial buildings and tangle of cobblestoned streets, the area appeals to the well-heeled and artistic looking for interesting loft spaces and a community feel, said [Robert Dankner](#), president of [Prime Manhattan Residential](#).

"There are a lot of quiet rich people who live there," Dankner said, adding that he had once had a famous client who "ended up in TriBeCa because he was surrounded by people like him, who are of means and have a high level of taste."

The recent home-invasions are "mind-boggling," said Sofia Song, a former TriBeCa resident and vice president of research for property listings firm [StreetEasy.com](#). The area is known for low crime, excellent schools and "a very wealthy demographic."

Richest Neighborhoods

Short for the Triangle Below Canal Street, TriBeCa has the second-highest median residential rent, at \$8,000, in Manhattan, according to [StreetEasy.com](#). Only the area of Central Park South in midtown Manhattan has a higher median price, at \$8,225.

In an October 2011 analysis published by [Forbes](#), TriBeCa and nearby SoHo, short for South of Houston Street, contained the richest zip codes in Manhattan.

Yet TriBeCa's charms, such as secluded nooks, uneven blocks and comparative quiet, also offer attractions to thieves, residents said.

At least five penthouse burglaries have occurred since April, all said to be the work of the same man, according to police. Residents contend there were others as early as December.

"Why do you rob banks? Because that's where the money is," said longtime resident Mark Dimor, 64, in a telephone interview. "There's a rich vein of roof gardens in TriBeCa. It's easy cash," he said, adding that people can be "sloppy" and leave their doors unlocked.

Dashed Away

The suspected burglar, whom residents and police described as a slim, light-skinned black man in his 20s or 30s, has tended to strike in the early evening on Thursdays and Fridays, sometimes even while residents are home. At least two residents said they saw him in their buildings, one just outside her bedroom, before he dashed away.

"He's brazen right now," said [New York Police](#) Captain Brendan Timoney, speaking at a May 30 community council meeting for [Lower Manhattan's First Precinct](#). Despite his boldness, there have been no reports of the man being armed or violent, Timoney said.

Teri Hagedorn, who lives on the top-floor of an apartment on TriBeCa's Walker Street, said she discovered a man she claimed was the burglar in her building's stairwell in December. The man, whom she described as "nicely dressed" in a gray coat, quickly continued down the stairs after she confronted him, she said.

"He was very apologetic, very polite," said Hagedorn, a 39-year-old advertising consultant.

Just Ransacked

Hagedorn said she later learned that the apartment of her neighbor, on the same floor, had just been ransacked.

"We just knew he shouldn't be there," she said. "I didn't get the sense that he was armed and dangerous, but we weren't sure."

In another incident, a 38-year-old TriBeCa woman who asked not to be identified said she was in a bedroom in her three-floor apartment on a January evening when she saw a similar-looking man coming down her stairs. The woman, whose two children were on a lower floor with a nanny, said she screamed at the man and chased him back up to a rooftop terrace where he disappeared.

Police quickly responded after she called, sending a helicopter to scan the roof, but couldn't find him, she said. Timoney said a suspect hasn't been located yet. He is believed to live outside of the neighborhood and may be using a Church Street building as a staging ground for his home invasions, he said.

Burglaries Rise

According to the [New York City](#) crime statistics, burglaries in the First Precinct, which includes much of TriBeCa, are up 31.1 percent for the year to date as of May 26 when compared to the prior year and up 40 percent over the past two years. In the Fifth Precinct, an adjacent area, burglaries are up 8.3 percent for the year to date and 30 percent over the past two years.

City-wide, the number of burglaries has dropped 9.9 percent so far for the year and 6 percent over the past two years.

Shimon Zlotnikov, the manager of a commercial building on Warren Street between Broadway and Church Street, said one of his tenants may have also been a victim of the burglar. About two months ago, a thief apparently climbed through a bathroom window on the top floor of the five-story building and took Apple Inc. products, Zlotnikov said.

Three other incidents have occurred on the same block in the past few months, he said. Zlotnikov, whose family has owned his building since the 1980s, said the transformation of the neighborhood over the years has helped it to become vulnerable to thieves.

'Breaking In'

"It's gone from being more office and commercial to being highly residential. There are a lot of families," he said in a phone interview. "Some of the blocks have a lot less people walking on them, so there are a lot less people who could potentially catch someone breaking in."

[Stanley C. Gale Jr.](#), a real estate developer who also lives in a TriBeCa penthouse, said he has installed a camera system on his terraces and is keeping his doors locked after learning about the burglaries. He said he is hopeful the community will band together to help catch the thief.

"Prices just continue to go up. It's a great place to be," said Gale, whose firm, Gale International, is a developer for a \$35 billion Songdo International Business District in [South Korea](#) and a Flatiron District condominium project in Manhattan.

"In order to catch this guy, it's going to be a matter of the community" taking action, he said. "I'm willing to bet that he knows the neighborhood pretty well."

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