

The New York Times

HERE NOW

Syllable-Reduction Surgery for West Chelsea

“WECHE? Oh dear, that is unfortunate,” said the restaurateur and taste-maker Brian McNally, commenting on the latest geographical shorthand to be foisted upon New Yorkers. “Whoever coined it should be punished severely.”

Acronyms are one of the growing pains of trendy neighborhoods in downtown Manhattan. And West Chelsea is now a hot parcel of real estate. The taxi garages and warehouses that line West 22d Street are being displaced by art galleries, the Chelsea piers are being transformed into a 1.7-million-square-foot recreational center, and Eighth Avenue has become the city’s focus of gay activity, lined with restaurants, bars and shops. With all this comes the need for a name that defines the neighborhood in a clever yet concise manner: WeChe.

But who is responsible for WeChe (which seems to be pronounced WEE-chee)? Some broker trying to be cute? Evidently not. “I’ve never heard it, and nobody else in the office has heard it either,” said Rosita Sarnoff, the general manager at Wells & Gay/Stribling, a Chelsea real estate concern. “We think it sounds stupid.”



Sean Kelly

WeChe’s roots can be traced to the September issue of *Art in America*. In an article titled “New Art District for Manhattan?” a contributing editor, Walter Robinson, tentatively ventured into uncharted territory: “Much speculation has centered on West Chelsea (WeChe?).” The journal *Flash Art International* followed suit in October.

In fact, Mr. Robinson seems to have taken it upon himself to insinuate WeChe into the New York vernacular. Since then, not only has he broadcast two WeChe shows on his cable access show “Gallery Beat,” but his wife, who also writes for art periodicals, recently filed two WeChe stories with *The Art Newsletter*.

“Gallery activity had reached a critical mass in West Chelsea,” Mr. Robinson said. “It was time to call it something. WeChe is peachy.”

Needless to say, not everyone agrees.

“Why can’t they just call it what it is — West Chelsea?” Mr. McNally said in a tone that did little to conceal his disgust. “I mean, we don’t want another NoHo on our hands.”

RENE CHUN