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## Real Estate

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in Park Slope, a couple find a cheery new one-bedroom for

**\$2,500**

a month in downtown Brooklyn, full-size freezer included.

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# Escape From Quirkyville

By JOYCE COHEN

EVERY now and again, during the six years that Mary Beth and Alan Maginn lived in a one-bedroom apartment on the ground floor of a two-family row house in Park Slope, they toyed with the idea of moving.

Over time, their rent rose to \$1,975 a month from \$1,700. They occasionally checked online to see what else was available, only to conclude they had a relatively good deal.

But in the spring their landlady announced that she was going to have to schedule a gut renovation of their bathroom. It was going to take a month. During that time, the Maginns would have to move out. They could have traveled, sublet another place or stayed with Mr. Maginn's sister in Williamsburg. Instead they decided to hunt for a new home altogether.

The Maginns — she is from Tyler, Tex., he is from Loudonville, N.Y., near Albany — met as students at the University of Notre Dame. They moved to New York, first rooming with friends in Park Slope and then renting the one-bedroom a few doors down from Prospect Park West. Their home had much going for it — a great location with a shared yard, a washer-dryer, plenty of storage and endless brownstone character.

But it was dark, with a small kitchen. The freezer was a compartment within the refrigerator. “Maybe one tiny thing of ice cream could fit in there,” Ms. Maginn said. In winter, the radiators clanked.

In summer, with bars preventing the use of a window air-conditioner, they used a portable one. Wheeling it between rooms was a two-person chore.

“You talk yourself out of things,” Ms. Maginn, 29, said. “You live with the quirks.”

But then there was the catalyst for their move, the ventilation-free bathroom. Its floor was always wet and spongy.

“As far as I could tell, the floor was rotting,” Mr. Maginn, 30, said.

Once they knew they would move, “there was maybe a 30-minute period when we discussed moving upstate, maybe Metro-Northing it to the city,” Mr. Maginn said. Instead they decided to rent a one-bedroom in a new Brooklyn building.

They hoped for upgrades — a big kitchen, plenty of light and central air-conditioning. Mr. Maginn wanted a shorter commute to his Midtown office, where he works as a consultant in the competitive research field. He envied his wife's briefer commute downtown, where she is a health care consultant.

They set an upper limit of \$2,300 a month, or \$325 more than they were paying, and contacted several agents. The first to reply was Newton Hinds III of Platinum Properties. He showed them the new rental building Brooklyn Gold, where one-bedrooms start around \$2,300.

They didn't love the finishes there. The build-



The layouts seemed odd at 99 Gold Street in Brooklyn.



At 182 Atlantic Avenue, also in Brooklyn, the rooms were too small.



BridgeView Tower in Brooklyn scored high on the wish list.



Mary Beth and Alan Maginn have two balconies, and air-conditioning, too.

ing felt like “a nice college dorm,” Ms. Maginn said. The location was inconvenient.

Although they had a wish list, they had done enough online apartment-searching to be realistic from the start.

“As I began to understand their story,” Mr. Hinds said, “I sensed some despair.” They knew, he said, that “they would have to accept some sort of tradeoff.”

He had another building nearby to show them, BridgeView Tower, originally a condo but now al-

lowing rentals — and, he told them, “a little more expensive” than other new Brooklyn buildings.

But Ms. Maginn recalls that Mr. Hinds also mentioned the building's “condo finishes.”

When she entered a one-bedroom, “my jaw just dropped,” she said. “There were things I would do myself if I were decorating from scratch.” The apartment had a gleaming high-end kitchen as well as two balconies, a walk-in closet and an extra half bath. “Everything was so pretty,” she said.

But the rent was \$2,700 a month. “I felt, there

is no way we are ever going to be able to live here.”

Again, the location, in downtown Brooklyn, wasn't ideal. “You had to walk several minutes to find things,” Ms. Maginn said, “and there was nothing in the immediate vicinity.”

The Maginns negotiated the rent down to \$2,500. Then they fretted. “All of a sudden our rent was going to be 25 percent more than it had been,” Mr. Maginn said, “and that seemed scary to me.”

Would it be smart to spend that much? “I kind of had that pit in my stomach,” Ms. Maginn said. She decided to see what else was available at a similar price. “If I was going to make the jump, I was at least going to do the research to back it.”

Mr. Maginn was swamped at work, but Ms. Maginn took an afternoon off and scheduled appointments 30 minutes apart. “I had my running shoes and just ran,” she said.

A one-bedroom in a prewar building near Eighth Avenue “had that avenue traffic,” she said. A duplex had two tiny rooms. One place smelled of dogs.

At 99 Gold Street, also a newly built condo allowing rentals, Ms. Maginn found the layouts odd and the balconies strangely configured. “It had a basketball court inside it, which meant nothing to me,” she said.

She liked the Cobble Hill neighborhood of 182 Atlantic Avenue, a new low-rise. With the interior of Trader Joe's visible from the hallway, she could peek in to see whether the lines were long. But the one-bedrooms weren't quite spacious enough.

So the couple — acutely aware they would be spending \$2,400 more annually than they had budgeted — returned to BridgeView Tower with a tape measure to see if their furniture would fit in the 733-square-foot apartment. It did. “We had that nervous feeling,” Ms. Maginn said, “but we both knew.”

They arrived at BridgeView in late May. Only days before, having lined up friends for an after-work move, they learned that moves were restricted to daytime hours. They solicited the help of a friend who was between jobs.

Now they are able to indulge their love of cooking (him) and baking (her) in their well-appointed kitchen. “It is one of those things that is so stupid,” Ms. Maginn said, “but since we've gotten a big freezer it is like, wow, think of all the frozen things we've been missing. We used to have dishes in the sink. It's weird — you get a nice space and keep it up better.”

Mr. Maginn's commute on the F train has dropped to 9 stops from 15. (He is, however, less likely to get a seat.) In the heat, the two enjoy their central air-conditioning, though the first Con Edison bill was twice what they formerly paid.

Big windows face south and east, but they are loath to complain about too much sun. So they just installed triple-layered curtains to block both heat and light. Charley the cat sneaks behind them to bask in the warmth.

“I feel like we went from living in a cave to living in a bird's nest,” Ms. Maginn said.

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