

NATIONAL

NYC's Historic White Horse Tavern Could See Changes Under New Owner

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Heard on All Things Considered

ALEJANDRA SALAZAR

The White Horse Tavern in Greenwich Village has a new owner. Fans worry the storied literary watering-hole is going to change.

AUDIE CORNISH, HOST:

A historic New York City Pub once patronized by the likes of Bob Dylan and James Baldwin is getting new ownership, and that could mean changes for the White Horse Tavern. Alejandra Salazar from member station WNYC says neighborhood residents are fighting to preserve the storied watering hole.

ALEJANDRA SALAZAR, BYLINE: The White Horse Tavern in New York City's Greenwich Village hasn't changed much in the last century or so. Inside, tall windows give way to dark wooden booths. Legend has it that the poet Dylan Thomas had his last drink on one of those benches. A pair of white horse heads flank the front door. If

you look up, you see a tin-panelled ceiling dating back to when the tavern opened in 1880. For longtime customers like Henry Laura, the White Horse Tavern represents decades of Village culture, like a time capsule with happy hour.

HENRY LAURA: The history is so edifying. It's just who we are. It's what New York was supposed to be and always will be.

SALAZAR: Laura has been coming to the White Horse Tavern for about 25 years. It's his place to grab a drink, chat with other regulars and jam out to classic rock on the jukebox.

LAURA: This is my local. And I don't know what I'm going to do. That's not me whining or being a snowflake. It's me looking for another bar.

SALAZAR: The White Horse tavern's building was sold to landlord Steve Croman, who recently spent eight months behind bars for grand larceny and tax fraud related to his real estate holdings. A spokesperson for Croman's company says they plan to keep the tavern running in a manner that is consistent with past operations. The tavern's new operator says he doesn't plan to touch any key parts of the interior, but he hasn't announced specific plans.

Concerned residents want the White Horse Tavern's interior to be protected as a city landmark. Several neighborhood businesses have gone under in recent years, which hasn't gone unnoticed by Greenwich Village resident Evette Stark Katz.

EVETTE STARK KATZ: I'm upset about losing the old Village. And, you know, my kids are funny. They'll say, like, you know, Mom, things change. Things change, you know?

And you have to sort of go with the flow.

SALAZAR: But Katz doesn't want to go with the flow. Two weeks ago, she and others joined writer Malachy McCourt in one of the pub's side rooms to remember those who met and drank within its walls - the beat poets Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, Jim Morrison of The Doors, New York City activist Jane Jacobs. McCourt recalled raising a glass with a few of those icons himself decades ago. He led an Irish wake in their honor and in honor of the White Horse Tavern.

MALACHY MCCOURT: (Singing) And if my love should leave, I would never find another where the wild mountain thyme grows around...

SALAZAR: For NPR News, I'm Alejandra Salazar in New York.

MCCOURT: (Singing) Where you go the lassie know. So live every day as if it's going to be your last 'cause one day you'll be right.

(LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE)

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