

REAL ESTATE

# In Clinton Hill: Their First Apartment Together

The Hunt

By JOYCE COHEN    OCT. 20, 2016

In her first year as an architecture student at the Pratt Institute in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, Kelly Cho lived in the dorms. In her second year, she moved nearby with a good friend.

The roommates chose a two-bedroom in a 2009 high-rise, 163 Washington, with a balcony and a washer-dryer. A Key Food supermarket was handy and Pratt was a seven-minute walk. They split the rent of \$4,200 a month.

In a new building, “we didn’t have to deal with plumbing issues and cockroaches,” Ms. Cho said. In an old one, she worried that, even if renovated, structural issues and outdated heating and air-conditioning systems might be a problem.

After three years, her roommate graduated and returned home, while a year of school remained for Ms. Cho, a native of South Korea who grew up in Vancouver, Canada. She assumed that she would move to a studio in her building, along with her energetic cat, Taco.

Meanwhile, her boyfriend, Jaime Soriano, had graduated last May from Full Sail University in Florida with a degree in recording arts. Mr. Soriano, who is from Mexico City, headed to New York and is seeking an internship at a music or recording studio.

Ms. Cho and Mr. Soriano, now both 22, decided to find a place together. The obvious plan was to downsize to a one-bedroom in Ms. Cho’s building.

But a new management company required a local guarantor or a year's rent in advance, Ms. Cho said. The one-bedroom available, for \$3,000 a month, was on a low floor and seemed expensive for what it was. And the rapidly changing Clinton Hill area offered plenty of other options.

With a budget of up to \$3,000 a month, the two sought a cat-friendly one-bedroom within walking distance of Pratt. Ideally, they wouldn't need to give up a balcony or a washer-dryer. "Everything we saw was more or less the same price," Mr. Soriano said, in the high \$2,000-a-month range.

Ms. Cho again preferred a new building. "In older buildings, you can find issues with opening windows," she said. "I am very worried that my cat will jump out of the window, and that freaks me out."

She also wanted a system for keeping deliveries safe. "I've seen where they just leave packages in the hallway and other people will take them," she said. "My friends have had that happen."

One obvious choice was the Refinery, a 2015 rental building on Myrtle Avenue conveniently atop the Key Food supermarket. "That's where I do my grocery shopping with my Pratt student discount," Ms. Cho said. (Students receive 5 percent off.) From her balcony, she had watched the building rise, and she liked the landscaped roof deck.

But no one-bedrooms were available — just a studio for around \$2,300 a month, which she and Mr. Soriano decided against. Visiting friends would have nowhere to sit but the bed.

At brand-new 180 Franklin, they saw the amenities before they saw the one-bedrooms for rent. The gym didn't interest them, but a pool table and roof deck did. Ms. Cho liked the workroom with tables "where you are allowed to cut things," she said. "It is like it was made for architecture students." There was a package room, too. Each apartment included a washer-dryer.

But they still had more places to see. At yet another new building, the unit they viewed was strewn with trash, and Ms. Cho was leery of potential poor maintenance. At a building that was renovated rather than new, a lobby upgrade was planned. They didn't want to endure construction.

In the end, the couple decided on 180 Franklin. "It was everything we wanted except the balcony," Mr. Soriano said. The leasing agent, Alexandra Tramont of Citi Habitats, told them the rent rose by \$25 a floor. They chose the lowest floor possible, for \$2,700 a month.

The building, which was offering an incentive of one and a half months

free on a 13-month lease, allowed guarantors from anywhere in the United States. With parents in Canada and Mexico, the couple had an aunt of Mr. Soriano's in Miami sign on. They paid the pet deposit of \$250 for Taco and arrived just before school started.

As an architecture student with an eye for detail, Ms. Cho has noticed some quirks, like a crooked cooling/heating unit on a wall. And the view is of other people's windows, so she lowers the blinds after dark. Her walk to school is now 12 minutes.

"We have literally just abused the common areas," she said. They often grill on the roof deck. She and her classmates use the workroom for model making.

"The pool table, we also use that excessively," Ms. Cho said. "Sometimes we're playing pool and it's three hours. We don't even realize."

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A version of this article appears in print on October 23, 2016, on Page RE6 of the New York edition with the headline: A Cat Runs Through It.

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