

Between Four Walls and City Streets:
Urban Challenges and Domestic Adaptations

by

Tracey Elasmr

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

The practices of domesticity within the city have expanded the understanding of 'home' to encompass a broad range of spaces beyond the physical boundaries of the dwelling. The city itself, by means of its own inherent conditions, restructures the physical and psychological manifestations of domestic space. Among these factors, the issue of the home as a commodity has restricted the availability of space within an affordable margin. A series of layered thresholds between the public and the private have emerged across domestic and urban spaces. This porosity has developed uniquely within the context of the metropolis.

Through a series of interviews, this thesis investigates the dwelling habits of a unique group which have become prevalent across global cities; those who are fixed in migration. Individual narratives weave together common themes across two cities, London and New York, displaying how dwellings support daily practices and how city dwellers rely on the urban to supplement the facilitation of domestic activities. *Between Four Walls and City Streets* draws explicit connections between public and private life, highlighting how the commodification of domestic space creates a knock-on effect that ultimately forces domestic life to spill into the public sphere and the high turnover that results from the relentless compromise of city living.

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Introduction



Fig. 0.1. The urban 'fact', illuminated, and the backdrop of the conceptual city.

Michel De Certeau's notion of the juxtaposed concepts of the urban 'fact' and conceptual city reflect the themes presented within this thesis; the home as the urban 'fact', the daily practices, and the conceptual city as the contextual framework of urban and capitalist constraints.

¹ *Global City* is a term that contextualises the metropolis within an international economic system. The term evolved from the concept of the 'world city' developed in the 1980s in research examining the world's most important cities, and was developed in the subsequent years of globalisation which coined the term global city. The term is inherently capitalist and points to the city's capacity for production and financial growth.

Between Four Walls & City Streets presents a series of narratives that illuminate the issues of spatial occupation at the intersection of housing commodification, home-making, transience, and the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study connects research on these tangential topics and expands them by demonstrating the practicalities of urban dwelling structured within the constraints of the contemporary city. This thesis captures responses to the intertwined challenges of housing affordability and resultant domestic configurations through the collection, analysis, and presentation of fourteen interviews across two global cities,¹ New York and London.

This thesis is structured in three chapters, focusing on the residents, the dwelling, and the city in order of ascending scale. *Chapter 1: Fluid Home Boundaries & the Transient City Dweller* zooms in on the juxtaposition between the place-fixed act of home-making and the nomadic urban dweller. It separates the idea of the house and the home and unpacks the material and immaterial thresholds defining each, where physical separations of space and individual stories work together to construct these boundaries.² This notion is overlaid with the indefinite transience of the city renter, who lacks autonomy in their home-making practices through a lack of ownership and stability. The concept of home becomes a predominantly mental territory, unconstrained by the dwelling and fragmented across a series of locations and times.³

Chapter 2: Manipulations to Urban Domesticity situates the dwelling as the central point of urban life, outlines its size constraints, and the physical artefacts that structure domesticity. The commodification of dwelling space is cited as the primary cause of the urban housing unaffordability crisis and furthermore, a significant catalyst for the restricted dwelling sizes in city centres and the ongoing displacement of people from them.⁴ The conditions of the 2008 global financial crash paved the way for the rampant financialisation of the home. With similar conditions replicated by the recent COVID-19 pandemic, cities have seen an acceleration in the increase of housing costs alongside stagnant wage increases.⁵ Micro-housing trends paved the way for the acceptance of constrained city living and the associated overflow of domestic practices into urban spaces and a reciprocated porosity from the urban to the domestic.

Chapter 3: *Unpacking the Cost of Urban Life* expands its scope to encompass the specific influencing factors on affordability, spatial, and migrational difficulties at the urban scale. The impact of relative proximities from transportation, amenities, public outdoor space, and commercial hubs impact housing costs due to high desirability. More central dwellings incur significantly higher rents despite decreased rent-to-income ratios, highlighting the unequal distribution of wealth in cities.⁶ The rapidly increasing cost of living, especially the escalated cost of housing following the pandemic, has forced a wave of displacement of people further away from city centres.

The story of the transient city dweller comes full circle, from their difficulty navigating home-making practices as a product of their eternal transience to their inevitable displacement from the places they turned into home. The fragmented narratives throughout this thesis reflect the patchwork of home, made by the individuals throughout this study.

² For several prominent theories on the making of space and home, see: Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translation by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); Aviezer Tucker, "In Search of Home," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 11, no. 2 (1994): 181–187.; Michel De Certeau, "Chapter VII: Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall (University of California Press, 1988).; Iris Marion Young, "House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme," in *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

³ Alison Blunt and Olivia Sheringham, "Home-City Geographies: Urban Dwelling and Mobility," *Process in Human Geography* 43, no. 5 (July 2018), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0309132518786590>.; Flavio Martella and Marco Enia, "The Domestic City," in *The Architect and the City*, vol. I (Universitat Politècnica de Valencia, 2021), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349664250_The_domestic_city.

⁴ *Push*, directed by Fredrik Gertten (2019; Stockholm: WG Film), <https://make-the-shift.org/push/1:27:59>.

⁵ Steffen Wetzstein, 'The Global Urban Housing Affordability Crisis', *Urban Studies* 54 (2017).

⁶ Charles Haworth, James Long, and David Rasmussen, 'Income Distribution, City Size, and Urban Growth', *Urban Studies* 15, no. 1 (1978): 1–7.

Methodology

7 *Push*, directed by Fredrik Gertten

8 Michel De Certeau, 'Chapter VII: Walking in the City', in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translation Steven Rendall.

9 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (Federal), 'About Affordable Housing', 31 March 2018, <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/industry-innovation-and-leadership/industry-expertise/affordable-housing/about-affordable-housing/affordable-housing-in-canada>.

The issue of housing unaffordability exists as the context within which this thesis operates. The most significant mobiliser of the snowballing housing crisis is the detachment between property and dwelling. Buildings are seen as assets rather than residences, and their occupants are viewed as cash flow rather than human beings.⁷ The process of conducting interviews within the home aimed to shatter this disconnect, putting people and their stories at the centre of the thesis and using existing scholarship and data to amplify their voices. The heart of this work is the home, its residents, and their mobilities.

Urban centres have taken the brunt of unreasonably high housing costs and have seen the greatest spatial impact as result of high demand for housing alongside limited affordable housing stock. The decision to engage with the residents of two global cities to investigate this issue was twofold; the context of the city on a global scale, particularly placing it as a financial centre, outlines the gravity of capitalist practices on domestic life; using multiple cities broadens the range of impact while simultaneously providing controls on findings, maintaining that the emerging issues of those of cities rather than one place; and in order understand each city as its own entity while maintaining the ability to conglomerate them such that they may be understood as one unanimous place 'the city', providing a way of conceiving and constructing space.⁸ The cities must be comparable in terms of global presence, economic backdrop, and domestic practices. The complete version of this study would incorporate several cities and multitudes of interviews spanning across differentiating factors such as political context and cultural settings. Within the scope of this thesis, two cities have been selected to host seven interviews each to solidify theories that may be carried forward to future research.

Through the process of interviewing and analysing residents and their homes, this thesis aims to answer the question: How are material and immaterial fabrications of the urban home influenced by factors limiting their spatial capacity? This question will be evaluated along two types of physical and circumstantial hypotheses, the manifestations of material structures and boundaries, and the act of carving out space through daily practices. Furthermore, these will be projected onto two separate settings of home, the dwelling and the city. Within the domestic architectures of home, spaces are presumed to fall below the statical median average floor areas per dwelling. Moreover, this study aims to uncover the physical artefacts present as a means of navigating the limited area within the dwelling, projecting multi-use spaces as well as occupant-driven design interventions. At the urban scale, this study anticipates housing costs to consistently fall above an affordable margin (>30%).⁹ Wide-scale migrations are expected to be tied to housing affordability and implications of the pandemic.

London & New York

London, UK, and New York City, USA, were selected as the hosts of the case studies to investigate the hypotheses set out early on in this thesis. Both cities have a similar population, are centres for arts & culture, have similar access to transport infrastructure, draw people in for work opportunities, and are experiencing widespread issues related to the cost of living. It is apparent that both cities are operating at the same global scale in terms of significance, this applies to their nature as financial metropolitan centres, the large number of people they house (between 8-9 million), their capacity for entertainment, and, within comparable democratic political backdrops. They are both structured around their own systems of urban planning which rely heavily on underground infrastructure to transport residents throughout the city, while also having their own unique ground-level organisations of roads and pedestrian paths which are traversed daily by its residents.

Though the two cities house approximately the same number of occupants, their densities differ widely, noting London's significantly larger geographical scale. New York City's footprint at 790 square kilometres¹⁰ is less than half of London's 1,570 square kilometres,¹¹ making the average population density for New York about 11,100 people per square kilometre versus London's average of 5,600 per square kilometre. This puts further pressure on the spatial demand in New York, and alongside differing housing typologies between the two cities, is evident in the manifestation of varying spatial restrictions between the two cities.

Michel De Certeau's distinction between the urban 'fact' and the 'concept' of a city provides an appropriate metaphor for the positions of the two cities alongside the broader issues of housing affordability, to the urban dweller who creates spaces through their daily practices and mobilities. The 'concept' of a city that London, New York, and the housing affordability crisis create is a vantage point that exists outside the city's grasp, the circumstances of each create guides for understanding that which unfolds within them. "The walkers of the city" as De Certeau calls the urban dwellers, write the "urban text" through their movement and shape spaces through their trajectories.¹² Their spaces, their homes within the city, are the urban 'fact' that are the subject of this book.

¹⁰ New York Metropolitan Transportation Council, 'Overview of New York City', in *Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan for NYMTC Region*, n.d.

¹¹ Greater London Authority, 'Land Area and Population Density, Ward and Borough', Data (London Datastore), accessed 7 April 2023, <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/land-area-and-population-density-ward-and-borough>.

¹² Michel De Certeau, 'Chapter VII: Walking in the City', in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translation Steven Rendall.

The Interviews

13 *Push*, directed by Fredrik Gertten

14 Philip Cohen, 'The Rise of One-Person Households', *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 7, no. 1 (December 2021).

Conducting these interviews within the four walls of the dwelling evoked thoughtful reflections from each participant which were tied to their ideas of home and linked to the commodification of space, limited city dwelling size, and the resultant blurring of domestic boundaries. The seven interviews conducted in each city allowed the sample group to cover a range of living arrangements including those who lived alone, with their partners, with friends, with strangers, or with a combination of relationships.

Across participants, people in a variety of industries and central neighbourhoods within both London and New York were selected to participate. These were meant to be middle-class individuals chosen to represent the extent to which housing affordability has crept further out of reach; "You have poor people really struggling like never before. But then you also have the middle class unable to afford to live in cities and provide services that are necessary for living in a city... it is a crisis...then we start asking, who is going to live in cities? Who are cities for?"¹³ While there is plentiful research on the impacts of the high cost of living on lower-income populations, there is a gap in covering the upward creep of these implications, and the importance of further tying them to narrative and spatial manifestations of homemaking.

It should be noted that there are variances in personal income and other conditions evident in the data collected. Each participant was given the option to share information about affordability as they saw fit, this manifested in personal stories on hurdles faced by the individuals and specific cost data such as rent-to-income ratios.

While many scholars have gendered conversations on home, this work looks through a lens that is more interested in the age demographic than that of gender. Home is a territory of both physical and mental space that each individual carves through their own practices. A gradual rise in single-person households has been intertwined with a trend of rising house prices and a growing tendency for young adults to delay or refrain from starting families.¹⁴ This demographic of people is at large within the rental market in urban centres.

A guide was created to organise these dynamic conversations. The structure was fluid and aimed to inspire individual reflections on ideas of home in the city, as it pertains to the domestic interior and beyond.

- *Can you tell me a bit about your home?*
- *How long have you lived in this apartment?*
- *How long have you lived in New York/London?*
- *Where did you live before?*
- *How long do you intend to stay?*
- *Where are you getting the furniture from? / Where did you get the furniture from?*
- *Do you have any hobbies? How do they take up space in the apartment? In the city?*
- *Do you have any pets? How do they take up space in your apartment? In your routines?*
- *Do you work from home? If so, what's your set-up?*
- *Do you have enough storage space?*
- *How many people other than you are in this apartment on a regular basis? A semi-regular basis? Where do they stay?*
- *Do you entertain a lot? What do you do when you have people over?*
- *Do any spaces change to accommodate different activities? Are some objects not fixed to accommodate this? Do you move furniture around a lot?*
- *Did you add or modify anything after you moved in to make the space more livable?*
- *Are there any specific reasons why you decided to move to this neighbourhood? How do you feel about this neighbourhood?*
- *Do you have any issues with regard to privacy?*
- *Do you have enough space?*
- *Do you feel like you're lacking any specific types of spaces? Is there anything you wish you had?*
- *Do you have access to any private outdoor space?*
- *Would you sacrifice some interior space for a private outdoor space?*
- *Where in the apartment do you spend the most time?*
- *Do you spend much of your week at home?*
- *How do your habits change with the seasons?*
- *What does your typical work week look like?*
- *Can you walk me through what a regular day might look like?*
- *Are there any communal spaces or amenities in the neighbourhood that you use?*
- *What are your thoughts about the affordability and cost of living in New York/London?*



Fig. 0.2. Map of London reserach sample participants.

1km

London Residents

Based on the available information given from each participant, a few have been identified as likely outliers from the middle-class demographic outlined from the outset of this study. Their information can be found on page 14.

For full interview transcripts see appendix.

Casper, 31, Content Manager - Entertainment / Design

Rent-to-Income Ratio - 35%, Dwelling Space per Resident - 22.3m²

Casper lives with his partner, Ashley, in their one-bedroom Drayton Park (Islington, Zone 2) apartment. Their dwelling has access to a 1.3m² private balcony.

Caitlin, 28, ADHD Practitioner in a Prison - Healthcare

Sara, 28, Trainee Teacher - Education

Rent-to-Income Ratio - 50%, Dwelling Space per Resident - 27.9m²

Caitlin & Sara live with their two friends, Adam and Benedict in their four-bedroom Sydenham (Lewisham, Zone 3) apartment. Their dwelling has access to a 42.4m² illegal terrace, the rooftop of a workshop below accessed through their living room window.

Fern, 31, Technologies Salesperson - Sales

Rent-to-Income Ratio - 50%, Dwelling Space per Resident - 24.7m²

Fern lives with her two friends, Liz and Kate, in their two-bedroom Battersea (Wandsworth, Zone 2) terrace house, with a converted living-to-bed room. Their dwelling has access to a 35.6m² private backyard. The group also live with a small dog named Zach.

Harley, 29, Architectural Assistant - Design

Linde, 29, Architectural Assistant - Design

Rent-to-Income Ratio - 25%, Dwelling Space per Resident - 17.3m²

Harley & Linde are a couple who live with their friend, Maito, in a one-bedroom apartment in a Victorian terrace house in Highgate (Haringey, Zone 2/3). Their dwelling has access to a 6.8m² private terrace. They rent from a family friend who has given them a significantly reduced rate.

Liz, 36, Executive Assistant - Business

Rent-to-Income Ratio - 35%, Dwelling Space per Resident - 42.1m²

Liz lived with her friend and longtime flatmate, Patrick, in their two-bedroom Tooting Bec (Wandsworth, Zone 3) flat. Their dwelling has access to a 104.9m² semi-private backyard that they are only allowed to use outside of business hours of the dentist below and with permission from the landlord.

Nadine, 27, Currently: Unemployed / Creative Endeavours, Formerly: Marketing & Partnerships - Business

Rent-to-Income Ratio - 55%, Dwelling Space per Resident - 29.1m²

Nadine lives with two housemates in their two-bedroom Stoke Newington (Hackney, Zone 2) terrace house, with a converted living-to-bed room. Their dwelling has access to a 5.3m² illegal terrace, the rooftop of part of the house below accessed through their staircase window.

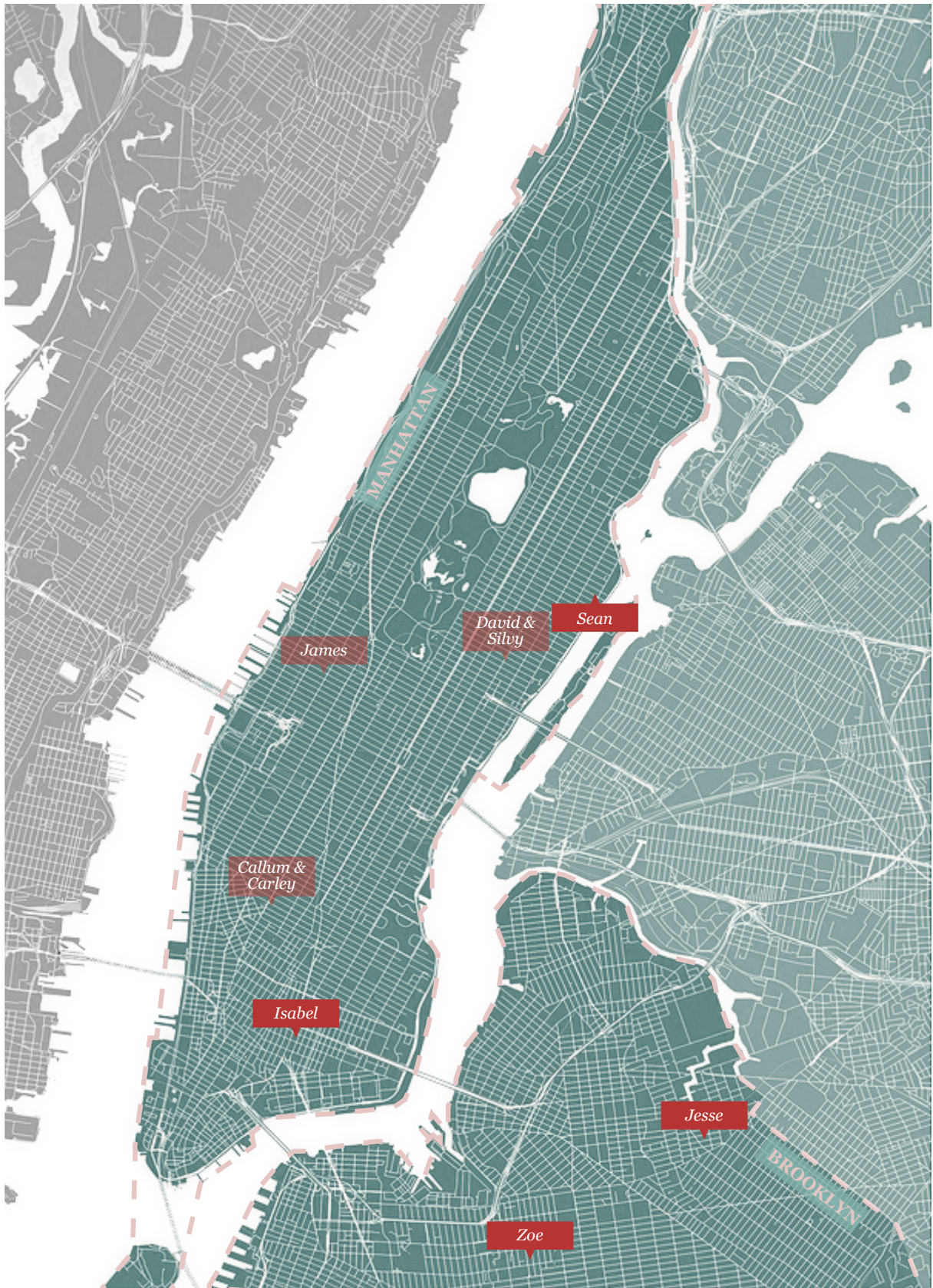


Fig. 0.3. Map of New York research sample participants.

1km

New York Residents

Based on the available information given from each participant, a few have been identified as likely outliers from the middle-class demographic outlined from the outset of this study. Their information can be found on page 14.

For full interview transcripts see appendix.

Isabel, 26, Nurse & Student - Healthcare

Rent-to-Income Ratio - 35%, Dwelling Space per Resident - 25.1m²

Lives alone in her Lower East Side (Manhattan) studio apartment sublet. Her dwelling has no access to private or semi-private outdoor space. She lives with a cat named Taco who was left behind by the previous tenant.

Jesse, 28, Booking Agent - Entertainment

Rent-to-Income Ratio - 40%, Dwelling Space per Resident - 30.2m²

Jesse lives with his partner, Daniella, in a two-bedroom apartment in Bushwick (Brooklyn). They have converted the unbearably noisy second bedroom into a living room. Their dwelling has no access to private or semi-private outdoor space.

Sean, 28, Plumber & Bartender - Trades & Hospitality

Rent-to-Income Ratio - 25%, Dwelling Space per Resident - 20.5m²

Sean lived in a two-bedroom Upper East Side (Manhattan) apartment with a rotating roommate. Their dwelling has no access to private or semi-private outdoor space. He has since moved out of this apartment.

Zoe, 28, Architectural Assistant - Design

Rent-to-Income Ratio - 45%, Dwelling Space per Resident - 28.8m²

Zoe lives in a two-bedroom Bed-Stuy (Brooklyn) apartment with her friend Liga. Their dwelling has no access to private or semi-private outdoor space.

On Outliers & Other Variances

15 Pierre Bourdieu,
*Distinction: A Social Critique
of the Judgement of Taste*,
translation by Richard
Nice (Cambridge, MA:
Harvard University Press,
1984).

Four participants have been separated as outliers from the target income earnings for this study. Their contributions are still largely reflective of themes of transience and home-making in the city but may be less impacted by issues of housing affordability than others who more accurately reflect a middle-class income. Furthermore, their dwelling continued to fall below spatial medians represented in statistical data sets. Their narratives continue to reflect the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as well. They highlight that the cost of housing is not the only catalyst for issues affecting these primary themes, however, the majority of the sample reflected the hypothesis that housing affordability is a primary pain point for urban dwellers.

Those who have mitigated their housing costs in some way, such as Isabel who lives in a sublet of an undetermined length and Harley & Linde who have received a reduced rent as a benefit of having a personal connection. Their favourable conditions are counteracted by costs beyond the price of housing, infiltrating their sense of stability through uncertain timeframes of occupancy, limitations on their personalisation of space as a result of living with other people's things and lacking the agency to change them, and an inability for the dwelling to properly facilitate their daily practices. Others including Fern, Nadine, and formerly Callum, have sacrificed communal living spaces within a dwelling in order to create additional private space in the form of extra bedrooms. These mitigations in some cases provide liberation from excessive financial strain while in other cases simply make it feasible for one to dwell there. Many urban residents endure the weight of the monetary and experiential costs of city dwelling in return for the embodied cultural capital gained to award themselves future social mobility.¹⁵ This type of capital is disproportionately evident in upper-class individuals and is utilized by those who wield it to propel themselves into more advantageous positions.

Housing cost is not necessarily geographically bound, however, there are statistical and narrative trends which reaffirm higher costs associated with more central city locations in a general sense; between the two cities of this study, this is prominent in a multitude of ways. In New York, Manhattan presented itself as all but shut off from those making even lower middle-class wages. Callum & Carley, Dean & Sally, and James all work in finance and have been identified as likely outliers from the middle-income bracket accordingly. Further, Sean is working two jobs and Isabel works on short-term contracts (and thus short-term visas) to increase earnings to afford central city accommodation. In general, those interviewed in London seemed more burdened by the cost of living in the city, with Aengus standing out as the only outlier to this rule- coincidentally, he was the only participant residing in Zone 1.

**London
Residents**

Aengus, 33, Marketing Director & Artist - Business & Arts
Rent-to-Income Ratio - 35%, Dwelling Space per Resident - 18.2m²

Aengus lives with a couple, Liam and Christy, in their two-bedroom Angel (Islington, Zone 1) apartment. Their dwelling has access to a 11.0m² private balcony as well as a 189.8m² semi-private rooftop terrace.

**New York
Residents**

Callum, 27, Trader at a Bank - Finance
Carley, 30, Trader at a Bank - Finance

Rent-to-Income Ratio - 20%, Dwelling Space per Resident - 26.4m²

Callum & Carley are friends who live together in a two-bedroom West Village (Manhattan) apartment. Their dwelling has no access to private or semi-private outdoor space.

Dean, 27, Trader at a Bank - Finance

Sally, 26, Executive Assistant-Carbon Management / Finance
Rent-to-Income Ratio - 20%, Dwelling Space per Resident - 26.9m²

Dean & Sally are a couple who live in a 'two-bedroom' apartment on the Upper East Side (Manhattan). Their 'second bedroom' is such a shape that it would likely not be able to comfortably accommodate a double bed, they have converted it into a linear living room. Their dwelling has no access to private or semi-private outdoor space.

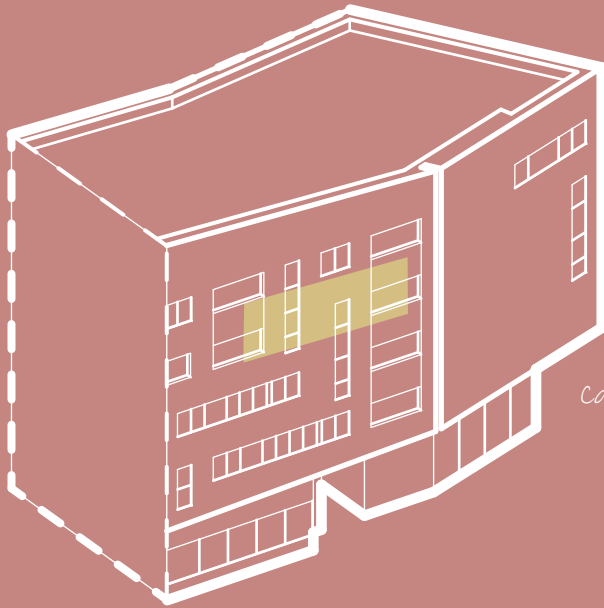
James, 35, Internal Auditor - Finance / Accounting

Rent-to-Income Ratio - 50%, Dwelling Space per Resident - 57.5m²

James lived by himself in a one-bedroom Hell's Kitchen, Midtown (Manhattan) apartment. His dwelling had no access to private or semi-private outdoor space. He has since moved to New Jersey.



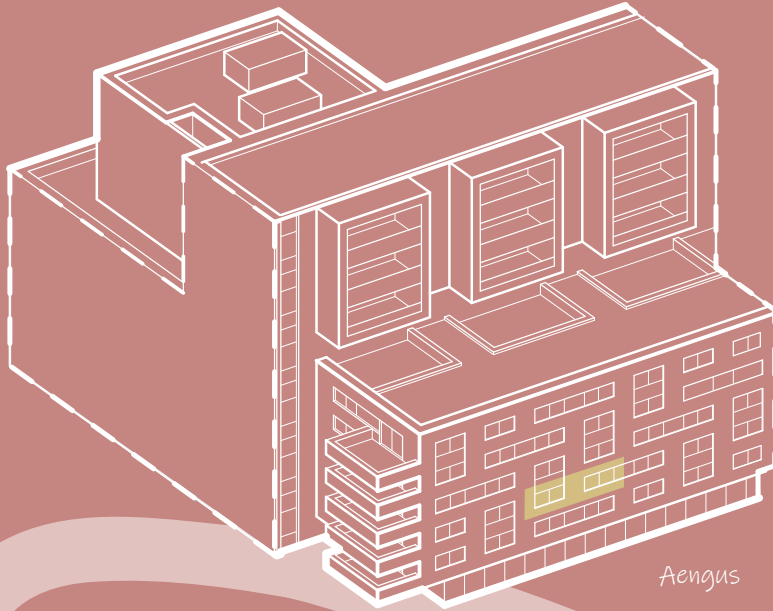
Harley & Linde



Casper



Nadine



Aengus



Fern

Caitlin & Sara



Liz



 Resident Occupied Apartment

Fig. 0.4. London residences, occupied floor level axonometric.

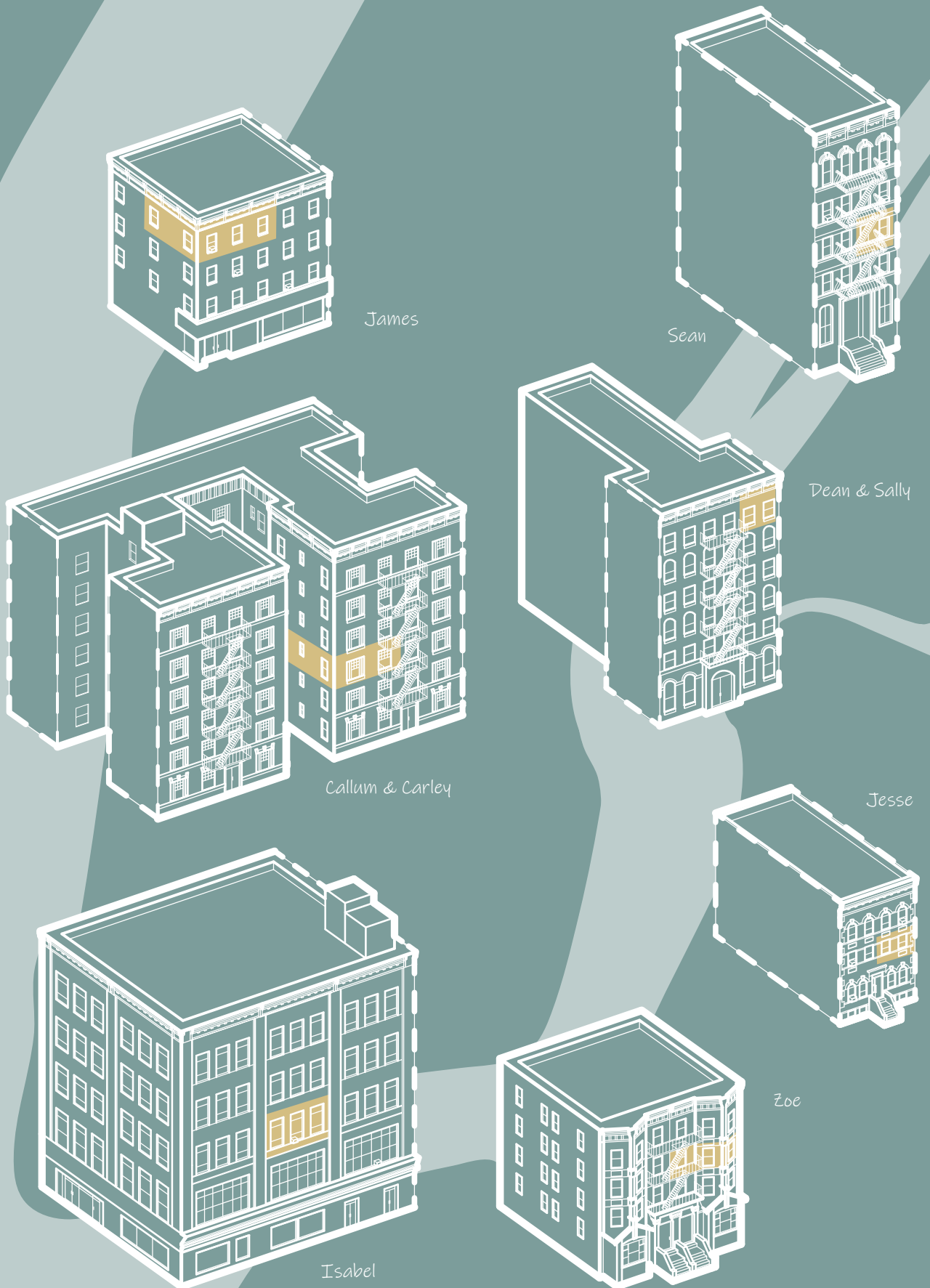


Fig. 0.5. New York residences, occupied floor level axonometric.

**Chapter 1: Fluid Home Boundaries & the
Transient City Dweller**

1 Alison Blunt and Olivia Sheringham, "Home-City Geographies: Urban Dwelling and Mobility," *Process in Human Geography* 43, no. 5 (July 2018).

2 Flavio Martella and Marco Enia, "The Domestic City," in *The Architect and the City*, vol. I (Universitat Politècnica de Valencia, 2021).

3 Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translation by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

The constraints manipulating the conditions of city living drive the city dweller to mobilise themselves in specific ways. In the short term, day-to-day mobilities are influenced by the interconnectedness of the dwelling and the city fabric which together make up the wider boundaries of home for the individual.¹ In each transient person's urban timeline, they are pulled into the city by its many attractive opportunities and eventually pushed away by the harsh realities and relentless compromise of living in the city.²

Home as a concept is an inherently human experience. Dwelling becomes a compilation of 'the place and things that structure and house our activities'.³ The physical dwelling contextualises its surroundings and makes home out of them. Relationships emerge between these places and those who occupy the spaces that they create within them, extending beyond interior architectures to the surrounding environment. While the privatization of space creates a theoretical separation between the private domestic and the public urban, the practice of dwelling, especially when restricted within the domestic realm, spills out into the commons. The city has encouraged the occupation of the neighbourhood above that of the dwelling in many ways, with residents occupying squares, bars, coffee houses, restaurants, and parks. The dwelling itself often becomes a secondary living space, however, it is an invaluable core from which urban life radiates.

When establishing home in the city, urbanites become grounded by the jobs, opportunities, people, and amenities which brought them to adapt their lives to the urban framework. Individuals are drawn to the city to develop themselves, build experience in their careers and lives, and create a network which supports their endeavours. For those who do not exist in the upper brackets of financial earnings, stability, sufficient dwelling space, and a high quality of life may seem elusive and unattainable especially as one is entrapped within an erratic rental market. As a result, the city becomes a transient place with a high turnover of occupants who come for opportunities to advance themselves and are pushed out in search of more secure home.

The high cost of living in the city has knock-on effects which instigate the short and long-term migrations to, through, and away from the city. The constrained spaces which city dwellers occupy push them to engage with the city in a more integrated way, creating a porosity of social and reclusive space between the dwelling and the neighbourhood which together fabricate the home. Ultimately, the exhaustive compromise and restriction push people to look further afield in search of the spaces that award comfort and stability.

Home Between The Dwelling & The City

4 Shelley Mallett, "Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature," *The Sociological Review* 52, no. 1 (2004).

5 Aviezer Tucker, "In Search of Home," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 11, no. 2 (1994): 181–87.

6 Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986).

7 Barrington Moore, *Privacy: Studies in Social and Cultural History* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1984).

8 Michel De Certeau, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayol, "Chapter 6: The End of The Week," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translation by Timothy Tomasik, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 101–113

There are two concepts which have become conflated in the understanding of the places we dwell - the notion of the dwelling, the shelter, or the house, and additionally, that of the home. The two terms have been used interchangeably as part of the capitalist development of the home as an owned place.⁴ The process of renting inherently deconstructs this act of possession and by contrast, introduces the process of making a home within temporary and conditional spaces. Within these indefinite dwellings, residents of the city negotiate between their desires and reality, constrained by the restriction of timeframes, resources, and autonomy within rental housing; "[Our] actual home tends to be our best approximation of our ideal home, under a given set of constraining circumstances".⁵

The concept of the home is recognised across interdisciplinary research as a phenomenon that cannot be described one-dimensionally, rather it is a multi-layered threshold which filters daily practices of interaction and seclusion. These boundaries are a compilation of the fixed and fluid, where physical separations and the frontiers drawn within narratives structure the mental territory of home occupied by each individual. On one hand, the home provides a theatre for social interactions which are in turn influenced by its spatial configurations.⁶ Across participants of this study, this was described through the unpacking of various social events within their dwellings, such as hosting dinners and overnight guests, and within the city, in finding meeting points between individuals that mitigate large travel distances and expand the social capacity of the home.

Beyond the dwelling, these social practices unfold across various public and open-to-public spaces. The most significant quality of these is their ability to provide what the dwelling cannot. These spaces provide stages onto which home can be acted out through actions and mobilities. Parks, squares, and cafes for example play a multitude of roles in providing meeting places across the city that expand the home for one and connect the homes of many. Many of these urban landscapes are not limited to their ability to host interpersonal interactions but also solitary ones, such as reading, studying, and acts of care for the self like exercising and meditating.

The home is understood as a place of seclusion, where one may retreat within the safety of the private that their dwelling provides.⁷ Many participants of the following study, especially those who lived with others, found comfort in having enough space within the dwellings to have separate rooms where one may retreat in solitude within a closed space; the 'private' realm emerged within the confines of only one individual room where one may be able to find solitude,

rather than the entire dwelling at any given time. They recognised the compromised state of privacy within a city dwelling which manifested in many ways, be that the limited individual space, widespread noise transfer between adjacent rooms, apartments, or streets, and visual connectivity with the outside world.

9 Michel De Certeau, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayol, "Chapter 9: Private Spaces," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translation by Timothy Tomasik, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 145–48.

Michael De Certeau and his research team delve into a study of the urban dweller through a similar process of recording daily practices and occupations of space through *The Practice of Everyday Life*.⁸ *Chapter 6: The End of the Week* follows the weekly trip to and from the market with a man named Pierre. He connects the otherwise mundane domestic task of collecting food for his family on a Sunday morning with the rituals of friendly interaction and socialisation carved through his trajectories. His regular detour to a local cafe where he meets his friends on his way home from the market becomes the focus of the section titled "*The Market*". Here, the public occupations of the privatized business of the cafe creates living space beyond the dwelling for social gathering. The communal nature of sharing Sunday morning wine cafes deconstructs the monotonisation of this space through this act of neighbourhood occupation. The city holds space for both the individualised acts and those of social cohesion through Pierre's routine, outlining home spaces through his socialisation outside the dwelling.

Then in *Chapter 9: Private Spaces*, the focus turns inward to the dwelling as the space of individual identity and restorative "withdrawal".⁹ The operations of home (meals, dressing, receiving guests, cleaning, study, leisure, rest) are outlined and centred within the dwelling, and the organisation of available space used to facilitate these actions is said to speak the resident's narrative without words. Within the understanding of the 'private' home, one may practice care for themselves both mentally and physically.

While the differing concepts of the social and reclusive seem to divide perceptions of home, they strengthen the versatility, highlight the dynamic use of the space, and the fluidity of the thresholds which define its bounds. Home, as distinguished from the physical confines of the shelter, extends into the broader urban landscape through the daily practices and engagements of its residents. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in smaller dwellings, where the capacity for home to exist within the constrained domestic spaces afforded by city dwellers is limited thus spilling into the urban and redefining the thresholds which separate the 'public' and 'private', as is fits in and spills between the dwelling and the city.



Fig. 1.1 Stoke Newington High Street.

Nadine's Story

City:
London
 Neighbourhood:
**Stoke Newington,
 Zone 2**
 Dwelling Size:
87.4m²
 Rent-to-Income:
55%
 Relationships:
Flatmates

**Nadine, 27,
 Recently Unemployed /
 Small Creative Business**

Steph, 31, Art Director

Anna, 31, Video Editor

After moving to London for work in 2019, Nadine made a mid-pandemic move to her Stoke Newington home in order to gain private space during the lockdown periods. Her current dwelling, though situated quite centrally, is a nearly 20-minute walk from the closest rail station. As a result, she rarely accesses parts of the city which are not within comfortable walking distance from her flat. A series of physical and immaterial thresholds have since emerged through Nadine's daily practices within her neighbourhood. Between the extent of the commercial area, the nearby Clissold Park, and the dwelling itself, Nadine spends the majority of her time; this is her home.

"I moved to Stoke Newington because I feel like it's a really cute area. It's not very well connected, you can only get there by bus, but that gives it a nice village feeling. I thought it was very charming.

I stay in my area 7 days a week, most weeks. I have everything I want here - coffee shops, grocery stores, clothing shops, gyms, and parks. I like to stay in the neighbourhood"



Fig. 1.2 Nadine's Home
- Dwelling & City

The social and solitary functions of her home unfold in a variety of ways across the public and private spaces it encompasses. Her own private space is confined to her bedroom because of the nature of the shared house with no living room, a common hurdle for London city dwellers. Social functions within the dwelling are limited to the hosting of overnight guests, while the remainder of social interactions happen in the public spaces of her home, occasionally reaching beyond the neighbourhood into further parts of the city. The solitary functions of homemaking exist primarily within the dwelling through the practice of completing housework and her career ventures. Recursive practices infiltrate the public sphere as well, through regular exercise and other domestic routines such as shopping and going for coffee.

“My friends and I would usually meet for coffee or go for a walk in the park. If people don’t live in the area we would meet halfway, London is so big. I don’t have people over unless they’re coming from overseas, then they stay over. The others have never had anyone over. I’ve had people over twice in the past month, I don’t know if my flatmates like that.

We don’t have a living room, because our living room was converted into someone’s bedroom. It’s not really the best because I feel like if I have people over I’m kind of taking over the kitchen space when we’re in there.

I get along with the flatmates, but we’re not really friends. which is kind of good because I’m not wasting time chatting and I spend more time getting things done when I’m at home. Work mode is always on. Not having a living room also makes me do more work. I typically would work from home and I also run my own business from there. I’m doing all this stuff in my room.

Our floorboards are just so creaky that if I tried any sort of workout my flatmates would definitely ask me to stop, so I go to a gym nearby and I would go for runs in the parks as well. I go thrift shopping in the area too.”



Fig. 1.3 Nadine's front door.
A physical threshold from dwelling to city.

Nadine speaks to the disparity between salaries and the cost of living in London, the “invisible costs” of renting, and the implications of work on the dwelling. She was made redundant from her full-time job in August 2023 and explained that managing the high cost of living in London as someone recently unemployed would likely drive her away from the city.

“Even though the price of my room is OK, the salaries are ridiculous, they don’t match up. You have to have a well-paid job or parents who support you to be able to get by in London. I’m probably paying like 60-70% of my wages on my living expenses to be in London. I’ve adjusted my expenses to what I earn, but I’m not saving.

There are so many invisible costs for renting. The bills are not included, there’s council tax, and other expenses as well. Our rent increased as well, they were going to increase our rent by 20% but we renegotiated down to a 10% increase.

When you don’t have a job you want to be in London for, there’s no point in killing your savings on rent to live there. It’s way too expensive to not be employed. There’s nothing keeping me in London so I might as well leave.”

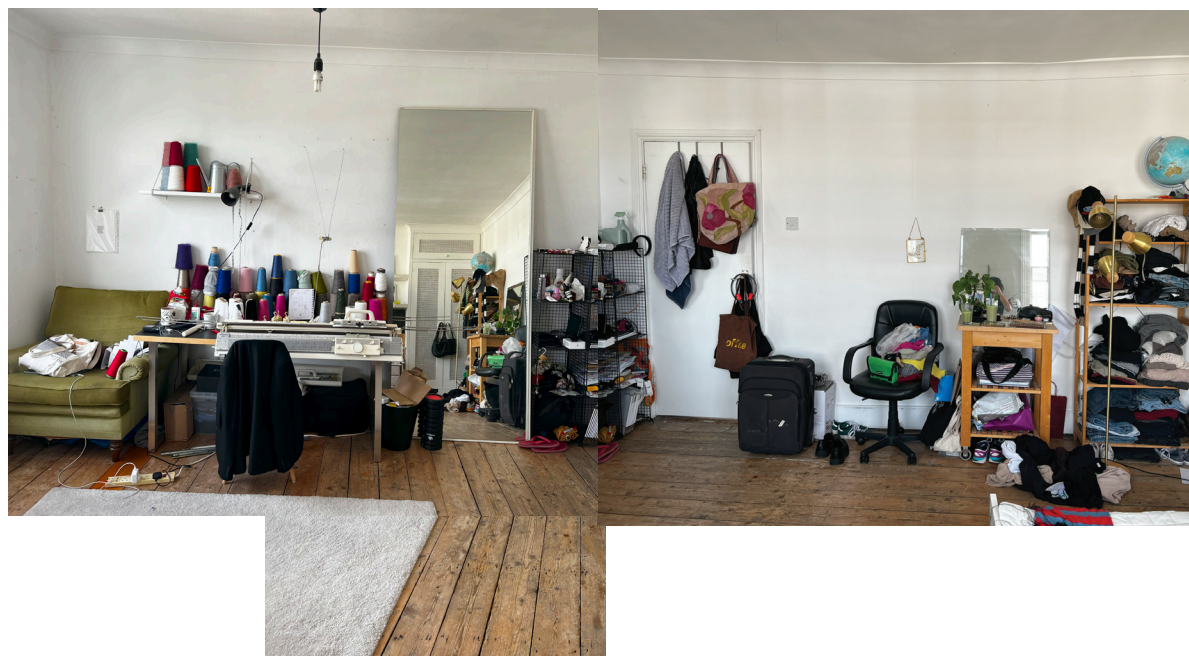
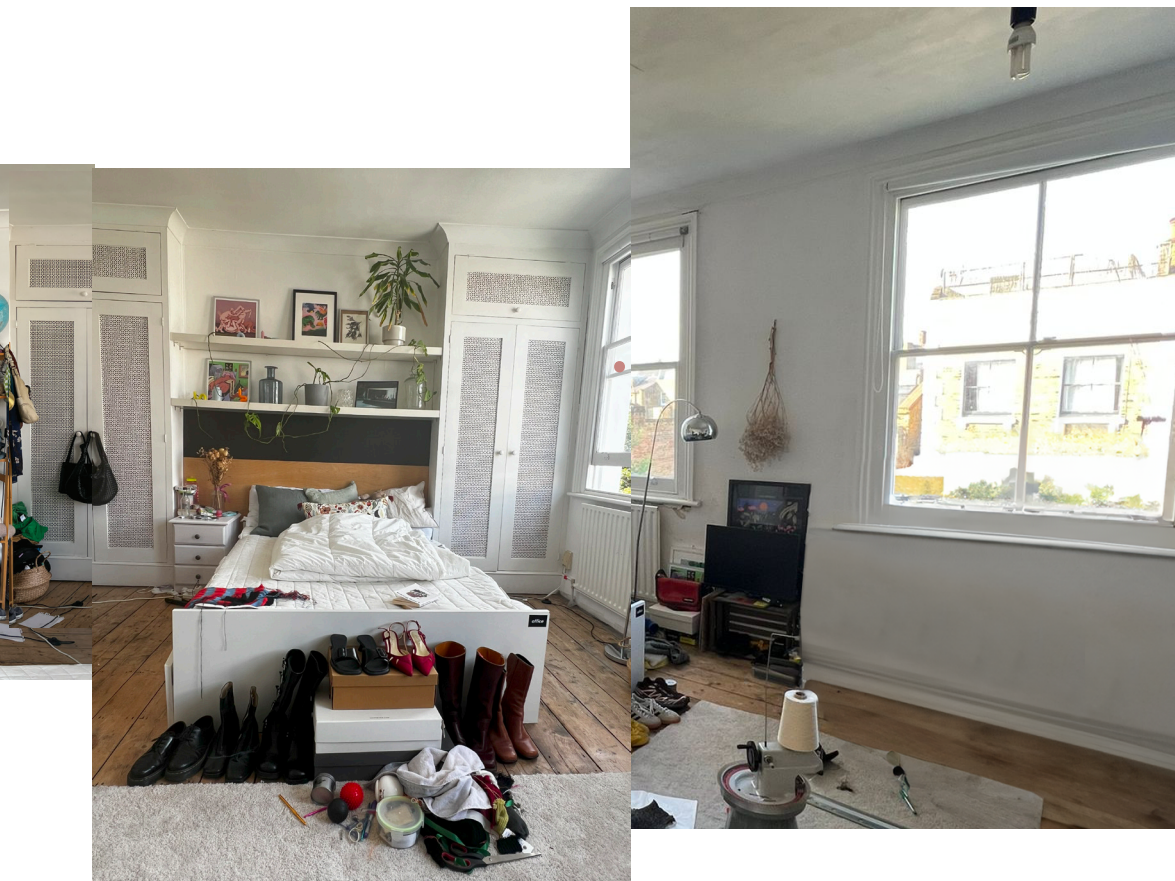


Fig. 1.4 Nadine’s room, her private dwelling space.

In reflecting on Nadine's experiences within her London home, the porosity between the dwelling and the city is articulated through daily mobilities. The spatial limitations within her dwelling have enhanced the discourse between the dwelling and its surrounding neighbourhood, allowing the city to supplement where the space within the flat cannot provide. The financial constraints imposed on her dwelling as a result of the commodification of domestic space puts Nadine in a position where she has had to decide on a move away from the city following the dissolution of the job that anchored her, shedding light on the fragility of the connection between work and dwelling in the urban landscape. Within Nadine's story, we find echoes of a larger societal discourse on the complex relationship between the monetisation of housing, the restriction of domestic space, dwelling-city connections, and the indefinitely mobile city dweller.



Volatile Transience

10 Michel De Certeau, 'Chapter VII: Walking in the City', in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translation by Steven Rendall (University of California Press, 1988).

11 Iris Marion Young, "House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme," in *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

12 Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translation by Albert Hofstadter.

13 Martella and Enia, "The Domestic City," in *The Architect and the City*.

The city draws people in with the allure of an idyllic life they believe it can offer. The promise of abundant career opportunities, a vibrant social scene, and an exciting lifestyle fuels the desire to be part of the urban landscape. The city, with its diverse culture and endless possibilities, symbolizes a realm of newfound freedom and development for many who migrate there. However, the very same aspects that make the city so alluring are often intertwined with the financial constraints that limit its occupants, grounding the city fantasy into a much more complex reality.

City dwellers are anchored by their careers, dwellings, and personal connections. The precarity of these foundational aspects of one's livelihood has an immense gravity on the migrations and fabrication of home within the city for the individual. Thus, the modern city has become the host of a new type of city dweller; one who is perpetually mobile. The ability to feel at home is impacted by migrations and mobilities, some people are liberated by these migrations to and through the city while others are constrained by their inability to be mobile or are otherwise forced into migration.

This perpetual motion is manifested in the daily movements¹⁰ (from the home to the coffee shop, to work, to the bar, and then back home) and in larger-scale migrations (from one apartment to the next, from one city to another, and from one country to another). These dynamics impact the ways people curate their identities, their belongings, and ultimately their spaces.¹¹ Martin Heidegger separates the concept of dwelling into two parts; the act of building and that of preservation.¹² Through these actions, he argues that identity is formed and that the act of dwelling, which can only occur in a place, relies on fixity. Through Heidegger's writing, the transient urbanite is scarcely considered, situating the investigations of this study as a contemporary response to the question of urban dwelling. For the nomadic city dweller, both the domestic and urban become temporary fragments of home which are knitted together in an individualised mental collection of artefacts, relationships, spaces, and places.

Many people are impacted by the urban processes which lead to widespread displacement caused by rising housing costs. The metropolis "churns", which is to say it pulls in and spits out its occupants in an endless turnover, a constant stream of people coming and going.¹³ The permanence that provides stability for residents slips further out of grasp as a result of these challenges. The lifelong home remains an elusive notion, illustrating the cost trade-of, both monetary and circumstantial, that city dwellers pay. While transience may not pose an obstacle to young, independent, and able-bodied individuals who choose to be mobile in the short term for long-term gains, issues

often arise once the realization dawns that one is unable to choose. When people begin to age, start families, lose physical ability or get ill, the difficulty of transience becomes painfully apparent for those who do not have the choice to escape it.

¹⁴ Aviezer Tucker, "In Search of Home," *Journal of Applied Philosophy*

The city's allure lies in the promise of a better life, complete with career opportunities, however, one's position in the city is never truly fixed and those with fluctuating attachments become increasingly likely to depart in search of stability. In search of a home which reflects their ideal,¹⁴ a place which supports and fulfils them, many endure migrations - both voluntary and imposed.

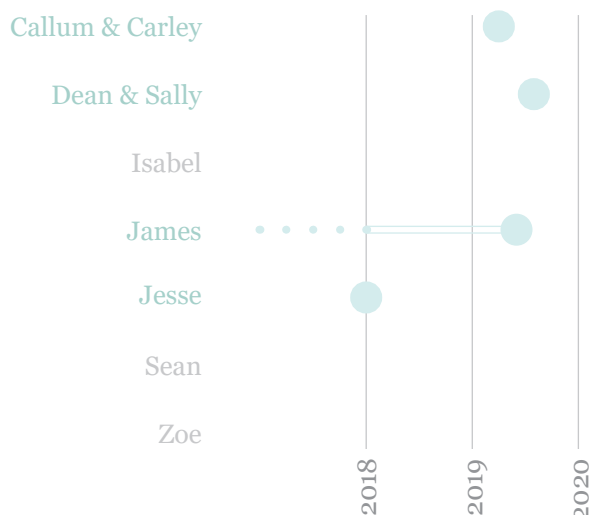
Transient Stories

The stories collected from participants in both New York and London placed transience at the forefront of each narrative. Individuals have been drawn into the city in search of opportunity and personal development, struggle with stability for the duration of their city lives, and ultimately project their migrations away from the metropolis. The COVID pandemic added a layer of complexity to this timeline as a point of both forced and encouraged migrations at its start, mid and end points.

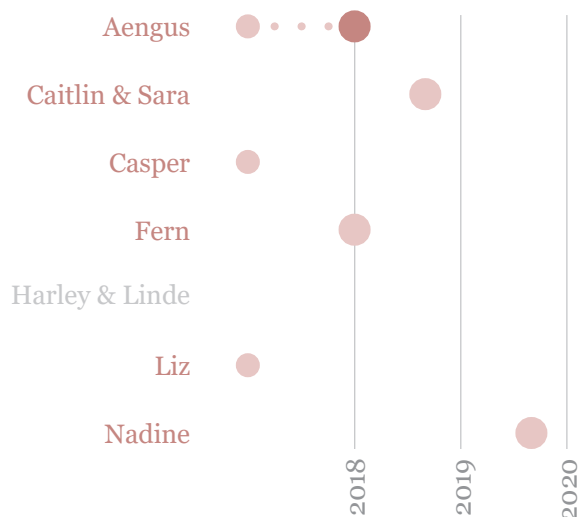
The majority of the research sample were engaged with the metropolis prior to 2020, living in different dwellings at the time of moving to the city than the ones they lived in at the time of the interview. Within the time frame of their lives in the city, many participants reported several moves across dwellings, often moving every one to two years aligned with lease agreements.

Earlier Arrivals to the City

- 04-05/2019 *Callum & Carley* moved to New York for jobs at the same bank that relocated them to the city in early 2019, Carley in April and Callum in May. They moved into separate apartments, Carley on her own and Callum into an apartment with housemates.
- 08-11/2019 *Dean & Sally* moved to New York together in 2019, with Silvie first moving in August and David arriving later that year in November. The couple moved into a small apartment together on the Upper East Side.
- 07/2019 *James* was born and raised in New Jersey where he has lived and commuted to New York City for his entire working life. He bought a small apartment in Hoboken in 2014 which he lived in for five years before being relocated to work abroad in July of 2019. During this period, he rented out his Hoboken apartment.
- 01/2018 *Jesse* originally moved to New York City from Washington D.C., drawn in by work opportunities and the lifestyle associated with living in the bustling and unique place.



- 11/2016 **Aengus** moved over to London for a career opportunity in 2016 and has been living in the city for 7 years since then. He originally moved into an apartment with strangers who he didn't get along with, which drove him to spend more of his time outside of his home.
- 01/2018 He got fed up with living with people whose company he did not enjoy and in January 2018 he decided to move to what is now his current home in Angel. He originally moved in with one man who has since moved out and now lives with a couple who are his long-time friends.
- 06/2018 **Caitlin & Sara** moved to London in 2018 and have lived in several dwellings since their arrival.
- 01/2017 **Casper** moved to London in 2017, six years ago.
- 01/2018 **Fern** moved out of her family home to move to London in January 2018. She had the desire to be out on her own after living with her mother for a long period of time and began flatting with friends and others across various accommodations.
- 07/2015 **Liz** moved to London from Australia for what was originally meant to be a two-year period back in July 2015. She arrived on a working holiday visa and planned to leave following the visa's expiry.
- 09/2019 **Nadine** first moved to London in September 2019, drawn in by the career, social, and entertainment opportunities the city has to offer.



LONDON



Fig. 1.5 New York City's Times Square empty during COVID lockdown.

A Global Pandemic

When the pandemic escalated to the point of global action in March 2020, a critical period of retreat and bracing began. For those who were able and motivated, a move away from the city was actioned to afford more space at a time when the extent of the home was cut off at the dwelling's edge as cities were put under lockdown.

For those who stayed in the metropolis, many were able to take advantage of the capitalist panic that seized the rental market. Many residents were able to secure more affordable housing while landlords scrambled to draw people back into the city.

As restrictions eased, the freedom of mobility returned and people began flocking back to urban centres. Now, inspired not only by jobs and opportunities but also by a burning desperation to start anew and progress their lives after a long period of stagnant growth.

Mid/Post-COVID Migrations

08/2022
Post-Pandemic

Caitlin & Sara and their other two flatmates, who all lived together in their previous flat, moved to their current flat after a large rent increase drove them out of their previous home in August 2022. The group have been pushed out to Zone 3 as a result.

11/2020
Mid-Pandemic

Casper and his partner Ashley moved from their previous flat in Finsbury Park to their new place across from Arsenal Stadium in November 2020.

08/2020
Mid-Pandemic

During the pandemic, **Fern** and a couple of friends decided to move in together. They moved into their Battersea house in August 2020.

12/2022-
02/2023
Post-Pandemic

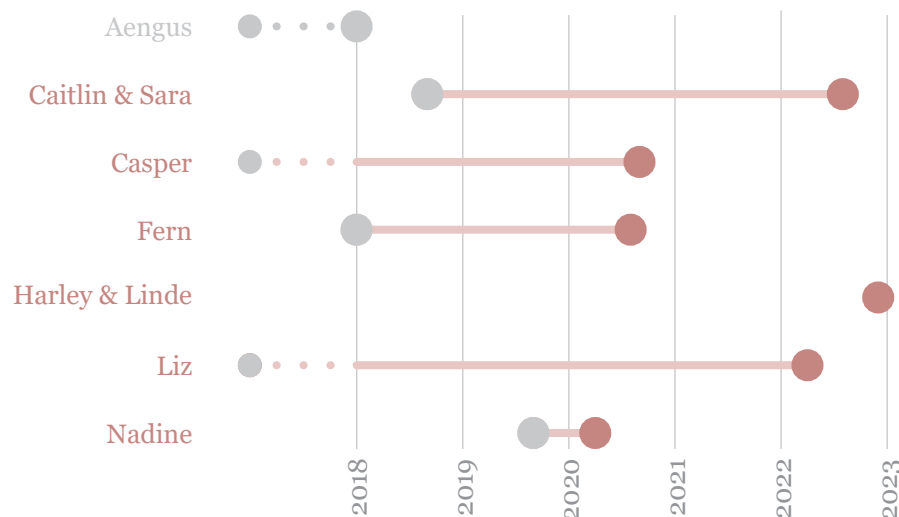
Harley & Linde moved into their London home within the past year. Harley moved to the city in December 2022 and Linde moved in shortly after, in February 2023.

04/2022
Post-Pandemic

In April 2022, **Liz** moved into her current flat with her long-time flatmate Paddy after being priced out of their previous three-bedroom apartment. They have progressively moved further from central London with their past two moves.

04/2020
Mid-Pandemic

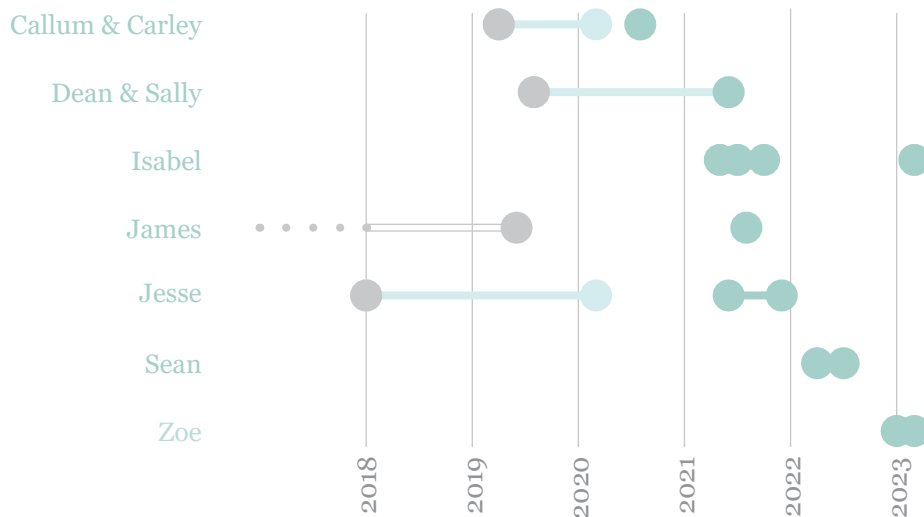
Nadine moved into her current three-bedroom Stoke Newington flat during the pandemic to escape the cramped conditions of her old house, where she was sharing a very small room with her partner in a five-bedroom house.



LONDON

COVID Exodus

- 03/2020 After living in New York for about a year, *Callum & Carley* left New York in March 2020 so that they could be closer to their family and friends during the pandemic lockdowns. Callum managed to get out of his lease and go to stay with his parents in Virginia while Carley, who still had all of her things in her New York City apartment, continued to pay rent over this period despite not living in the city.
- 03/2020 *Jesse* left the city during COVID to stay with his extended family outside of the city. He was able to get out of his rental agreement easily so he was able to avoid paying rent during this period while also keeping his job and awarding himself with a grander domestic space.



NEW YORK

Mid/Post-COVID Migrations

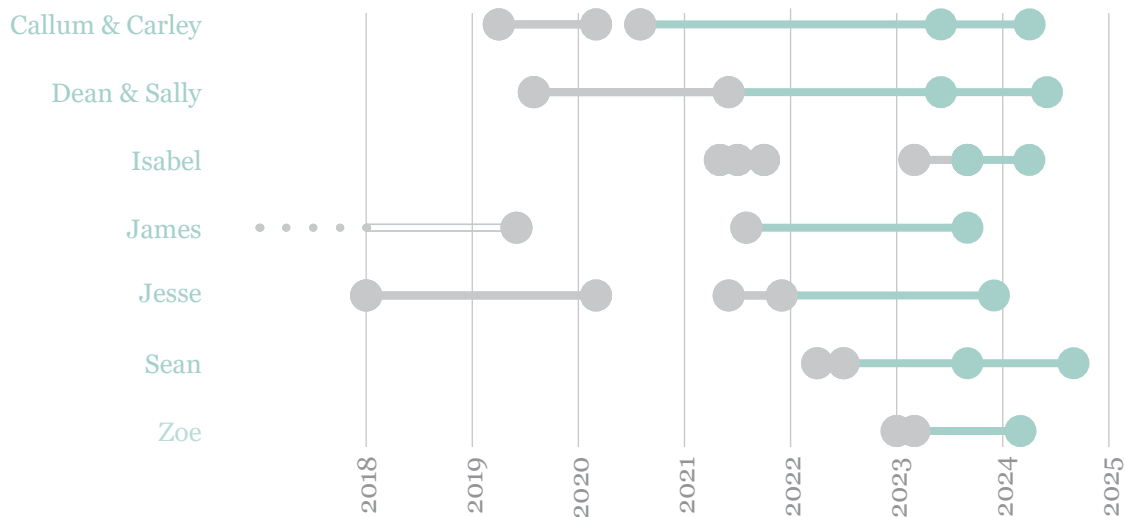
08-10/2020 Mid-Pandemic	<p><i>Callum & Carley</i> rented a new apartment together when they returned to the city following a call back to in-person work. Callum viewed and moved into the apartment first in August 2020 and Carley followed shortly after, moving into their current West Village apartment in October 2020.</p>
06/2021 Mid-Pandemic	<p><i>Dean & Sally</i> struggled with the lack of space in their small apartment during the pandemic and decided to move. After a reasonably easy search, they found a COVID deal on a larger apartment on the Upper East Side and moved into their current apartment in June 2021.</p>
05/2021 Mid-Pandemic	<p><i>Isabel</i> moved to Pelem, upstate New York, in May 2021, at which point she was commuting to Connecticut to work and to Manhattan on her days off for recreation. During this time, she built a strong network of friends and connections on the Lower East Side. In August 2021 she got a job offer in New York City and moved to an apartment in Brooklyn while she waited for the job to start. By November 2021 her job had still not started and she started running out of money; Isabel decided to leave the city with the intention to return.</p>
10/2022 Post-Pandemic	<p>She moved back to New York, renting a room in an apartment in Brooklyn.</p>
03/2023	<p>She found a good deal on a sublet in Chinatown and moved into a studio apartment on the Lower East Side and moved in March 2023.</p>
08/2021 Mid-Pandemic	<p><i>James</i> moved back to the United States in August 2021 at which point he took over the lease on an apartment in Manhattan from a co-worker whose move to Switzerland timed perfectly with James's arrival. He lived in the city for the first time and continued to rent out his apartment in Hoboken.</p>
06/2021 Mid-Pandemic	<p><i>Jesse</i> moved back to the city in June 2021 and into his current Brooklyn apartment with a roommate. His roommate left after six months due to a high volume of industrial noise in his street-facing room. Jesse's partner, Daniella, moves in and they convert the street-facing bedroom into a second living room.</p>
04/2022 Post-Pandemic	<p><i>Sean</i> moved to New York in April 2022, to a short-term sublet in Long Island. He did not originally plan to stay in New York longer than three months and had planned to keep travelling through to Chicago at the end of his sublet.</p>
07/2022	<p>After meeting his current partner, he decided to stay in the city and moved into an apartment he heard about from a friend. The two-bedroom apartment has long been the home for Irish men arriving in New York, passed on by mutual friends. The timing of one of the rooms in the apartment becoming available aligned with the end of Sean's Long Island sublet. Sean moved into the apartment in July 2022.</p>
01/2023 Post-Pandemic	<p><i>Zoe</i> moved to New York in January 2023 with the intention of finding work and moving in with her long-time friend Liga. The two women stayed in sublets for their first few months in the city while they searched for longer-term housing.</p>
03/2023	<p>In March 2023 Zoe and Liga found an apartment in Brooklyn where they moved in together.</p>

Short-Term Stability

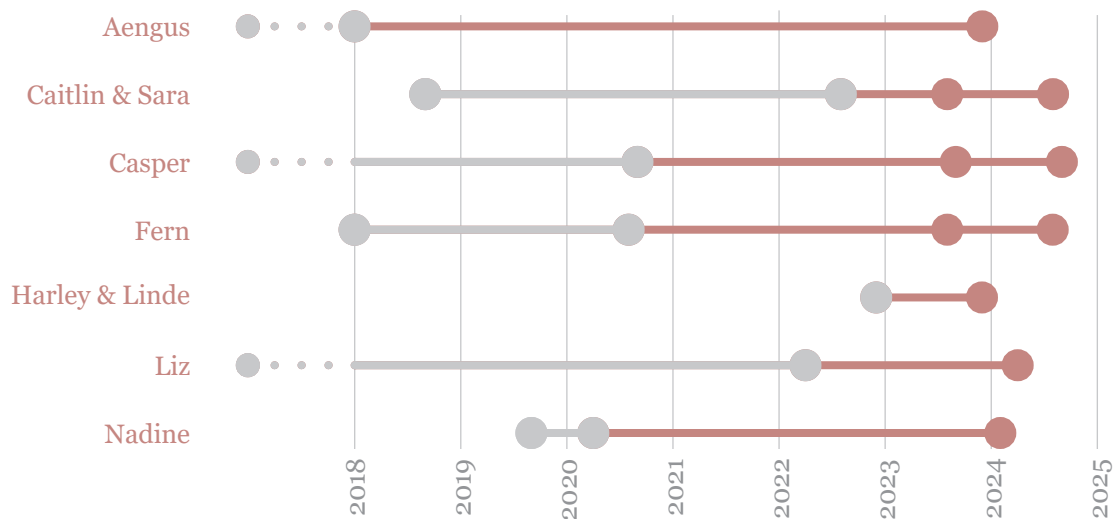
The problem of homemaking within the rental market can be linked closely to a lack of control and autonomy. Renters are at the mercy of the cost of housing with limited certainty about their future housing stability.

“When you have a tenancy agreement you always have a bit of a deadline and you’re always trying to think ‘what will I be doing when this tenancy is up?’.” - Casper

- 06/2023 - 04/2024 **Callum & Carley** extended their lease for a reduced period of 10 months in June 2023.
- 06/2023 - 06/2024 **Dean & Sally** renewed the lease on their apartment for another year in June 2023.
- 09/2023 - 04/2024 **Isabel** negotiated an extension on the lease in September 2023, securing the sublet until April 2024.
- 08/2021 - 08/2023 At the time he accepted his lease, **James** agreed to a two-year term which ran from August 2021-2023.
- 06/2021 - 06/2024 **Jesse** and his partner are currently on a lease which is set to expire in June 2024.
- 09/2023 - 09/2024 **Sean** lived in his shared apartment until September 2023. He has since moved into a new Upper East Side apartment with his partner, signing a one-year contract for the new lease.
- Zoe** and her housemate have secured their lease until March 2024, at which point they hope to renew the lease for another year, pending the review of a potential rent increase.



- 01/2023 - 01/2024 **Aengus** has no immediate plans to leave his apartment and continues to renew his yearly lease, refusing rent increases when they are presented and luckily receiving no push-back thus far. His current tenancy agreement is valid until January 2024.
- 08/2023 - 08/2024 **Caitlin & Sara** and their flatmates accepted a rent increase on their current flat and signed a new one-year contract in August 2023 which has secured their housing for that period.
- 09/2023 - 09/2024 **Casper** and his partner accepted a rent increase on their current flat and signed a new one-year contract in September 2023 which has secured their housing for that period.
- 08/2023 - 08/2024 In August 2023, **Fern** and her housemates renewed their lease, accepting a rent increase on their for the next year.
- 12/2022 - 12/2023 **Harley & Linde** have been in their rolling month-to-month undefined tenancy for one year, despite the original six-month time frame.
- 02/2022 - 02/2024 **Liz** and her flatmate negotiated a two-year contract when they moved into their flat in 2022. Their lease is set to expire in February 2024.
- 04/2020 - 02/2024 **Nadine** managed to negotiate an early termination of her tenancy agreement, moving it forward from April 2024 to February.



LONDON



Fig. 1.6 Depiction of a transient city dweller, packing all their things to move once again.

Perpetually Transient

Ultimately, the transient city dweller leaves the city. Many live indefinitely, in an uncertain state of dwelling for long periods of time with the knowledge that they cannot maintain the lifestyle that the city imposes. Others have finite endings to their urban ventures, often aligning with the end of the short-term certainty of lease agreements or the abrupt changes in career and personal circumstances.

Finite Endings

06/2024 **Fern** plans to move to Spain in the summer of 2024, when she becomes eligible for a remote working visa, in search of a better quality of life.

Indefinite Trajectories

Aengus wants to eventually move away from the city to afford himself more domestic space which includes a large outdoor space for himself and a future dog.

Caitlin & Sara are both happy to stay in the city for a few more years while their careers and other opportunities progress, with an understanding that they will eventually leave.

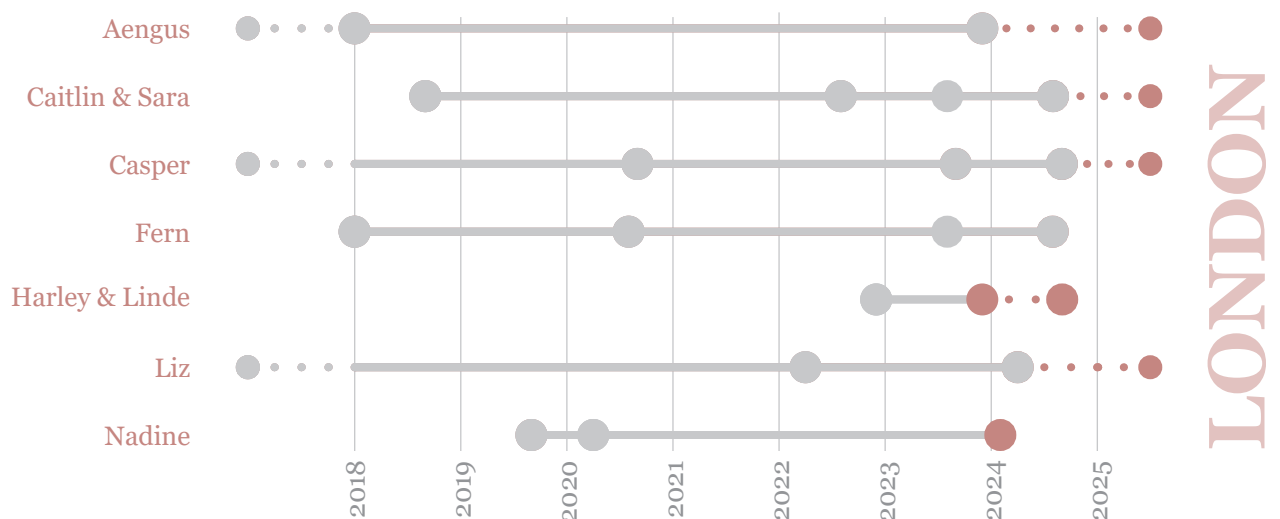
Casper and his partner will eventually leave London to be able to afford to purchase a property. Casper sees being stuck in the rental market, as a result of living in the city, as a negative and inherently temporary condition which does not allow one to settle and nest.

Harley & Linde moved into their flat, which has expanded from a limited 6-month term to an unpredictable month-to-month while the landlord is living temporarily in France. They are in the process of obtaining their architectural registrations in the UK. This career objective ties the three of them to London for the next year. They are not sure how long they will stay in London following the achievement of this milestone.

They are likely to move elsewhere in the long term, with no explicit plans at present as to where they may go or where exactly they will move.

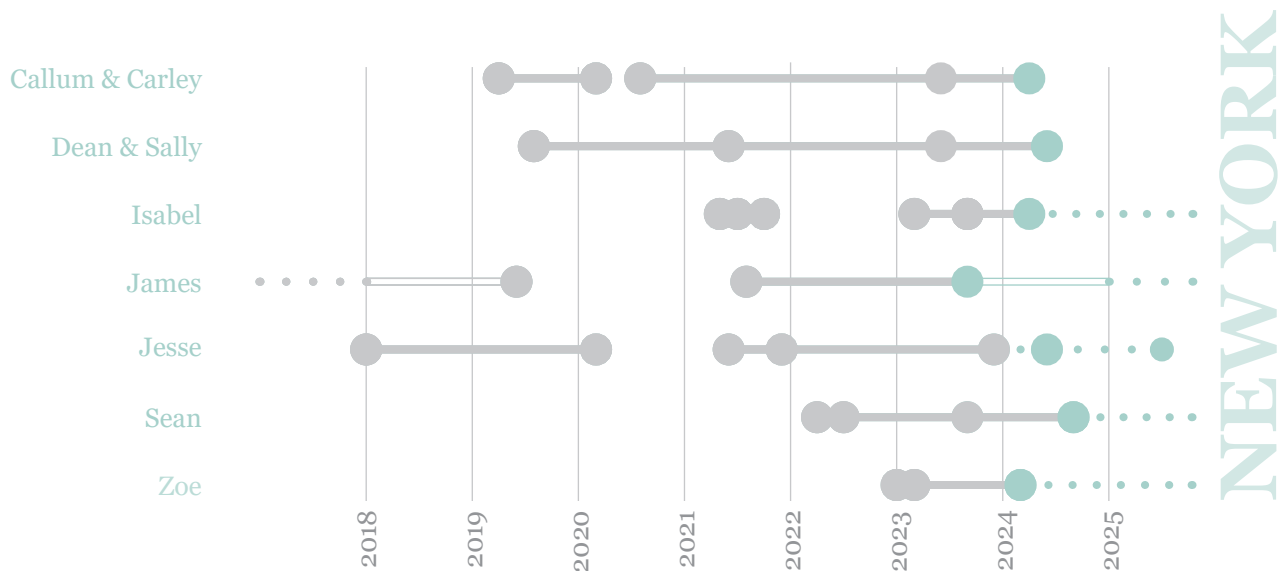
Liz has no deadline for leaving London but has a sense that she will one day grow tired of it and move back to her home country, Australia. Until then, she faces rental challenges as they come and navigates them accordingly.

Nadine was made redundant from her job in London in August 2023. She has been unable to secure a new job in the competitive job market and has decided to move to Australia to be with her partner. She is staying in her current flat until her move in February 2024.



Finite Endings

- 01-04/2024 *Callum & Carley* both plan to leave the city in early 2024. Callum is being relocated by his employer to Europe in January and Carley is moving back to her Toronto home when her work visa and lease expire in April.
- 06/2024 *David & Silvie* both plan on leaving New York in search of new ventures at the end of their lease in June 2024.
- 08/2023 At the end of his lease in August 2023, *James* moved back to his apartment in Hoboken New Jersey. This move brought James closer to his family and friends as well as reducing his expenses towards both housing and taxes. He continues to commute to Manhattan for work, keeping his connection to the city.



Indefinite Trajectories

Isabel hopes to live in New York City long-term. She sees herself in the rental market indefinitely with no strong attachment to the idea of purchasing a property.

Jesse expresses an interest in moving to a new apartment in Brooklyn to seek out a more green neighbourhood. He and his partner have no imminent plans to do so, however, he states that it is something they are serious about doing when the right place arises.

He and his partner plan to stay in New York for about four to five more years while they develop their careers. They plan to have children in the years following, which Jesse suggests may be a step which moves them away from the city.

Sean and his partner are staying in New York for work, for the time being. Long term they plan to have a family outside the city, with no set timeline for the move.

Zoe and her roommate have become quite attached to their apartment and hope for at least one of them to remain living in it for some time. Zoe's partner lives in Kuwait and is unsure if he will be able to move to New York, making her position in the city precarious.

Harley & Linde's Story

City:
London
Neighbourhood: **Highgate,**
Zone 2/3
Dwelling Size:
51.9m²
Rent-to-Income:
25%
Relationships:
Partners + Friend

Harley, 29, Architectural
Assistant

Linde, 29, Architectural
Assistant

Maito, 27, Architectural
Assistant

Harley & Linde moved to London less than a year ago after a long period of being fixed in one place during the recent pandemic that had them itching for new experiences. The couple, who are both working towards their architectural registration, chose to move to London because of the abundant job market in the field and accelerated qualification process in the UK versus other primarily English-speaking countries. When they moved to the city, they were immediately confronted by the hurdle of securing affordable housing. The number of available units was extremely limited and the couple had attempted to view and apply for several apartments which were scooped off the market before they were able to follow up. Luckily, a family friend of Harley's was moving to France for what was meant to be a 6-month period and offered her place to the pair at a significantly reduced rent price. The arrangement involves several extra-monetary costs such as uncertain timeframes of occupancy, a lack of official documentation to support their proof of address, and the understanding that the responsibility of resolving issues within the property falls on the tenants rather than the landlord.

"We moved in because it was the only place that was going, we weren't in a position to choose between places. We probably wouldn't normally have been able to afford something like this, but the landlord's given us 'mates rates', which just means that we have to sort out her problems for her because she's so hands-off. This arrangement is quite temporary, we don't know when our landlord will want to move back into the flat. We haven't really invested in it much because of that. Currently, she lives in her house in France and she's just had a baby which means, for now, we're hoping she'll stay there. We'll have a couple of months notice for sure but she might decide that she wants to live in London instead. We've never really known what the actual deal was." -Harley

"When she first went she said that we could live here for 6-months and then she was going to come back for the summer. We bought a drying rack for our laundry, some blankets and vegetables for the terrace." -Linde



Fig. 1.7 Harley & Linde's terrace.

A rare space of personalisation where the residents have populated it with plants and social activity, detached from the main dwelling by the addition of private dwelling space in the adjoining room.

The uncertainty of their housing stability has had a massive impact on the homemaking practices that they invest in. They live with the landlord's things, without a domestic set-up which reflects their needs or identities. Living in this sort of arrangement does not align with many scholars' definitions of dwelling, including Heidegger and Marion Young; the construction of and care for the space is disrupted by its temporality. Harley & Linde, among many other city dwellers, make this compromise in being able to afford housing in the city.

“The place came furnished which is great for us because we don't have any furniture. We still have a lot of the landlord's stuff in our cupboards, so not all the space in the house is ours. It doesn't have some of the things that I would put in, like a desk or a dining table. I quite like cooking for people and I do that a lot so I would like a place where we can eat other than the coffee table. It's not really set up for living, it feels like an AirBnB where people might stay short term.” -Harley

“We use pretty much everything here in a standard way, other than the living room. We use it as our office area if we work from home, as our dining area, and we use it as a guest bedroom as well.” -Linde

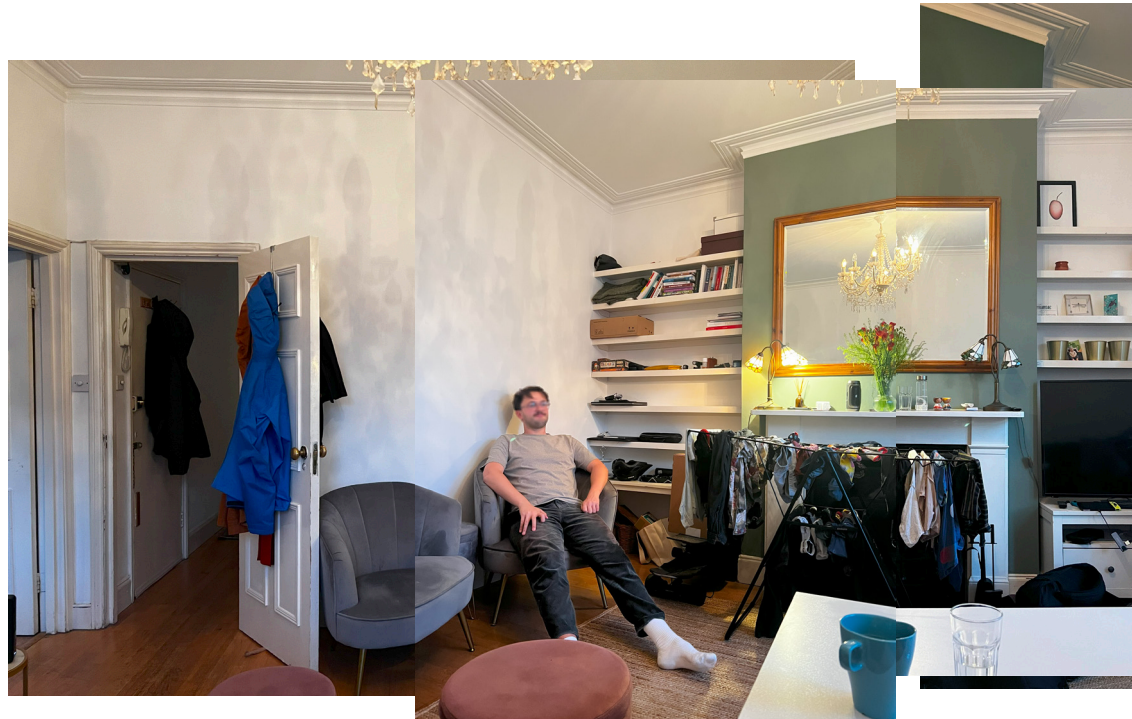


Fig. 1.8 Harley & Linde's living room. The living room used for lounging, dining, socialising, working, storage, and sleeping overnight guests. The space is set up for living and though it hosts many functions, it also impacts homemaking practices as a result of the physical artefacts that structure it.



Fig. 1.9 Living with someone else's things.



In August 2023, the couple's close friend Maito also moved to London. He had arranged to stay as a short-term guest while searching for a job and housing, however has begun to settle in the spare room which was once used as a gym, storage, and circulation space.

The addition of another resident in combination with the consequences of an undetermined tenancy period has had impacts on the daily routines practiced at home. The multi-functional living room takes on many different roles; a social space, dining space, space for entertaining, hosting overnight guests, drying laundry, working, storage and much more. The loss of the spare room has increased pressure on this space which has not been adapted from its unlivable organisation. Cooking, exercising, and outdoor living are among other daily practices which have been altered, the decision to take on another occupant has been a trade-off of their daily routines in exchange for greater affordability.

“The kitchen is tight, when the three of us are in there we have to shuffle around. We’ve got our cooking routine with single cooks now, everyone has their own days when they cook so there’s only one person in the kitchen at a time.” -Linde

“Our friend Maito moved to London recently and was originally going to stay with us for a short time before he found a job and a flat of his own. He’s going to stay with us for a while now it seems and we’re quite happy with that actually. He’s at the whim of our landlord as well now.” -Harley

“Maito’s room had nothing in there because it was meant to be a versatile room. Previously, our terrace was off a back room that no one lived in but now our terrace is off of a room which someone occupies, so the space is separated a bit. Now Maito is in the back room so I haven’t been sunbathing in a while. When we had the room empty we would also use it as a gym.

We have people stay with us every month or so. Since Maito is here, we often let people stay in our room when they come to visit and we’ll stay in the living room. There’s quite a bit of furniture in there, but I’ve never felt like it was too small except when it comes to bikes. There’s my foldable bike, Harley’s skateboard, and now Maito’s big bike so it starting to get really busy in the living room.” -Linde



Fig. 1.10 Additional bedroom in miscellaneous/circulation room.



Fig. 1.11 Harley & Linde's kitchen.

Only comfortably fits one person at a time, this has resulted in an adjustment of dwelling habits.

Beyond the completion of their career milestones, Harley and Linde are likely to move on to somewhere more affordable, given that they will likely be unable to maintain their current housing situation long term and alternative housing in the city demands significantly higher rental costs. Harley & Linde will likely not stay in London for long after acquiring their qualifications.

“Harley wants to get registered as an architect here which takes a year, but he’s basically finished. Now I am probably going to start my registration here as well which will take another year. So we’ll be here at least another year but after that, it’s open basically.” -Linde

“I’m not fixed on living in London. I don’t mind travelling around.” -Harley

Harley & Linde were able to find a convenient workaround to the competitive housing market, a situation which is unique to them and not necessarily commonplace for the majority of renters in London. While their conditional housing has afforded the group autonomy over a larger sum of their money, the price paid in place of the financial compensation is the significant impacts on the ways in which each individual dwells and engages in homemaking practices. They will follow the trend of the transient city dweller, entrapped by the relentless mobility of the housing affordability cycle.

Chapter Conclusion

The city, with its dynamic opportunities and constraints, becomes both a magnet and a repellant, shaping the experiences of those who dwell within it. The act of migrating carries with it the task of reestablishing home, which constitutes the dwelling and many collective city spaces, through the practices and daily mobilities of the resident. The instability of renting inevitably means that most city dwellers must reconstruct their homes over and over again as they are displaced.

As individuals navigate the ebb and flow of their urban existence, the city transforms into a space of both aspirations and compromises. The search for stability and an ideal home becomes a journey that transcends the physical confines of a dwelling, extending into the broader urban landscape. The journey of developing a home in the city is finite, however undetermined.

Chapter 2: The Dwelling & Urban Domesticity

¹ Alison Blunt and Olivia Sheringham, 'Home-City Geographies: Urban Dwelling and Mobility', *Process in Human Geography* 43, no. 5 (July 2018), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0309132518786590>.

² Alan Lightfeldt, 'Bright Lights, Big Rent Burden: Understanding New York City's Rent Affordability Problem', *StreetEasy*, 2 March 2015, <https://streeteasy.com/blog/new-york-city-rent-affordability/>.

The dwelling and the city allow domestic practices to shape the home across their boundaries. These can be categorised into two main schools of thought; urban domesticities (the act of homemaking in the city) and domestic urbanism (the city as the home).¹ Through the lens of urban domesticities, the dwelling is the central point of home from which domestic life is born and nurtured, while domestic urbanism sees the city as the framework from which domesticity is carved. There is a porosity between the dwelling and the city that validates both urban domesticity and domestic urbanism and allows the two modes of conceptualising dwelling to impact home.

The city binds the dwelling, it is moulded and is constrained by the urban, social and economic factors which are at large within the metropolis. These conditions restrict the space within the dwelling, producing an overflow of domestic activities from the home into the urban environment. The commodification of domestic space has had direct implications on the domestic functions that are able to exist within the spaces of the dwelling and those that are pushed out into the urban sphere. The high demand for living space within metropolitan centres has exacerbated the issue of housing affordability, further amplifying the spatial tax on city dwellers who are left to navigate the limiting housing market.

The exorbitant housing costs driving dwelling spaces to occupy smaller and smaller footprints can be directly linked to the overflow of domestic life beyond the material architectures of the dwelling and into the public sphere. The size of an affordable city dwelling does not appear to be growing alongside the increased average size of city apartments, indicating a focus on new-build units which are geared towards developing luxury accommodation.²

This chapter will focus on the role of the dwelling in the fabrication of home within the city. The capitalist agenda that drives the cost of housing beyond an affordable margin is outlined as the catalyst for constraining dwelling space. The limited space within private domestic structures creates a unique microcosm of dwelling practices within them and further inspires the utilisation of various public and private resources to supplement the home. and allow residents to access the benefits of urban life.

The Commodification of Dwelling Space

3 Steffen Wetzstein, 'The Global Urban Housing Affordability Crisis', *Urban Studies* 54 (2017).

4 Kirsten McRae, 'The Global Housing Crisis: A Crisis Unlike Any Other', *Urbanet*, 25 October 2022, <https://www.urbanet.info/the-global-housing-crisis/>.

5 Kaveh Dianati, 'London's Housing Crisis' presented at the 35th International Conference of the System Dynamics, University College London, 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322835767_London's_Housing_Crisis.

Over the past several decades, there has been increasing amounts of scholarship which acknowledges and interrogates the global crisis of urban housing affordability.³ This housing crisis has been historically misrepresented as a result of a shortage of housing stock across cities worldwide. However, this crisis is not one caused by a lack of housing but rather is primarily an issue of a lack of affordable and adequate housing, a result of economic expansion that is creating noticeable inequality in living conditions through the commodification of dwelling space.⁴ In the earlier discourse on the housing crisis in London (about 2006) the notion of a 'shortage of supply' was cited as the main cause for housing unaffordability. It has since been recognised that the notion of a shortage of supply was an oversimplification of the complex issue of housing affordability, which is a crisis of unequal distribution of housing above all else; "An inflated market fueled by over-investment".⁵ There is a lack of affordable housing options for would-be first time home buyers, heightened demand for rental properties as a result, and the displacement of individuals and communities who are priced out of their neighbourhoods because of consistently increasing housing costs.

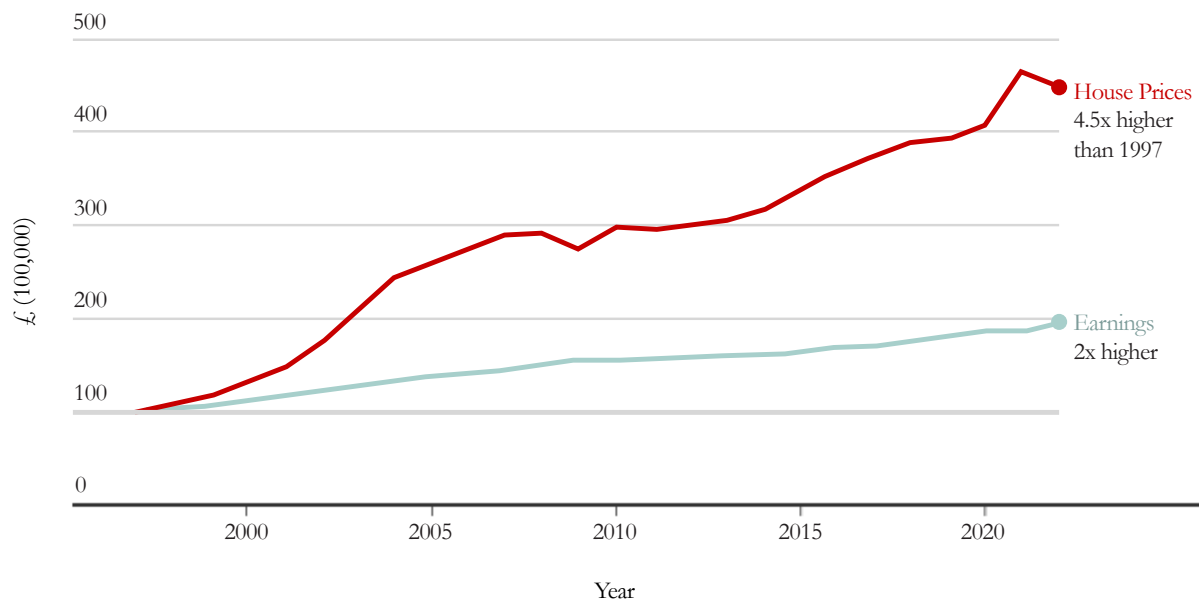


Fig. 2.1 Median house price to wage in increase UK, 1997-2023.

Alongside the prevailing discourse focusing on the false claim of low housing supply fueling the issue, there have been many who have pointed to planners, insisting that through a failure to plan the release of land for development, they have directly influenced the shortage. Planners have rejected this claim and highlighted that the land being released is not being developed and “speculative land banking” was being used to further capitalise on monetary gains. That is, developers had not been developing land immediately upon planning permission and rather waited for spikes in demand to maximise returns on their development, contributing to both the problems of supply shortage and inequitable distribution of housing.⁶

⁶ Dianati, ‘London’s Housing Crisis’.

⁷ McRae, ‘The Global Housing Crisis’, *Urbanet*.

Housing has been used as a financial tool, prioritising economic growth and the expansion of personal wealth through its commodification and exchange. The housing crisis has been a long-standing issue which is the result of a compilation of factors based on a system which favours those with wealth and power at the expense of the less privileged masses. Inefficient government policies often prevent the appropriate distribution of funding and put restrictions and incentives in place which are easily manipulated by those benefiting from the current system.⁷

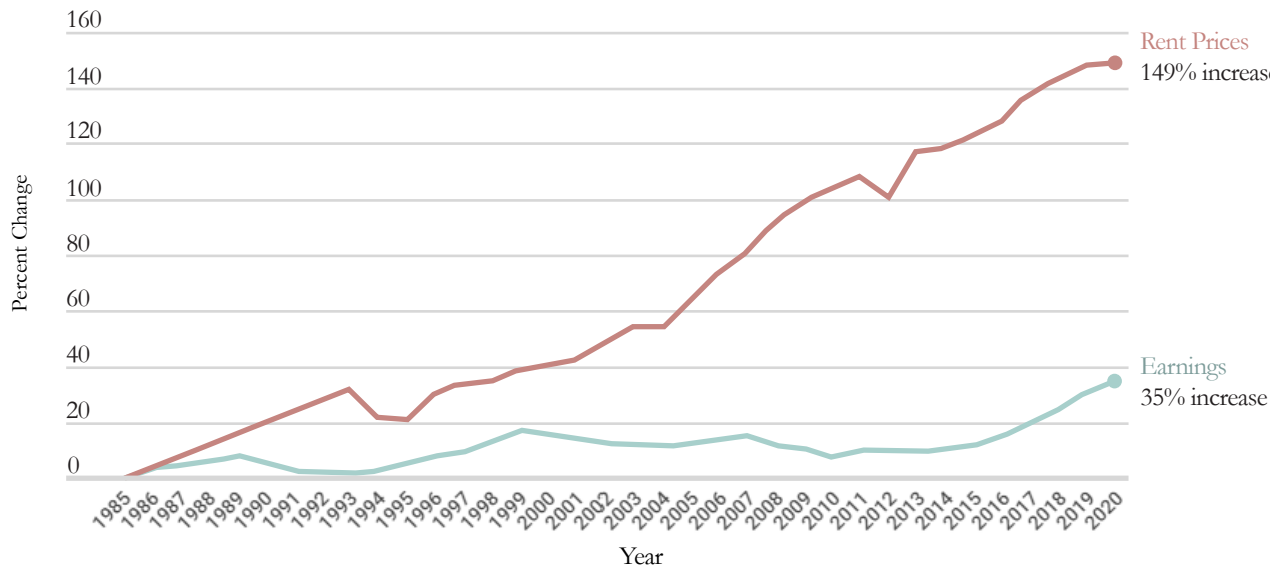


Fig. 2.2 Median rent price to wage in increase US, 1985-2020.

8 Stefanos Chen, 'New York Is Rebounding for the Rich. Nearly Everyone Else Is Struggling.', 28 September 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/28/nyregion/nyc-income-gap-wages.html>.

9 Trust for London, 'The Distribution of Wealth: London's Poverty Profile 2022', February 2022, <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/wealth-distribution/>.

10 Thomas Piketty, 'Part Two: The Dynamics of the Capital/Income Ratio', in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, translation by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

11 Shivani Vora, 'What Micro Housing? The Size of an NYC Apartment Keeps Getting Bigger', 3 March 2022, <https://nypost.com/2022/03/03/why-the-size-of-an-nyc-apartment-gets-bigger-every-year/>.

12 McRae, 'The Global Housing Crisis', *Urbanet*.

13 Lightfeldt, 'Bright Lights, Big Rent Burden: Understanding New York City's Rent Affordability Problem'.

The distribution of wealth and assets among city dwellers is becoming increasingly unequal across the globe. The wealth disparity between the top and bottom wealth deciles has increased exponentially over the past several decades, putting hundreds of thousands of dollars between the median incomes of each demographic;⁸ the top 10% of the wealthy in London make up 44.3% of London's net wealth compared to their lower 10% counterparts who hold less than 0.1%.⁹ The gap in society between inherited wealth and income has been consistently widening as well, with 5% of households in the US holding the majority of capital and the bottom 40% being negative due to debts.¹⁰ This has resulted in misleading representations of accessible housing affordability statistics, increasing the importance of first-person accounts to reflect realistic circumstances, as all but those who hold the top margins of wealth are struggling to manage affordability in the city.

Available research supports the stance that more housing does not clearly equate to an affordable solution. In 2013, New York introduced a tax incentive program which would encourage developers to develop 20 per cent of project units as low-moderate income apartments in return for tax exemptions; an incentive which was widely criticised and ultimately unsuccessful in combating the housing crisis as we can clearly see a decade on. It is evident that the majority of development is geared towards the upper classes, with luxury units making up a majority of new-build accommodation in metropolitan areas. In fact, the average apartment size in New York has been steadily increasing since 2000,¹¹ meanwhile, homelessness has been on the rise.¹²

Housing prices are rising much more rapidly than wages in many global cities including London and New York, meaning that an increasing number of these cities' inhabitants are slipping further out of reach from being able to afford to purchase property of their own. This puts the masses at the mercy of landlords and property managers amidst increased demand for rental properties in these densely populated regions.¹³ The unattainable cost of owning property in large cities highlights the importance of analysing renters as the means to unpacking urban domesticity.

Fern's Story

City:
London
Neighbourhood:
Battersea,
Zone 1/2
Dwelling Size:
74.0m²
Rent-to-Income:
50%
Relationships:
Friends

Fern, 31,
Technologies Salesperson

Liz, 31, Procurement Analyst

Kate, 29, Publisher

Fern moved to her current house in Battersea, London, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when she and two of her friends decided that they wanted to be together for the remainder of the COVID-related lockdowns and restrictions. She spoke to her experience living in London over time, from when she first moved to the city in 2018 to the time of the interview in 2023. She highlighted the prevalence of unaffordable housing, the rapid acceleration of rental costs following COVID, and the comparatively slow increase of wages over that same period.

“When I first moved here in 2018, people would often say to me, ‘London is so expensive’. I would think ‘It’s as pricey as any capital city would be pricey’. I was happy to take a tiny room because it was in a really good location and I could walk to work in an hour. I was close to central London and that mattered more than having space. I was paying £542 a month for a room in a house, it was a smaller room for sure; I couldn’t open my door fully because the bed was in the way, I had rearranged all my furniture so that I had space to work out indoors. I’d get in my room and then crawl into the bed. That was about 4 years ago and it’s gone up quite significantly since.

Certainly since the pandemic ‘finished’ it started to accelerate in really unreasonable stretches, at really unreasonable rates. For a long time, I did two jobs and my goal has been to do one job and to live well off of it - I don’t know why that’s so hard”

Fern specifies the rental costs associated with her dwelling and highlights the intensity of the post-pandemic rent increases in London, especially when compared to the COVID deals which were common for rentals across the city in recent years. She points out that since one of her flatmates decided to move in with their partner, two of the women were looking to move into a two-bedroom apartment together but were shocked at the prices that they were seeing.

“This place is run by an agent and they’re really dishonest and money-grabbing, we don’t speak to the landlord. They said that this place was discounted at the time we moved in because, in the summer of 2020, people were hesitant about moving, so we found this a fairly good deal for the area that it’s in. When we first moved in, it was £2100 a month between us, so it was about £733 each and we signed onto that for a two-year contract. After the two years, it’s gone up to £2300.

For the year coming up, in August, the agency called us and said ‘The market value has gone up, we would estimate that your place is worth £2700 a month’. That’s £400 on top of what it was. Eventually, they came back to us and the landlord was happy with a £100 increase per month, which considering some things I’ve heard from other people I know who are renting, is quite light. Liz and I were thinking that we might leave and find a two-bedroom place together, but prices were insane, so when the landlord came back and said he was OK with only a £100 increase we decided to stay.

The general rule is that you should only be paying 30% of your income towards living expenses, that’s just not the case. Mine is 50% at least and that doesn’t even include bills. Everyone is just a bit worse off. At the age I’m at, I felt like I was just breaking into adulthood and was a bit more stable. Now everything has just become unstable again.”

Fern discussed her ambitions to buy a house on her own one day, comparing her situation to that of others she knows who have purchased property and have all had assistance from partners or parents. She calls this hurdle the “single-person tax”, a premium paid by people who make up single-income households and therefore take on a disproportionate financial burden against the increasing cost of housing.

“We feel pretty lucky to be in this spot and we know that we’ve got a good deal, so we’re happy to hold onto it while other things feel really out of reach. My goal would be to live alone. Ultimately, down the line I’m saving for a deposit for a house. There’s definitely a sense that you can’t do those things unless you’re part of a couple. I know a few people have done it alone, and when you speak to them in more depth you realise they’ve had help from a parent or had an inheritance or something like that. I personally am not interested in settling down or getting married, and a lot of people around me are doing that. There is definitely a single-person tax here.”

Fern outlined the spatial implications of endlessly increasing housing costs. She was vocal about her displeasure with a lack of adequate dining space and says that the reason they don’t have a dining room is because of the reallocation of shared space within the house into a bedroom. Many other participants also mentioned scenarios in which living spaces were reallocated or bedrooms split to accommodate a larger number of occupants and validated charging higher rents in each rental unit.

“This place is not technically big enough for three people. It should be a two-person house. So when we’re in the living room, if all three of us are around or somebody has got a friend around, it can feel quite cramped. I’d say we have one extra person here a week, generally. A couple of times a month there will be two extra people and it feels crowded. It doesn’t have a dining table. I personally care about sitting at a table to eat, that’s something I can’t do. I think Liz’s room was supposed to be the dining room or a separate living room. But like a lot of places in London, they’ve converted it into an extra bedroom to get another person in.”

This conversation with Fern offers a glimpse into the challenges many individuals in metropolitan cities like London face, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The stark contrast between the ideal of city living and the financial constraints imposed by the cost of housing is vividly apparent in her narrative. Fern's discussion of the spatial implications of the housing underscores the sacrifices made by residents who cope with these high costs.



Fig. 2.3 Photographic 'section' of Fern's dwelling. Added bedroom takes away communal space and means that there is no dining area in the house. The living room has taken on many roles as a result and the house often feels crowded.

Constrained Dwelling Space

¹⁴ Hans Leistikow, *Die Wohnung Für Das Existenzminimum (The Dwelling for Minimal Existence)*, 1929, 1929, MoMA, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/6107>.

¹⁵ Marson Korbi and Andrea Migotto, 'Between Rationalization and Political Project: The Existenzminimum from Klein and Teige to Today', *Urban Planning* 4, no. 3 (30 September 2019): 299–314.

¹⁶ NBC New York, 'Apartment Sizes Have Actually Increased in Manhattan', *NBC New York*, 24 February 2023, <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/apartment-sizes-have-actually-increased-in-one-nyc-borough/4120686/>.

¹⁷ Office for National Statistics (ONS), 'About the Size of a London Flat', accessed 11 April 2023, <https://blog.ons.gov.uk/2020/02/21/about-the-size-of-a-london-flat/>.

Global cities are now facing the rapid decrease of affordable dwelling floor area which has inspired the design of micro-apartments. Intrinsicly tied to the concept of the minimum dwelling space, this micro-housing trend pushes the boundaries of spatial efficiencies. These minimal dwelling units can find their origins in Existenzminimum, a housing program born in Frankfurt which attempted to define the minimum habitable dwelling in a post-WWII landscape when inflation and housing crisis were rife.¹⁴ This method of design centralized collective dwelling for the economic, cultural, and social practices. It reduced the apartment to that which the individual alone would occupy with a single room allocated to each adult that would function as both living and resting space. Many of the elements of this manifesto can be seen echoing through contemporary city residences.¹⁵

The high cost of dwelling space in the city puts the monetary value of floor area at a premium. In Manhattan, the average apartment size is reported to be 70m² and Brooklyn's average is 64m².¹⁶ Similarly, the average floor area in a London dwelling is reported at 72m² across zones 1-3.¹⁷ These reported averages encompass a wide range of building typologies, neighbourhoods, number of bedrooms and residents. The figures are not a clear representation of what it means to dwell in the city or the level to which space has been constrained in the average home. In order to truly understand the extent of spatial restriction on an individual basis, the most effective and accessible methodology has proven to be the examination of collective archives which represent the mosaic of dwelling conditions across the city.

Fragmented narratives that portray individual experiences across multiple cities have been recorded and shared across various accessible media platforms. The breadth of this content is overwhelming, from formal news broadcasts and investigative journalism to informal blogs and social media, many people have taken an interest in representing the connection between the high cost of living in cities and the physical manifestations within domestic space.

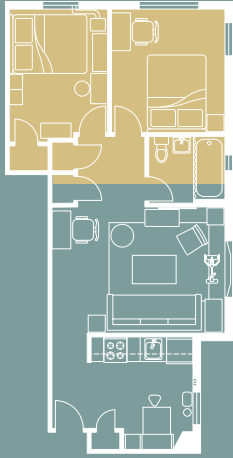
The study contained in this thesis, conducted across London and New York, aimed to collect and analyse data reflecting the average space per resident and the individual financial impact of the rising cost of housing. In London, the median interior dwelling space per resident among participants was 24.7m². New York fared similarly, with a median of 26.4m² per resident. Despite a stark difference in housing typologies and residents per dwelling varying from one to four, both cities showed that the amount of space generally affordable per individual in a dwelling is 25m².

Beyond the numerical areas measured, it was imperative to document the available rooms which support domestic functions, either in conventional or unconventional ways. Residents made explicit commentary on the functions their dwellings were able to support and those that they felt were lacking.

In New York, all residents had access to living rooms and dining spaces of some description within their dwellings. In London, however, it was much more common to see accommodations which sacrificed additional living or dining space for extra bedrooms. This can likely be connected back to the affordability of space as a result of higher salaries attributed to New York and the difference in pay scale across industries.

Access to outdoor space varied widely between the two cities, with none of the New York participants having any access to private or semi-private outdoor space, versus those in London who all reported having access to some type of outdoor space attached to their dwelling or building. Given that all residents in New York were dwelling in apartments and that the city has a significantly smaller footprint than that of London, it comes as no surprise that this should be the case. By contrast, many of the residents in London lived in flats which were either part of or entire townhouses or similarly sized buildings which had access to terrace or garden space. The balance of London residents who lived in apartments had either private balconies and/or a semi-private rooftop terrace.

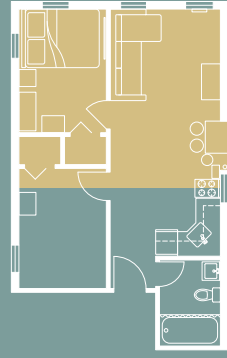
As the trend towards micro-housing persists, it becomes increasingly vital to address the spatial challenges imposed by the commodification of dwelling space. Clear parallels can be drawn between the economic climates of the post-war and post-pandemic housing markets which reflect similar focus on restricted dwelling space. With a current focus on the development of luxury apartments across global cities which cater to the top percentile of wealth holders, widely available data points to an inflated figure representing the average dwelling size, stressing the importance of data collection which makes explicit the demographic and urban conditions of the documented dwellings. The study contained across this thesis aims to contribute a comparative that captures the many factors contributing to spatial conditions and affordability of each unit, broadening the range of narratives that create a tableau of city dwelling.



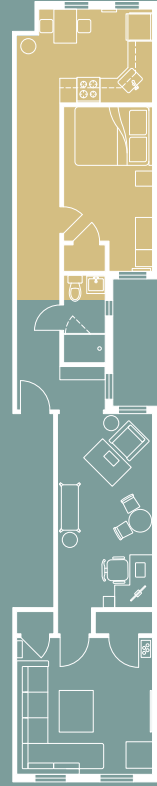
Callum & Carley



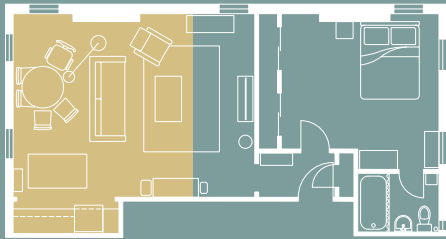
Dean & Sally



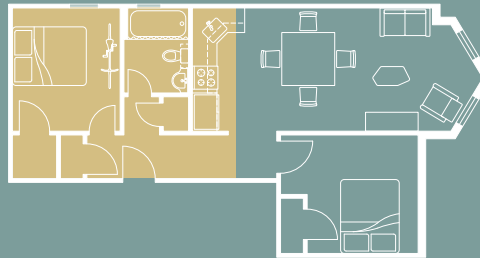
Sean



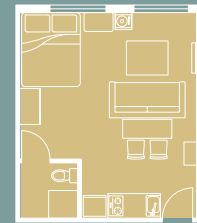
Jesse



James



Zoe



Isabel

25m² (Average Individual Affordable Floor Area)



Fig. 2.4 New York dwellings plans with highlighted average per-occupant area as depicted by research results.

Callum & Carley

Residents: 2
of Bedrooms: 2
of Bathrooms: 1
Size: 52.8m²
Size per Resident: 26.4m²
Location: West Village, Manhattan
Rent-to-Income: 20%
Private Outdoor Space: -
Semi-Priv. Outdoor Space: -

Dean & Sally

Residents: 2
of Bedrooms: 1
of Bathrooms: 1
Size: 53.7m²
Size per Resident: 26.85m²
Location: Upper East Side, Manhattan
Rent-to-Income: 20%
Private Outdoor Space: -
Semi-Priv. Outdoor Space: -

Sean

of Residents: 2
of Bedrooms: 2
of Bathrooms: 1
Size: 41.0m²
Size per Resident: 20.5m²
Location: Upper East Side, Manhattan
Rent-to-Income: 25%
Private Outdoor Space: -
Semi-Priv. Outdoor Space: -

Jesse

Residents: 2
of Bedrooms: 1
of Bathrooms: 1
Size: 60.3m²
Size per Resident: 30.15m²
Location: Bushwick, Brooklyn
Rent-to-Income: 40%
Private Outdoor Space: -
Semi-Priv. Outdoor Space: -

James

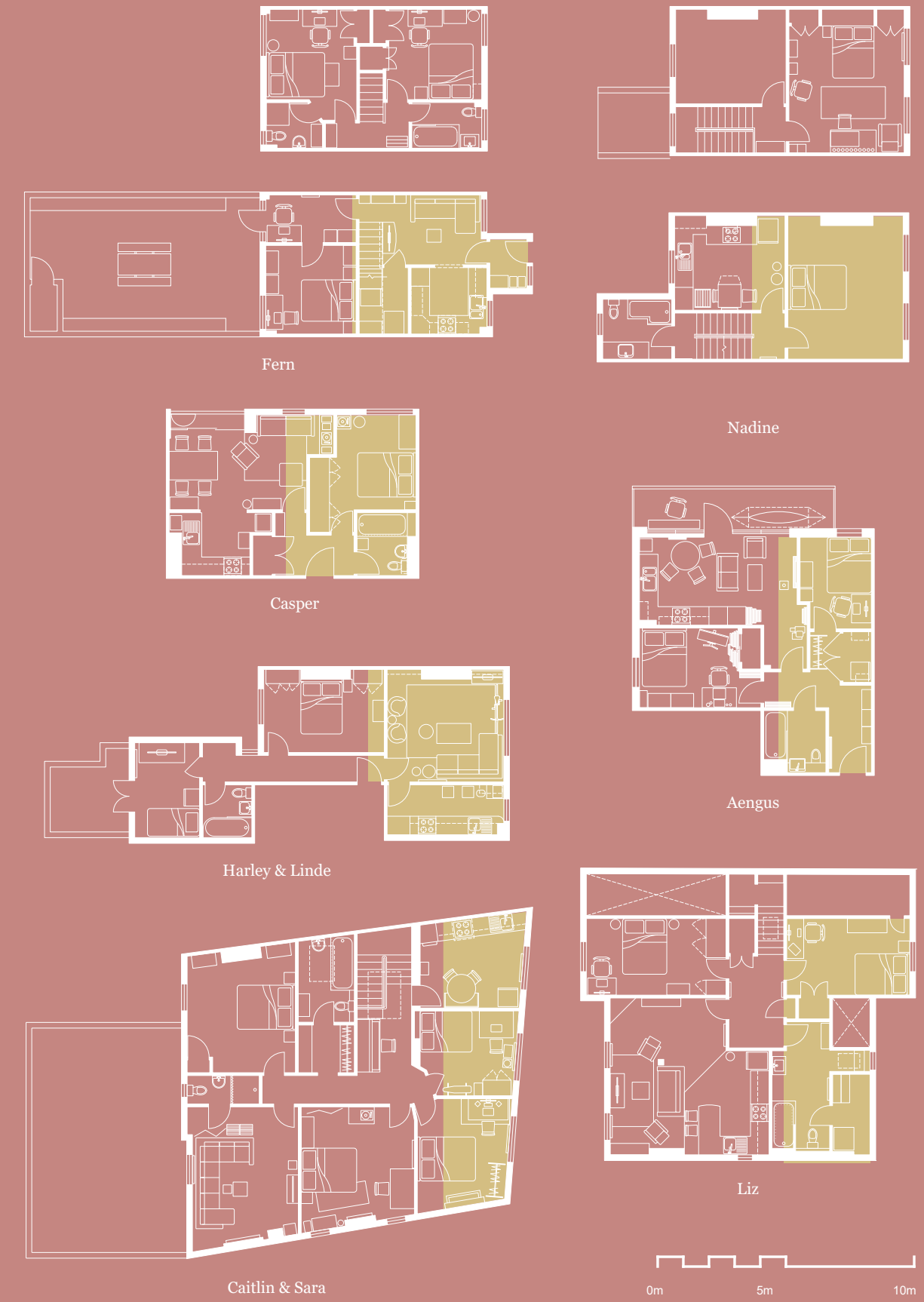
Residents: 1
of Bedrooms: 1
of Bathrooms: 1
Size: 57.5m²
Size per Resident: 57.5m²
Location: Midtown West, Manhattan
Rent-to-Income: 50%
Private Outdoor Space: -
Semi-Priv. Outdoor Space: -

Zoe

Residents: 2
of Bedrooms: 2
of Bathrooms: 1
Size: 57.5m²
Size per Resident: 28.75m²
Location: Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn
Rent-to-Income: 45%
Private Outdoor Space: -
Semi-Priv. Outdoor Space: -

Isabel

Residents: 1
of Bedrooms: 1
of Bathrooms: 1
Size: 25.1m²
Size per Resident: 25.1m²
Location: Lower East Side, Manhattan
Rent-to-Income: 35%
Private Outdoor Space: -
Semi-Priv. Outdoor Space: -



25m² (Average Individual Affordable Floor Area)

Fig. 2.5 London dwellings plans with highlighted average per-occupant area as depicted by research results.

Fern

Residents: 3
of Bedrooms: 2
of Bathrooms: 2
Size: 74.0m²
Size per Resident: 24.7m²
Location: Battersea, Zone 2
Rent-to-Income: 50%
Private Outdoor Space: 35.6m²
Semi-Priv. Outdoor Space: -

Nadine

Residents: 3
of Bedrooms: 2
of Bathrooms: 1
Size: 87.4m²
Size per Resident: 29.1m²
Location: Stoke Newington, Zone 2
Rent-to-Income: 55%
Private Outdoor Space: 5.3m²
Semi-Priv. Outdoor Space: -

Casper

Residents: 2
of Bedrooms: 1
of Bathrooms: 1
Size: 44.6m²
Size per Resident: 22.3m²
Location: Drayton Park, Zone 2
Rent-to-Income: 35%
Private Outdoor Space: 1.3m²
Semi-Priv. Outdoor Space: -

Aengus

Residents: 3
of Bedrooms: 2
of Bathrooms: 1
Size: 54.7m²
Size per Resident: 18.2m²
Location: Angel, Zone 1
Rent-to-Income: 35%
Private Outdoor Space: 11.0m²
Semi-Priv. Outdoor Space: 189.8m²

Harley & Linde

Residents: 3
of Bedrooms: 1
of Bathrooms: 1
Size: 51.9m²
Size per Resident: 17.3m²
Location: Highgate, Zone 2/3
Rent-to-Income: 25%
Private Outdoor Space: 6.8m²
Semi-Priv. Outdoor Space: -

Liz

Residents: 2
of Bedrooms: 2
of Bathrooms: 1
Size: 84.2m²
Size per Resident: 42.1m²
Location: Tooting Bec, Zone 3
Rent-to-Income: 35%
Private Outdoor Space: -
Semi-Priv. Outdoor Space: 140.9m²

Caitlin & Sara (& 2 house mates)

Residents: 4
of Bedrooms: 4
of Bathrooms: 2
Size: 111.7m²
Size per Resident: 27.9m²
Location: Sydenham, Zone 3
Rent-to-Income: 50%
Private Outdoor Space: 42.4m²
Semi-Priv. Outdoor Space: No

The Porosity of Domestic & Urban Practices

18 Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (University of California Press, 1999).

19 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translation by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

20 Blunt and Sheringham, 'Home-City Geographies: Urban Dwelling and Mobility', *Process in Human Geography*

21 Michel De Certeau, 'Chapter IX: Spatial Stories', in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translation by Steven Rendall (University of California Press, 1988).

22 Amy Catania Kulpur, 'Private House, Public House: Victor Horta's Ubiquitous Domesticity', in *Intimate Metropolis: Urban Subjects in the Modern City*, edited by Vittoria Di Palma, Diana Periton, and Marina Lathouri (London: Routledge, 2009), 110–131.

The separation of the dwelling and the city evolved as a response to the modern city, which painted a picture of the urban sphere as an unruly juxtaposition to the calmness of domestic space.¹⁸ Many scholars who engage with this perception of two separate realms reference Walter Benjamin's notion of the home as the isolated interior, where city and home life are separated as places of exchange and seclusion respectively.¹⁹ This ideology developed a tendency to conceptualise domestic interiors as stand-alone spaces, removed from the wider context of the city as spaces for privacy and seclusion. While it is clear through the articulation of material boundaries that the dwelling and the city host spaces which are separate and distinct, the demarcations between the domestic and the urban, or otherwise, the private and the public, are blurred. It is important to note the interplay between these entities, brought to life by the daily practices of those who dwell between them.²⁰

In "The Practice of Everyday Life", Michel De Certeau outlines the ways in which cities are organised by their occupants through the forming of personal narratives and even the simple act of walking.²¹ Through his writing, he explains that places only become spaces through the actions of the narrative figures who animate them. Therefore, places such as the dwelling and the city are defined not by their scale or built form, but rather by the practices which populate them. These spaces become connected and are not bound as strict theatres for either domestic or urban activities. There are both physical and immaterial connections that manifest as a result of the domestication of urban space and conversely the urbanisation of domestic space.

Through this overlap, there has been an increasing uptake of the domestic in otherwise public spaces which create microcosms of home within the larger fabric of the city; restaurants, parks, museums, department stores, cafes, etc.²² Otherwise domestic activities find themselves taking place in urban spaces; resting, eating, spending time with loved ones, and finding seclusion for intimate interactions. The urban infiltrates the dwelling in a similar manner and is especially prevalent in shared homes where there is an added threshold between the personal private (the bedroom) and the semi-private/public spaces (the living room, dining room, kitchen, reception, etc). Furthermore, the intertwining of work and domesticity is another aspect of urban life which has been escalated by the pandemic. This element of domestic urbanisation punctures even the most intimate and private space of the bedroom and demonstrates the complete porosity of public and private.

Looking inward at the domestic interior, spaces are defined by the objects they house and the stories that unfold within them that are structured by those same artefacts. The items kept and curated by the individual are invaluable expressions of identity and their recurring experience of home. Objects are also important displays of the self which are a negotiation between the shared and secluded self that is shared with those who enter the home. However, the rented dwelling strips its residents of the autonomy to realise this intimate form of self-expression. In the 2022 iteration of the IKEA “Life at Home” report, people were asked if they felt that their home was a reflection of their identity and personality, to which only 42% of renting respondents agreed with the sentiment. Many people cited that having items they bought themselves, space for their needs and interests, and living with people they liked, were key factors in managing their connection to their dwelling space.²³

Many spaces have been redefined as a result of the new ways of living that the modern city and its associated technologies impose on the dwelling. The kitchen no longer functions as much as a place for cooking then it does as a place for heating or assembling pre-ordered parts from various home-delivery services; the living room is not a separate seating area confined within the dwelling, and it spills out to the public more than it exists in the private; and the bedroom has suffered the most of all, becoming a place of rest, multi-media leisure, and work.²⁴ The bedroom, and the bed specifically, has become the epicentre of urban domestic life around which all else radiates and other than it, nothing else is guaranteed.²⁵

²³ IKEA, ‘Life at Home Report 2022 – Make Yourself at Home’, accessed 9 October 2023, <https://www.ikea.com/ca/en/life-at-home/highlights-of-life-at-home-report-2022-pubebadd6do>.

²⁴ Martella and Enia, “The Domestic City,” in *The Architect and the City*.

²⁵ Jack Self, Shumi Bose, and Finn Williams, *Home Economics: Five New Models for Domestic Life* (London: The Spaces, n.d.).



Fig. 2.6 Home beyond the dwelling.

This Lower East Side bar provides an extension to Isabel's home by providing lounging and social space for her and her network. Activities often flow freely between these types spaces and her dwelling.

Isabel's Story

City:
New York
 Neighbourhood:
**Lower East Side,
 Manhattan**
 Dwelling Size:
25.1m²
 Rent-to-Income:
35%

**Isabel, 26, Registered
 Nurse / Graduate Student**

Isabel moved to her studio on the Lower East Side to more closely align her dwelling with her ideal home. In her previous apartment, in Brooklyn, she felt that her daily routines, socialisation, and ability to recharge within her space were compromised. Since beginning her sublet, she has felt more at home, she is near to the people and places where and with whom she wants to spend her time.

“I like this neighbourhood a lot. Where I hang out is very close by so it's very walkable for me. Also, the subway lines that are nearby take me to the places that I need to go. It's all very convenient.”

I was in Bedside, Brooklyn before, I didn't really like that area at all. If I had a lot of friends there, then it probably would have been fine, but my social circle is here on the Lower East Side. It's really annoying to have to take a 30-minute transit to get to where your friends are and then take a 30-minute Uber home at the end of the night and it costs \$50.”

Isabel's sublet has left her dwelling at the mercy of several unknowns. She lives with the furniture and much of the clothes and other articles left behind by the previous resident and landlord. She lacks the autonomy and stability to invest time or money into structuring and curating a home that reflects her identity. Her transience and spatial limitations are reflected in her daily practices and lack of self-expression within her dwelling.

"There's a bunch of stuff the girl I'm subletting from left, under the bed and on top of the wardrobe. The girl who used to live here also left Taco behind and she has not been messaging me about him. I have no idea what's going to happen to him if I can't keep this apartment. Most things were already here when I moved in. When the last girl moved in here a lot of the stuff was here already then, so I guess the person who owns the building owns it. I don't like to look a gift horse in the mouth, I'm not asking too many questions.

I don't really like the high table. I like the bar table idea but I'd rather have something a bit sturdier and with different chairs. I've always wanted a sectional couch but I don't really think it would fit. I also don't know if I can get rid of this furniture because I don't know who it belongs to.

I am slowly trying to convert this apartment with things I like, though. I'd like to add some girly touches, it's a bit earthy for me. I'd like to buy a pink throw to match the wine glasses I recently bought. I have these Barbie paintings at my parent's house that I'd love to bring here, and I also would love to have some prints made of romance novel cover art and some vintage celebrity photos of people like Patty Boyd and Jane Birkin. There's no point in me stressing over the decor that much until I know if I'll be taking over the lease."

The restricted size of her 25m² studio apartment affects the occupation of space within it. Isabel lives alone in a dwelling with no partitions, thus the physical boundaries which define the 'private' space she occupies from the 'public' interfaces of the home are vastly different from a one-bedroom or shared apartment. The proximity of her dwelling to the central hub which connects her social circle also has a huge impact on these thresholds.

"I like that the apartment is small because I'm just one person. It's easier to tidy up and it helps me keep control over how much stuff I have, I get rid of things as they pile up. My biggest hobby would be crochet, I have a lot of yarn and tools for that under my bed. I also like to do makeup and collect records, so those things have their own space. I read a lot too, mostly on my kindle - I do that in my bed mostly.

There's only a half kitchen in the apartment, I only have two burners and there's no oven and it's a smaller-sized fridge. I order all my groceries to the house and I order food out. The food comes already prepared and I just heat it up. I do that for work and everything, that's my version of meal prep. I guess that would probably be a big turnoff for you if you're more into cooking. It suits my vibe at this current stage of my life.

If you go in the hallway you can hear what's going on in the other apartment but once you're in here you can't hear anything at all. The curtains are always open, I don't really mind but I can't close them either because they're tied up out of reach.

I'm so close to all my friends and a lot of them will come here after a night out too, I have people over a couple of times a week. Normally 3-5 people come over for drinks after the bar. When people come over the bed doubles as a second couch. I do wish I had a balcony because when people come over and they want to smoke it's really annoying. They have to go downstairs, but sometimes if I have one friend over I'll let them smoke in the bathroom but I regret it because it smells afterwards, I just put the fan on.

People sometimes stay over, I have friends that'll crash in the bed with me or on the couch. My friends from college came to visit recently, 6 of them, one girl slept on the couch, one girl slept in the bed with me, three of them slept on the floor in the living room, they brought camping pads, and one girl slept on the kitchen floor because she's allergic to cats and didn't want to sleep on the carpet."



Fig. 2.7 Isabel's Dwelling, part 1.
The bedroom and living room are one. Work, rest, leisure and social practices unfold across this space.



Fig. 2.8 Isabel's Dwelling, part 2.
The reimagined kitchen & dining - the sofa is the primary dining space and kitchen used only to heat up meals.

The squeezing of domestic functions through the constrained dwelling area amplifies the connection to the city. The overflow of domestic practices into urban space articulates the porosity between the two realms through the resident's movements. The social connections which are the cornerstone of Isabel's life in the city exemplify this connection across many theatres of interaction. The spilling of even mundane tasks such as doing laundry or walking between stores and other businesses in the area also enhances this connection.

"I always work night shifts, 7pm-7am. On my days off I sleep in because I go to bed late, I'll potter around the house, if I have an errand to run I'll do it, I'll eat, do some school work, then around 11 I'll go out with friends. A lot of the people I know get off work around 1 or 2am, at bars, so I come around near the end of their shift and we'll just go out after that.

I get all my groceries delivered so I don't go to the grocery store. I have a gym membership that I don't really use and am going to cancel. There's a laundromat 2 blocks down that I drop my laundry off at and they do my laundry for me."

Isabel's experience of living in her compact studio apartment on the Lower East Side is a testament to her adaptability and resourcefulness. While the limited space has forced her to make some compromises, such as in the kitchen and storage, it hasn't restricted her ability to carry out her daily routines. In fact, she has embraced the advantages of a smaller space and integrated resources accessible because of her central city location in order to manage the restrictions on her dwelling space. She is able to both maximise her living space and take advantage of her ideal proximities which balance out the negative aspects of small city living for Isabel. However, her living situation remains uncertain, and the lack of stability associated with renting and subletting has limited her ability to personalize her space and adapt or plan her living situation freely.

Chapter Conclusion

The commodification of dwelling space, exacerbated by the global housing crisis, has significantly impacted the size of affordable units in metropolitan cities including New York and London. The struggle to find affordable housing has forced urban dwellers to adapt and redefine their concepts of home. Access to the city and its central locations has become a luxury for the privileged few, while others are pushed further away from the urban core in search of affordability. The pricing dynamics of the rental market highlight the vulnerability of urban dwellers to economic forces.

The restricted dwelling space within city rentals has reshaped the physical aspects of home. The average apartment size in cities like New York and London has remained relatively small, while the cost of living continues to rise. Personal narratives and visual media have offered glimpses into the spatial realities of city living, showcasing the compromises and adaptability of urban dwellers.

The result is the dissolution of the traditional separation of domestic and urban spaces. The home extends beyond the physical boundaries of the dwelling, encompassing parts of the neighbourhood and even the entire city. This modern concept of the home is manifested in the changing nature of spaces within the dwelling.

Chapter 3: Unpacking the Cost of Urban Life

The cost of the city dwelling, already skyrocketed by its rigorous monetisation, is further manipulated by various other associated factors. Relative proximities, instigators of economic downturn such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and the disproportionately slow rise of wages alongside inflation and increasing cost of living. Each of these elements puts pressure on housing costs, shattering affordability and forcing people away from central dwellings.

Through the intricate relationship between affordability and a dwelling's relative location within the city, important proximities play a significant role in the fabrication of a 'home'. Factors such as access to transportation, amenities, and green space impact the desirability of each dwelling (and therefore the cost, typically) and the ability of the city to provide a supplement to the home. Unequal concentrations of wealth in more central city areas mean most people will not be able to afford central dwellings readily and thus will rely greatly on their surrounding neighbourhood.

With the large-scale migration away from cities as a result of COVID-19, many global cities were left vacant for significant periods from 2020, showing signs of rebound in 2022. Since restrictions have been lifted in the past year, many people have come rushing back to the city, causing a rapid rise in housing rental costs and other costs of living, the current conditions of the city exist largely as a result of the post-pandemic landscape. The rental market has become increasingly volatile as a result of post-COVID increases, which followed a long period of COVID-related rental deals. The financial implications of the pandemic have created a ripple effect which continues to influence the home in the metropolis.

The cost of housing has been increasing at an exponentially faster rate than wages in their respective localities over the past several decades. When paired with inflation, the cost of goods like food, and the high price tag attached to many social interactions, the cost of living in the city has become an unwieldy beast. This increasing financial burden has caused a wave of widespread displacement, and migration further from city centres in response to inordinate post-COVID rent increases.

The current conditions of city living are shaped by a convergence of economic trends, the pandemic aftermath, and the evolving relationship between affordability and proximities among urban spaces. These patterns control who can afford the city, the regular migrations which result from this rising unaffordability, and the homemaking practices between residents and the city

Proximities

¹ RentHop, 'A 10 Minute Walk Could Be Worth 10% Off Your Rent', 2 August 2023, <https://www.renthop.com/studies/nyc/nyc-rents-by-subway-proximity>.

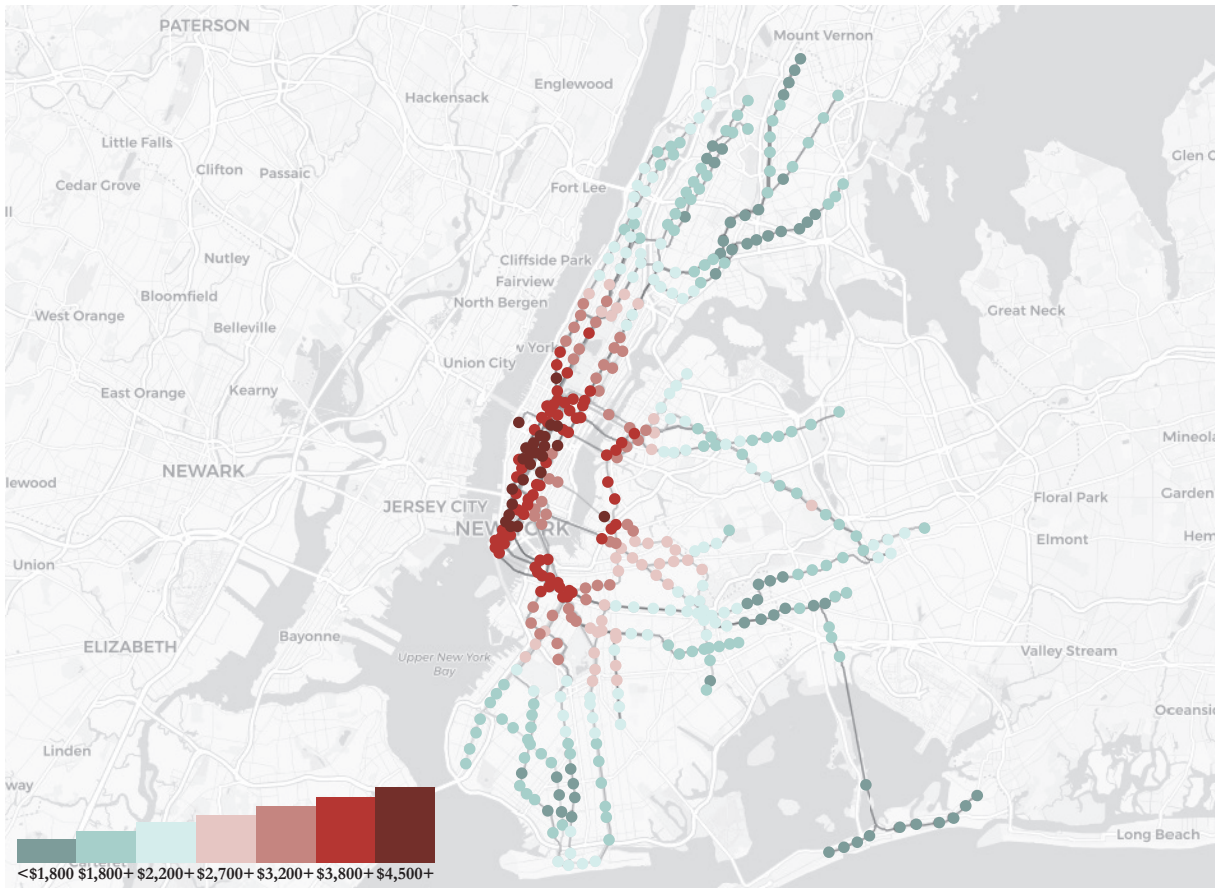
² Jason Allen, 'The London Underground Rent Map: Where You Can't Afford to Live, by Stop', *Thrillist*, accessed 11 April 2023, <https://www.thrillist.com/lifestyle/london/london-underground-rent-map>.

There is an overarching relationship between the cost of rent and the centrality of a dwelling's location in the city, meaning that there are significant cost implications associated with dwelling in central zones and/or in an area which is easily connected to central neighbourhoods by transportation, particularly those residences which are proximate to train or subway stations.

Within New York, Manhattan has always been the central point of the city, often referenced synonymously with New York in film and other media. It is the city's focal point for business, tourism, and arts, however, Brooklyn has begun to compete with Manhattan in terms of preferable living space, having an uptake in residents early on because of its relative location and easy access to the city life of Manhattan. Brooklyn has since developed its own welcoming urban cityscape and along with the widespread gentrification of the area, the unsurprising spike in housing costs followed. The monetary impact of a dwelling's centrality has been quantified in New York in terms of one's proximity to the nearest subway station. Dwellings located within a 10-minute walk of a subway station in New York are reported to induce a 10% premium on the cost of rent compared to similar units in the same neighbourhoods.¹

In London, which is much less defined by its land boundaries, one's location in the city is defined by relevant transport zones above all else. Thus, the connection between transit links and access to the city is obvious from the outset. The city's footprint is twice that of New York and as a result, people are further separated from other parts of the city and the people who live there. Zone 1 encompasses much of the city's business and tourist hubs and is widely recognised as the centre of London, with Zones 2 and 3 serving as preferable inner residential zones for city dwellers who wish to have easy access to central London.²

Among participant interviews, results reflected that residents in New York were much closer to subway stations than those in London. This result was likely attributed to both the geographical scale differences between the two cities putting larger gaps between transit stations and the higher price tag on apartments among New York participants, a reflection of differing housing markets and financial diversity across participants. Among the group of residents in New York, each individual dwelling was a 1-7 minute walk away from a metro station, versus the residents in London who were 5-18 minutes away from their nearest station. People in London were much more likely to use the buses, the cost of using the bus in London is much lower than the cost of using the tube, making them a more affordable option.



Participants also outlined other adjacencies that contributed to the perceived value of their dwellings, either through their presence or absence in their own configurations. Parks and green space were noted repeatedly, even among those who had access to hardscape private outdoor space. Easy access to places of employment was another primary concern among residents and often swayed the process of searching for accommodation from the get-go. With the uprise of widespread remote-working arrangements, proximity to workplaces has an even deeper impact on the dwelling; an inconvenient commute is regularly presented in the greater occupation of working space within the dwelling. Furthermore, the presence of local cafes and restaurants played a significant role in daily routines and a sense of home through both social and solitary expansions of homeplaces.

These proximities affect the people who exist within them in a complex way. There is a relationship between the cost of each dwelling based on its centrality and vicinity to nearby transit stations and other amenities, the spaces that each individual can afford, and the way that each person makes a home within the city at the intersection of affordability and location.

The Price of Access to the City

3 Alan Lightfeldt, 'Bright Lights, Big Rent Burden: Understanding New York City's Rent Affordability Problem', *StreetEasy*, 2 March 2015, <https://streeteasy.com/blog/new-york-city-rent-affordability/>.

4 PropertyClubTeam, '40x Rent Rule NYC', *PropertyClub*, 13 January 2023, <https://propertyclub.nyc/article/40x-rent-rule-nyc>.

5 Eric Reed, 'The Average Salary in New York City', 31 August 2022, <https://smartertasset.com/retirement/average-salary-in-nyc>.

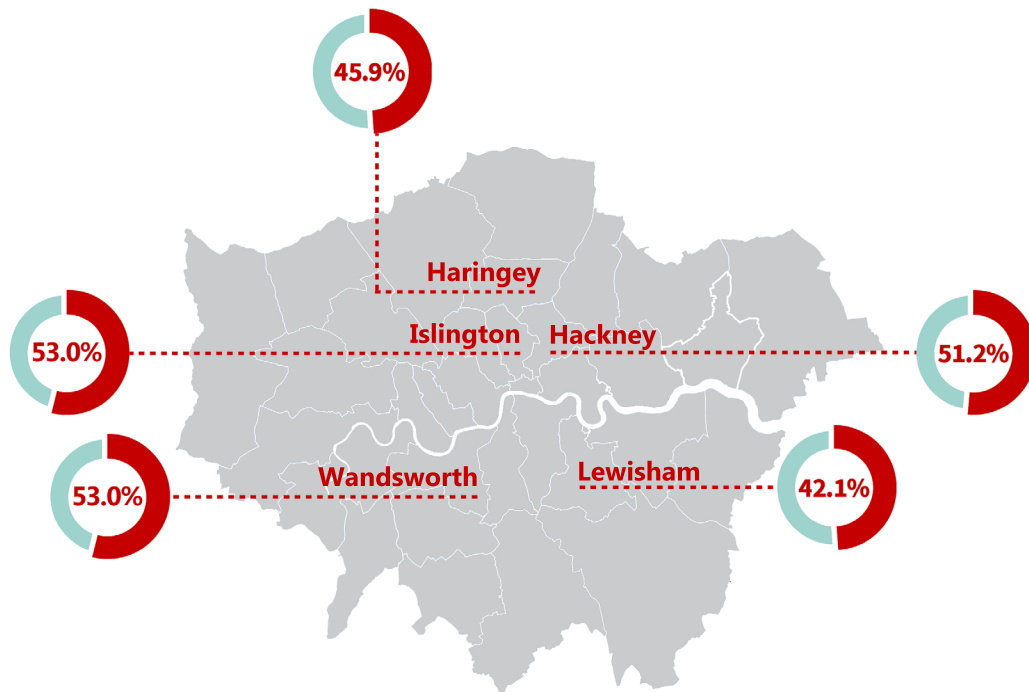
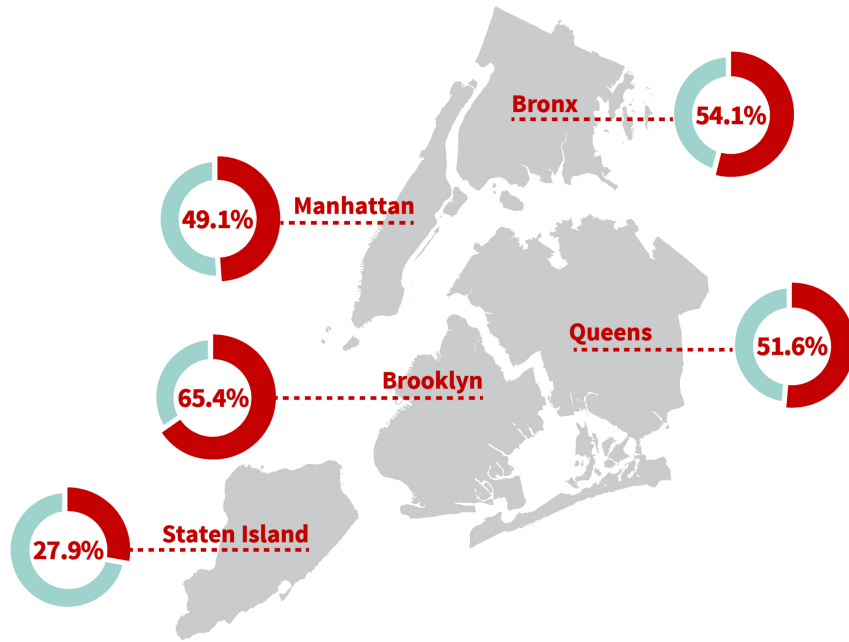
6 RentHop, 'Average Rent in New York, NY | New York, NY Rent Costs', accessed 11 April 2023, <https://www.renthop.com/average-rent-in/new-york-ny>.

7 Jason Allen, 'The London Underground Rent Map: Where You Can't Afford to Live, by Stop', *Thrillist*.

Economic experts have defined that in order for one's living costs to be considered affordable, they should be spending a maximum of 30 per cent of their income on housing so that the majority of their income can be allocated to other living expenses with some percentage allocated for savings and daily spending. This has not been the case in metropolitan cities, including New York and London, where the median cost of rent has constantly been reported to be over 50% of the median salaries.³ These cities have shown stagnant income growth in comparison to increases in the cost of living, which contributes to the growing inequity in housing availability. The stark difference in housing equality is shown when we examine the ratio of income to rent medians in central city areas. Areas with the highest median rents in New York City accounted for less than half of the median income in those areas, highlighting the wealth disparity in the city above all else.

In New York, landlords have implemented rules which restrict who can rent out their properties based on income, imposing restrictions on tenants who must earn 40 times the monthly rent in annual income in order to be eligible.⁴ With the median income in the city being \$67,000 USD⁵ that would suggest a median rent of \$1,675 USD to match the population, however, the median rent has exceeded \$3,000 USD per month.⁶ By comparison, the average income for Londoners is £41,000 and the average cost of rent in London is currently £26,316 annually, with the typical Londoner spending about half of their income on housing. The variance can be observed across both cities, with the median rent in New York's central Manhattan areas sitting at \$4,400 and the median rent for similar units in London's Zone 1 being over £2,100.⁷

When comparing these numbers to the median incomes in their respective cities, and furthermore the New York 40x rule, it is obvious that residents of these central locations will likely be paying more than 50% of their wages towards rent in the city or that the primary occupants of these areas will be making wages much higher than the median. It is much more likely that most people are finding ways to mitigate these costs such as moving further from central zones and living in multiple-bedroom homes to reduce financial loads on the individual.



Jesse's Story

City:

New York

Neighbourhood:

Bushwick, Brooklyn

Dwelling Size:

60.3m²

Rent-to-Income:

40%

Relationships:

Partners

Jesse, 28,

Booking Agent - Music

Daniella, 29, Booking Agent -

Comedy

Jesse moved to his Bushwick apartment when he returned to the city following COVID, in June 2021. He was drawn to the area for its proximity to work, what he considered a reasonable deal on rent for the quality of space he was awarded, and the dwelling's close access to a subway station. He notes the value of his apartment's location as well as the fast-paced nature of the rental market he had to endure in order to secure it.

"This block we're on is a really industrial area. There are a lot of garages that are manufacturing wood or certain kinds of metals, a lot more so than there are apartments. It's loud but there's not a lot of people in this area.

Part of the reason I live in this area specifically is because I work in entertainment, in music, and this is where a lot of music venues are. I'm within walking distance of six or seven popular venues, which helps me for work.

I picked this place because it's a nice apartment. The area is good for my work as I said. It's spacious, it's near the subway, and we got a decent deal on the spot. When you're looking for apartments in New York you need to decide quickly. I called the broker that I got this with the night that I saw it, I had to decide right on the spot. Most places that are on the market for rent get seized up in a couple of days if they're nice. That's just a demand thing."



Jesse's Home,
relevant proxim-
ities.

♪ MUSIC VENUES

Like the majority of people in central New York, Jesse's dwelling does not have any access to private outdoor space. This is exacerbated by the fact that their local neighbourhood is an industrial area with little greenery. Jesse has tried to make up for this by keeping several plants within the home, however ultimately this lack of outdoor space will likely push the couple to move to neighbouring parts of Brooklyn where local parks and green space are abundant.

"I work about 10 hours a day so having quality interior space is very important to me. I work fully remotely myself. Mondays and Fridays we'll usually both be here. If I was only here in the morning and the evening I would probably trade off some interior space to have private outdoor space."

When I moved into this apartment, there were a lot of places to rent, and there were a lot of deals. I got my first month and a half of rent-free here. That was very common. Some places got 2 to 6 months of free rent, just as an incentive to get people back into the city. Once a lot of people started coming back, everyone started coming. From there rent prices went way up and now you can't find places to rent.

We want to move away from here, out of this place for several reasons. We're not in a huge rush to move but let's say we had to move out at the end of the month then it would be a little difficult to find the right spot, in the right location. As for why we might want to move, I mentioned that this is a pretty industrial area; I really prefer trees, or at least more trees than there are here. I'd say there are probably 3 trees on the entire block. It makes a difference when you walk outside three or four times a day. That's especially true when you work from home. The plants help, that's why I've got so many plants here."

Jesse articulates the desire of many to live in New York, and why people are willing to pay a high cost, evidently both monetary as well as spatial, in order to gain access to the city.

“New York City is generally a rich person’s city. Just to throw out a number, I’d say you need to be in the top 10% in earnings to live in a way that any person would say is comfortable. I’m not very wealthy but I think I make above the median income and I struggle to be able to live here and I do not live an extravagant life. You pay to be in a special place that can’t be replicated in many other places. It’s a unique place to live, and there’s a lot of demand, so the people who control what the prices are have a lot of leverage because of that demand. That’s the situation. I’m willing to pay for it because I enjoy it. I don’t need to sell you on New York City because you and everyone else already know about this city, a lot of people want to live here. There are millions of people who want to live in Manhattan or close to Manhattan and they’re willing to pay a premium to do that. As a result, they’ll also pay a premium for their eggs and a pair of jeans and coffee”

Jesse’s observations underline the allure of the city, where the cost of living is high, but the appeal is undeniable. He acknowledges that the city is a place which many seek to live in and are willing to pay a premium for the unique experience it offers, these features attract and grab hold of people like Jesse and many others who become part of the larger fabric of the city and the practitioners of daily urban life.

The COVID Exodus & Subsequent Rent Influx

8 Lane Brown, 'New Yorkers Never Came "Flooding Back." Why Did Rents Go Up So Much?', *Curbed*, 27 January 2023, <https://www.curbed.com/2023/01/nyc-real-estate-covid-more-apartments-higher-rent.html>.

The shockwave caused by the recent pandemic has had lasting impacts on the housing and rental markets in cities that are deeply intertwined with the current financial and spatial landscapes. Early in 2020, when many businesses turned to fully remote modes of working and most people were worried about the unknowns the virus had in store, there was a mass exodus from city centres. Residents could not see the value of paying such high rent prices and making various spatial sacrifices at a time when they were not required to be available in person for the jobs they had come to cities to work as well as the loss of access to amenities and entertainment.⁸

Landlords began to panic and suddenly COVID deals began cropping up all over cities in an attempt to keep people in and draw others back to the city. People were thrilled to see rents drop and housing become more affordable, however shortlived that period lasted. Many people who stayed in the city moved to places that better suited them during the pandemic while there were many cheaper options available. Some people received a few months of rent for free, while others said that rent was reduced for periods up to two-year contracts. Those who came back to the city early enough were able to jump in on these deals and slowly landlords and property managers were able to breathe a sigh of relief as restrictions were released and people began migrating back into cities. The power returned to property owners and they began to 'make up for lost time'. Landlords who were once coaxing tenants to return suddenly regained power in early 2022. Potential occupants were lining up for viewings and bidding above asking prices became a commonplace tactic required to secure housing. This sudden flood of demand on the rental market inevitably spiked the cost of rental dwellings in the city, with the median rent in Manhattan spiking to \$4,000 USD per month for the first time.⁹

When the time came for contract renewal, many people were shocked to see the prices that landlords were requesting from them to stay in their apartments. Many of those who managed to sign onto COVID deals prior to the spike have been receiving letters of renewal demanding rent increases reflective of the current market which had appreciated an average of 33% in New York¹⁰ and 30% in London.¹¹ There was a wide range of responses to these exaggerated rent requests among participants of this study. Sean in New York and Aengus in London both decided to refuse or ignore landlords in hopes that they could avoid the rise in prices and were rewarded for their effort, maintaining their rent while managing to avoid moving. Some were not as lucky, being priced out of the places that they had been renting and moving further afield, like Sara and Caitlin and the rest of their housemates, as well as Liz and her flatmate in London. Most

people saw this rise as unavoidable and thought that by comparison to other costs, and to the price increases they had seen their peers incur, they had gotten off easy and decided to stay put, accepting the increases.

The sudden lack of supply has caused speculation given that many of the issues people had left the cities to escape were still prevalent and return-to-office plans were slow to execute. Among many sources reporting the ‘geyser’ of people returning to New York, other data showed that occupation rates had not returned to pre-COVID levels.¹² A practice known as “warehousing” was brought to public attention; a monetisation strategy which works on the basis of creating a false sense of housing supply scarcity in order to drive up rental value.¹³ This has been found to be linked to an algorithm-based software that has been used to price tens of thousands of apartments and allows property managers to increase the number of unoccupied units while also growing profit margins.¹⁴ This system has been implemented across several countries, including the US and UK, and discourages interpersonal negotiations between landlords and tenants; dehumanising the process of providing housing while the company leaders boast their contributions to the growing issues of housing affordability.

With a combination of misrepresented housing vacancy rates and the associated control of housing supply, a lack of sufficient affordable development, and a rapid influx of people moving back to global cities, the ‘post-pandemic’ landscape has paved the way for unprecedented issues of housing affordability.

Location and access to transport are just some of the factors which sway the cost of living in the big cities, without also taking into consideration transportation costs, food and other living expenses, and the local amenities which residents rely on. The pandemic has left in its wake an influx of living costs alongside a downward trajectory of wage increases, creating hostile living conditions for those in mid-low income positions.

⁹ Deanna Garcia, ‘Manhattan Median Rent Hits \$4,000 for the First Time’, 9 June 2022, <https://ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2022/06/09/manhattan-median-rent-hits-4-000-for-the-first-time--douglas-elliman-reports>.

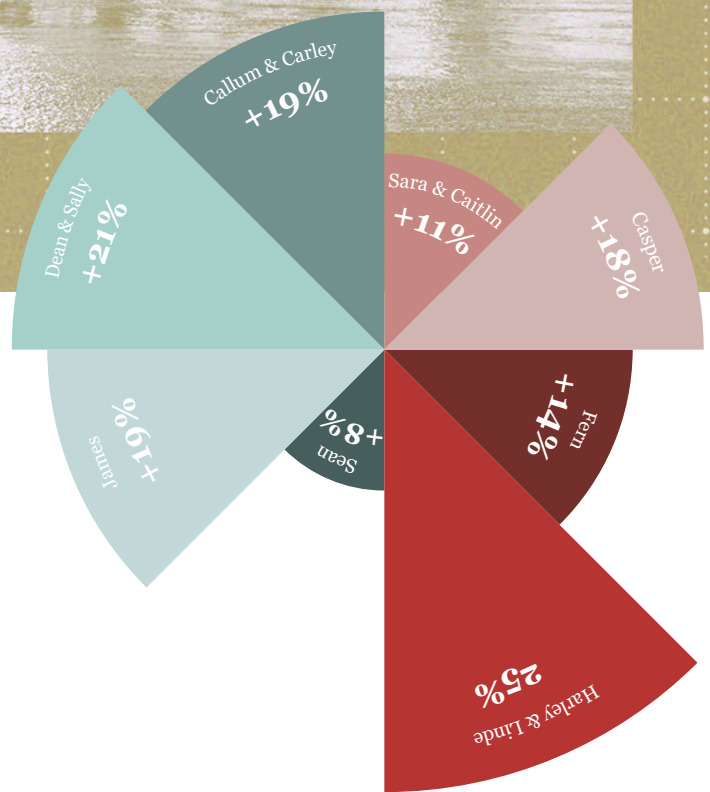
¹⁰ Mihir Zaveri, ‘As NYC Rent Prices Surge, Those Who Scored Pandemic Deals Face Sticker Shock’, The New York Times, accessed 6 October 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/08/realestate/nyc-rent-cost.html>.

¹¹ Jack Sidders and Lucy White, ‘UK Rents Surge at Record Pace as Home Sellers Lift Asking Prices’ *BNN Bloomberg*, BNN, 17 September 2023, <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/uk-rents-surge-at-record-pace-as-home-sellers-lift-asking-prices-1.1972652>.

¹² Suhail Bhat, ‘NYC’s Population Plummeted During Peak COVID – And It’s Still Likely Shrinking’, *The City*, 31 May 2022, <https://www.thecity.nyc/2022/5/31/23145072/nycs-population-plummeted-during-peak-covid-and-its-still-likely-shrinking>.

¹³ Brown, ‘New Yorkers Never Came “Flooding Back.” Why Did Rents Go Up So Much?’, *Curbed*.

¹⁴ Heather Vogell, ‘Rent Going Up? One Company’s Algorithm Could Be Why.’, *ProPublica*, 15 October 2022, <https://www.propublica.org/article/yieldstar-rent-increase-realpage-rent>.



Callum & Carley's

Carley and Callum moved to New York about a year before cities across the globe began implementing the strict lockdowns that would drive the exodus and subsequent acceleration of the housing affordability crisis. They, among many others, left the city in 2020 to be closer to loved ones and away from their cramped city apartments.

“My old apartment was a one-bedroom, fifth-floor walk-up. My bedroom wasn't a bedroom. It was a bed-room because I had a queen-sized bed that was wall-to-wall-to-wall, and the only space was the door to enter.” -Carley

“I had two roommates. I would say it was smaller than this, it didn't have a living room but it did have a dining table. The kitchen was about the same size. They slipped in a third bedroom instead of having a living room... I was paying half of my income on rent. We left the city in March 2020. I went down to Virginia where my parents live.” -Callum

“I went back to Canada.” -Carley

“When we both came back, we came to view this apartment for the first time. Every other apartment we saw was way smaller for the same price. This was the first COVID deal that came out.” -Callum

“We didn't have to go into work and no one was going into the office when we came back. We probably could have not paid rent at that time. I still had an apartment and all my stuff was there so I had to pay rent. So I never got a period of not paying rent even though I wasn't living here.” -Carley

City:
New York
Neighbourhood:
West Village, Manhattan
Dwelling Size:
60.3m²
Post-COVID Rent Increase:
20%
Relationships:
Friends/Co-workers

Callum, 27,
Trader at a Bank

Carley, 30,
Trader at a Bank

Carley made the point that the reason most people come to the city is for work. People make compromises on living space to be able to advance their careers, and when COVID allowed people to move out to places where they could have both ample living space and work remotely for jobs that they would otherwise have to make spatial and financial compromises for, a lot of people didn't come back.

“I was in the city for just under a year before I left. I worked really hard during that first year to make friends and to meet people. Every single person that I had connected with pre-COVID, who wasn't a work-related friend, didn't come back to the city. That was across industries. I also have a friend whose brother lives here, and when I first moved here, we went on a big trip with him and a bunch of his friends who are all from New York. A lot of them were native New Yorkers, and they preached that they would never leave the city. During COVID a lot of them went and bought country homes. Someone moved to Montana, someone moved to deep upstate New York - their jobs went remote, so why not have more space?” -Carley

For Callum and Carley, a return to mostly in-person work schedules was required by their company and so they were happy to take advantage of the opportunity to snap up a COVID deal, allowing the two of them to move in together and afford a higher quality space. They like their apartment, especially when comparing it to the places where they were each living before, but following the return of many to the city, landlords began to inflict severe rent increases. The pair was not able to escape unscathed. They discussed moving to Brooklyn to save money on monthly rent and gain dwelling space but ultimately decided to stay in their apartment in Manhattan for the finite period that they would each be remaining in the city. They accepted their 20% rent increase for a reduced lease period of 10 months which would take Callum a few months past a relocation to Europe and Carley to the end of her work visa.

“We've got a middle-ground apartment. It was a COVID deal. We got super low rent for this neighbourhood during COVID. Then, we got another reduction the year after. When they raised it the following year, they did it very reasonably - relative to some other people. Ours went up about 18-20%. Our friends got a COVID deal and then the next year their landlord came in and tried to raise their rent by \$1,500 per month, 112%. That's an absurd increase. A lot of landlords are trying to make up for lost time from COVID.” -Carley

The rent on their West Village apartment has gone up \$450 a month in the 3-year period that they have lived there, which they consider to be a reasonable increase when compared to those dished out to some of their friends and coworkers. However, both parties acknowledge the impact of the increasing cost of living and Carley goes on to compare her experience in New York to her life in Canada where she was able to afford to purchase a home prior to moving to New York.

“I went from owning my own house and living by myself to now living with a roommate. My expenses have only gone up every year but I’ve digressed as far as “adulthood”. I rented out a two-bedroom basement apartment for \$2,400 with two people in it. That’s less than what I’m paying for my half of this rent. My experience with affordability is being compared with Toronto, which is obviously a totally different city and a totally different market, but I think it’s absolutely insane how expensive it is to live here.” -Carley

The duo were able to articulate both the cost associated with the centrality of their dwelling as well as the extent to which the effects of COVID remain within the rental market, which seems to be worsening. The wealth disparity within New York means that the extremities of conditions will impact highly marginalised groups substantially while the wealthier populations, who are ultimately driving the crisis, benefit from the current conditions.

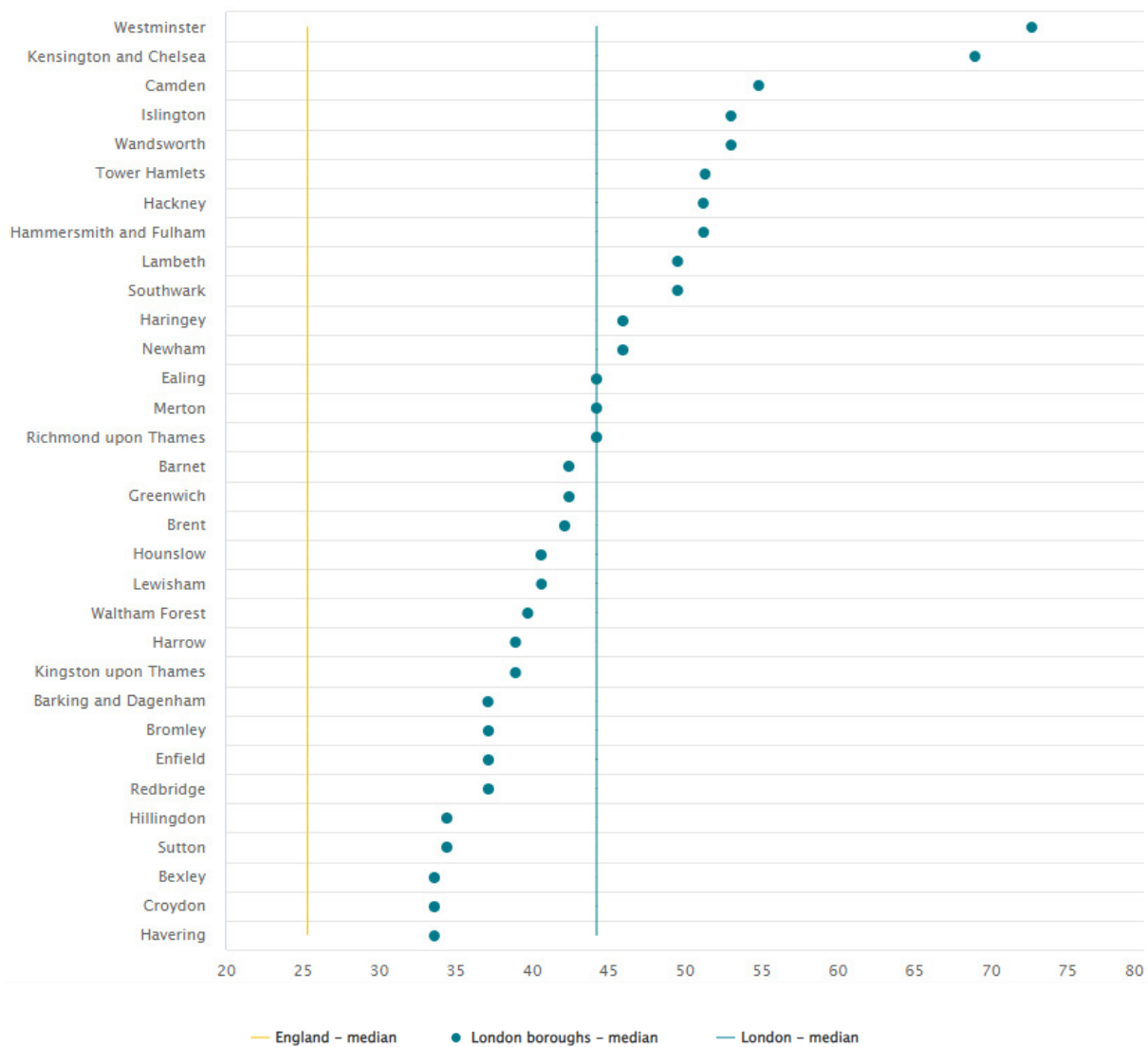
Cost of Living, Insufficient Wages, & Displacement

The cost of living can be broken down into the many aspects impacting the financial load on each resident including housing, food, transportation, bills (energy, water, phone, etc.), healthcare, and recreation. Each of these factors will have varying weights in each city and will experience fluctuations with a trend of increase over time.

In London, high transportation costs contribute significantly to the cost of living as well as the changes in daily practices people regularly must implement in order to minimise them, such as additional work-from-home days and compromising on higher rent to be more central and avoid paying the difference in transit fees. In New York, high food costs were noted as a point of pressure for residents, especially when combined with limited kitchen and dining space within the dwelling. Most local supermarkets are expensive and affordable alternatives are few and far between, this is paired with the popularization of ready-made delivered meals across the city causing a shift from home-cooking meals to the reliance on these services. No one in either city mentioned the cost of healthcare, however, most people in both cities mentioned the high cost of entertainment and recreation and its impacts on social capacity and lifestyle.

Of course, the main component which affects the cost of living has consistently been the unaffordable cost of housing. The housing affordability crisis as it is known, is inextricably linked to the insufficient increases in wages compared to the cost of housing. In 2023, the median rent in both London and New York is more than 50% of the median income. This was reflected among most participants, with most claiming a rent-to-income ratio of 35% to 55% of their wages, exclusive of bills and other expenses.

Housing prices along with the many other factors which drive up the cost of living have been on the rise and are responsible for pricing people out of central areas into more peripheral neighbourhoods. The post-pandemic increases caused a surge in these displacements across global cities. These displacements disproportionately affect marginalised communities and can be seen to impact even more socio-economically stable populations, such as the middle-class, reflecting the magnitude of the issue. The unyielding strain of the cost of living on city dwellers inevitably causes a ripple effect which infiltrates many aspects of living, dwelling, and homemaking.



Liz's Story

City:
London
Neighbourhood:
Tooting Bec, Zone 3
Dwelling Size:
60.3m²
Rent-to-Income Ratio:
35%
Relationships:
Friends

Liz, 36,
Executive Assistant

Paddy, 33,
Medical Advisor

Liz moved to a two-bedroom flat in Tooting Bec, London, just over a year ago with her flatmate of many years, Paddy. The two of them moved to their current place after a post-COVID rent increase priced them out of their previous home, a problem which threatened the majority of participants of the study. Many people were displaced as a result of the rent increases imposed after the lifting of COVID-related rent freezes and as a result, many people were searching for new living spaces around the city. Liz outlines the reality of having to offer over-asking rent and longer tenancy agreements to secure housing in the competitive market.

“We’ve been in this place for 16 months. Paddy and I have been in two other houses together previously, and we moved into this one when the rents on those places went up after COVID. We got priced out of our last house. The cost of this place is still up there but the further out you go, they start to reduce your costs.”

They reduced rents during COVID to try to get people to stay and then at the end of it all they put all the prices back up. It was ridiculous to try to find this place. We had to offer over asking and there were hundreds of people trying to get into the places. People would just offer without looking and would offer way more than was asked. Landlords could just do whatever they wanted. We still offered more than asking, but he had people offering more than us still and he said he would prefer to have someone who would look after the place and stay in it for a while. Otherwise, London can churn quite a bit. People are in and out of London, they move all the time.”

Liz reflects on the notion of proximities within the city, speaking from her own experience renting in London for the past 8 years. She ties the cost of being close to the centre of the city or a tube station to potential compromises within your dwelling. She highlights that many conveniences and preferences associated with the location and layout of dwelling space have been commodified.

“You either get further and further away or you end up sacrificing a lot more of what you want for space or location. We are really close to a tube station, we could have sacrificed not being as close and our rent would be a little bit cheaper. When we were looking for a place we wanted a lounge room, some sort of outdoor space, and to be close to a station. Those things tend to cost money, if we have compromised on those we might have found somewhere cheaper but we wanted those things as part of our quality of living. Paddy doesn’t like the buses. If it’s pouring while you’re coming home at night you don’t want to be walking through it so we pay more to be closer to the station.

The dining room for me was also a compromise, I like kitchens separately but also not one that is too small. We technically have a dining room but it’s part of the kitchen counter. If we have someone else over we would tend to eat up there with them, if it’s just us we eat in the living room.”

The high demand and competitive nature of the rental market forced residents like Liz and Paddy to offer over-asking rent and longer tenancy agreements to secure housing. The pandemic also prompted a change in what people sought in their living spaces, with an increased desire for private or semi-private outdoor areas. Liz’s perspective on proximity within the city underscores the trade-offs between location and the features within a dwelling, demonstrating how desirable adjacencies have become commodities. The struggle to find a balance between cost and quality of living exemplifies the challenges many residents face in the ever-evolving city housing landscape.

Chapter Conclusion

The narratives collected from residents in New York and London shed light on the many challenges and complexities of urban dwelling. The high cost of living in the city, coupled with the commodification of dwelling space, have resulted in a range of spatial sacrifices for residents. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these issues, leading to a volatile rental market and a shrinking or pushing of urban domestic space. Through these personal stories, we gain insight into the intricate relationship between affordability, location, and the fabrication of a 'home' in the city.

These spatial stories illustrate the many forms of currency that urban dwellers pay for the privilege of becoming part of the city fabric. From financial sacrifices to compromises in living space, residents of global cities are left to navigate the high monetary, spatial, and lifestyle costs associated with city living.

Conclusion

This research explored the homes of 14 residents across two significant global cities through in-person conversations within each individual's dwelling. Fragmented narratives were woven together with literature, testing the bounds of theoretical knowledge and statistical data by anchoring concepts in the stories of present-day city dwellers. Both qualitative and quantitative information was gathered at each interaction, measuring both the mental territory of home alongside the physical presence of the dwelling and its situation in the city.

Prior to engagement with and scouting of interviewees, hypotheses about the immaterial practices and spatial realities of city dwelling were drawn based on the theories and findings of other scholars of interdisciplinary fields. In anticipation of the challenges posed by the unaffordability of living spaces, driven by the commodification of residential property, the primary initial assumption was made on the basis that city dwellers would face severe constraints on available dwelling space. This was expected to lead to unconventional spatial utilization, both within the home and in the urban environment, as a means of compensating for the scarcity of space. The hypotheses could be categorized into two main areas of focus: the expectations regarding domestic interiors and the envisaged connections between dwelling spaces and the city.

Within the Dwelling

The dwelling was the focal point of each interview sequence. The process began by navigating towards each dwelling across the city, through the neighbourhood, the building (exclusive to apartment typologies), and situating the interview within some space of social interaction in each residence.

The first assumption related to the domestic interior focused on the utilization of space within the dwelling; several instances of occupant-driven design interventions were expected to present within each home. These would create more dynamic and flexible rooms within the constrained floor area of the city dwellings. In a larger sense, these modified interiors would produce more utility and unconventional function within each room. The imagined physical manifestations of these occupant-centred designs were multi-use and mobile objects that would allow spaces within the home to transform through their employment.

Contrary to this assumption, the city dwellers showed no sign of occupant-driven design. The majority of participants contributed minimally to the fitout of the space, if at all. Many of these urban rentals came either fully or partially furnished, and some inherited the personal effects of those who lived there before. The residents are left to make-do more than they are liberated to make-home within these units, stripped of their autonomy and stability through the time-limited contractual agreements that bind them to their dwellings by a thin thread of certainty.

Furthermore, the cost and sizes of the dwellings that were to be documented were projected to fall below-reported averages of floor area, a figure driven up by the trend towards developing large-scale luxury-investment apartments. London and New York are both large financial hubs and host enormous amounts of wealth within limited portions of their population, skewing median housing data in favour of larger units.

The data collected through this research took into consideration factors such as specific proximities, the number of residents per dwelling, and the space per person when subdivided in shared apartments. On average, the size of each residence was the sum of 25m² per occupant, taking into account a variety of locations, number of bedrooms, and housing typologies.

Within the City

The analysis of two similar cities highlighted the common themes of housing disarray that are prevalent worldwide. Referencing cities which speak to each other enhanced the ability to draw legible connections between the interviews by limiting variance in cultural, political, geographical, and socio-economical conditions. The comparative findings from this research can be projected to hypothesise the impact in various global cities, and future work on this research would replicate interviews across a wider number of participants, demographics, and across cities with varying populations, geographical scales and formations, political climates, global economic standing, and cultural practices. How would results overlap and differ when this research is conducted in varying settings? The expansion of the participant sample would reiterate and test findings, extrapolate practices that were not prevalent within a limited sample, and broaden the interrogation of wealth disparity and the marginalisation of minority groups.

Each of the residences visited was curated by their central city vicinity. In New York, the central area each dwelling was defined in proximity to was Midtown, Manhattan, and in London, they were measured in relation to the City of London Borough in central transit Zone 1. Each is within 30 minutes of transport measured from their nearest subway/tube station and endure the financial pressures of their urban environment.

Statistical data points to higher than affordable (>30%) rent-to-income averages in both cities, representing figures of about 50% of individual salaries allocated towards this singular living expense; other costs such as utilities, transportation, and food are additional to this significant sum. These bodies of research also pointed to a phenomenon within the most central neighbourhoods of metropolitan centres, which is the significant drop in rent-to-income ratios despite dramatically inflated rent prices in these zones, a clear indicator of wealth concentrations among the privileged few.

Therefore, this study prioritised the representation of rental cost as a proportion of household income rather than an outright figure. The sample reflected the forecasted assumptions, with a majority of participants reporting 35-55% of their wages being allocated to rent alone. The prevalence of these staggering figures in a sample of middle-class renters points to an even larger issue of housing affordability which disproportionately affects lower-income residents and negligibly affects the affluent.

Additionally, the rental price increases were far outpacing wage increases across the board. This issue was exacerbated by the recent COVID-19 pandemic which temporarily froze rent increases, causing a wave of dramatic jumps following the retraction of such

mitigation policies. Could this divergence of wage-to-rent increases continue indefinitely? These increases accelerated the cycle of displacement that plagues the city, pushing residents further and further from the city centre in search of affordable living conditions. In combination with the limited fixity associated with the renter's short-term certainty, tied to the duration of a lease agreement, the transient city dweller has become a common narrative figure within the urban fabric. Should these trends persist, who will cities be left for?

Urban issues of housing commodification can be linked to the ways that people occupy space in the city. Much scholarship already points to the wider extent of home beyond the dwelling, domestic space is so heavily constrained by housing affordability issues this extension of home is exaggerated. Rather than a willing connection to parts of the neighbourhood, the connection of these two theories led to the hypothesis that there would be an overflow of domestic activity due to a lack of space within the limited physical dwelling.

This reality was documented in many ways, from the infiltration of domestic tasks, like doing laundry, into the public sphere, to intimate social interaction and gathering. The mental realm of the home is less contained by the four walls of the shelter than it is by the mental territory superimposed between the dwelling and the city. While the initial scope of this work aimed to hold a balanced depth between the dwelling and the city, the composition of the majority of responses in conjunction with the setting of the interviews within the domestic interiors skewed the focus in favour of a rich investigation on the role of the dwelling as part of this greater dynamic relationship. Future research on this topic would aim to further investigate the role of the city in order to equally balance research findings across both realms.

Interviewees & Demographics

The selection of the sample group for this study curated individuals to fit within specific demographic groups. Millennials, those aged 26-36, were the main focus of the study, capturing how the issue of housing crises that affects a broad range of individuals are specifically affecting the group who are finding the prospect of home ownership difficult to access and are subsequently shifting their attachments to the vessels of home they are able to occupy through the rental market.

The sample group's representation of middle-class individuals intended to reflect the gulf between median rent and median salary that has been statistically represented across cities. Among participants, there were outliers whose financial earnings were disproportionately higher than the rest of the group and thus more readily exemplified the uneven weight of the housing unaffordability burden as a result of income inequality. The socio-economic standing of the interviewees aimed to define the upper limit within which the discomfort of the spatial, financial, and time-related constraints on housing impact the making of home for a particular group. At what thresholds of income do the greatest shifts happen?

The use of central city residents who endured the exacerbated impacts of these issues provided the ideal platform to explore the magnitude and navigation of the barriers that limit the practices of homemaking. However, many of the issues addressed within this research affect a much broader sample of people beyond the metropolitan group selected to participate in this study, Further study including a wider income, age, and location-based demographic could be explored in further research.

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Appendix

London

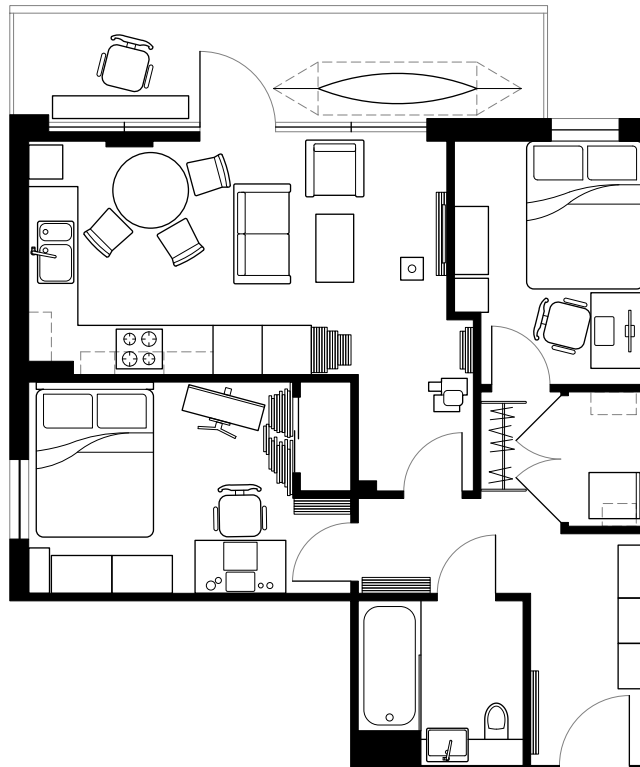
Aengus Transcript

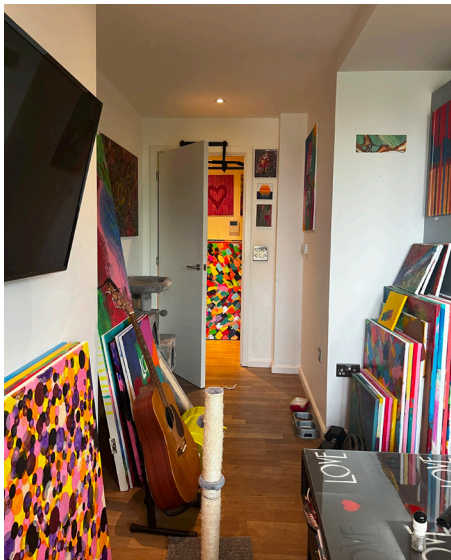
of Occupants: 3
Relationship: Friends & Couple
Neighbourhood: Angel, Islington, Zone 1
Bed/Bath: 2 bed, 1 bath
Size: 54.7 m² + 11 m² Private Outdoor Space
+ 189.8 m² Semi-Private Outdoor Space
Rent-to-Income: 35%

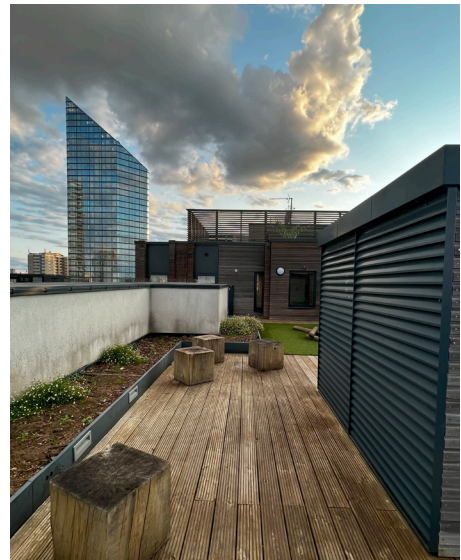
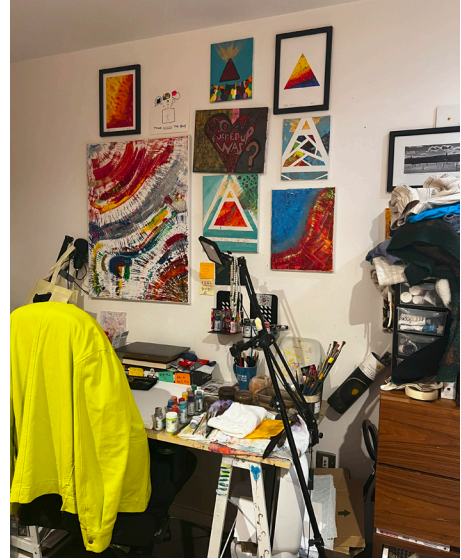
Aengus
Age: 33
Gender: M
Occupation: Marketing Director & Artist

Liam
Age: 31
Gender: M
Occupation: Chef

Christy
Age: 40
Gender: F
Occupation: Chef







Can you tell me a bit about your home?

[**Aengus**] I'll have been in London for seven years come November, so six and a half years. I moved from Ireland for a job, I've been in the same job ever since. I moved to one place a bit further out of the centre and was there for a year. That was shared accommodation with random people I didn't particularly like, so I tended to work late and avoid going home to avoid talking. That was not so good. Then in January 2018 I moved in here and have been here ever since. I moved in with one guy, then he moved out, one of my friends and his girlfriend moved in and the three of us are living here now. I love it - I love living in London, I really love where we are located because it's close to the action and easy to access a lot of different parts of the city. We're in Zone 1 which is nice.

There's a management company that takes care of the entire building, it's built for purpose. I think there's a built to rent element and then there's an element where there's some properties that people can buy part ownership of. I don't really understand how it works. Some people have equity in their homes as well. I think they pay rent, but a portion of their rent goes towards paying for the part ownership. I don't really know, I know that people have told me that they do that.

How long do you intend to stay?

[**Aengus**] That's a question mark I'd say. I'm not sure. Longer term I'm always tempted by moving a bit further out to have more reasonable rent and outdoor space because I want to get a sheepdog. In the immediate term I plan on staying, I don't think the plan is to move any time soon. If I were to move I would consider staying in London and moving further out or even moving somewhere else completely. I could be tempted to move to Spain as well, because that would be fun. In terms of London, I will consider moving to the outskirts where you can still be on the end of the tube, potentially. I would also consider somewhere that's technically outside London, but is a 30-40 minute train ride to get in.

How many people other than you are in this apartment on a regular basis? A semi-regular basis? Where do they stay?

[**Aengus**] I actually had a friend who was 6' 3" or 6' 4" sleep on this couch recently. Not very well though, his legs were popping out over the edge, it was very funny to wake up to see him like that in the morning. Occasionally I would have someone over who stays a couple of nights, usually sleeping uncomfortably on the couch. My girlfriend comes over and stays sometimes as well.

Do you entertain a lot? What do you do when you have people over?

[**Aengus**] I don't often entertain people. From 2018 to 2020 this place was a hub of action, non-stop, and lots of people were entertained here, on a very aggressive and ongoing basis - whoever would stay up late with me, basically. Since COVID I haven't really entertained too much. That's partially because I've filled this place up so much with paintings that it's running out of space.

Do you have any hobbies? How do they take up space in the apartment?

[**Aengus**] I started painting a little before COVID and started trying to make a thing of it during and post-COVID. I sell some of them occasionally and I'm planning to do an art show later this year. There are a lot of paintings here and cutting down the number of them to display in the show will be the biggest challenge. I don't like about 60% of them anyway. I do paint over them sometimes, but I didn't for a really long time but I started having to as space has gotten to a premium. I did a lot of those 'Love' paintings over ones that I didn't particularly like. I have a big one that I'm really tempted to paint over but it took me so long to paint so I might just leave it.

I've got a place in mind for my exhibition, I've never done one before. It's in central London, it's over two floors, and it's kind of expensive, £2500 per day. I'm viewing it as a sunk cost and not expecting to sell anything, I've got low expectations, but I think that's where I'm going to do it. It should be fun.

I find painting very therapeutic. Some of them are therapeutic at times, but they can also be madness inducing at times because you get to what feels like a point where you should be finished and you're only a third of the way through. It takes ages.

I paint in my room. There's one big streak of green paint on the carpet because I stood on a full tube of paint one time while I was trying to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, it was a disaster. I tried to wipe it up like an idiot, and then I thought maybe I shouldn't do this. The bits that I didn't wipe I could just peel off but the bits that I wiped are caked in there. Oops. I used to paint in the living room, there's paint all over the floor. It's quite cramped painting in my room, it is also my office. I'd say I work from home three or four days a week, I'm a big fan - it's something I'd dreamed of before COVID.

My office used to be nearby. When we moved in here it was a five minute walk down the road which was part of the appeal of this location. Now it's moved, it's a 30 minute commute but it may also move again soon to be closer again. I work for a digital marketing agency. My flatmates work in restaurants closeby, each within 30 minutes of here.

Related to the art, I also create content about the art. So this place also acts as a film studio. That can happen anywhere but it's mostly in my room.

Content creation is a very irregular stream of income. It's generated something like a couple of grand a year for the last few years. I also do a very small bit of freelance work for a friend. It's very minimal.

We have a guitar. Both myself and Liam play guitar but I haven't played in years. I also play poker here, either on the dining table or on the internet.

Outside of the apartment I also do a bit of graffiti, which is an extension of the art I guess. More so, my roommate sometimes plays golf in a pitch-n-putt, which I occasionally join - I haven't done so this year though, so it's not a regular thing. I like going to art shows and stuff.

Do you have any pets? How do they take up space in your apartment?

[**Aengus**] We have a cat. It's everyone's cat but more so Liam's. We got it 3 or 4 years ago. It has a litter tray and utility thing. Some toys and a scratching post but otherwise it doesn't take up much space.

Do you have any issues with regard to privacy?

[**Aengus**] As you will see in my room, to my girlfriend's dismay, I've got the window blocked off because I just don't like looking into other people's space and those people looking in at me. So, no I don't have privacy issues because of my blocked window. From the living room you can see into some people's homes but I feel like we are harder to see - we're a bit higher up. In my room I just accept that I'll have no natural light as a trade off for privacy.

Do you have enough space?

[**Aengus**] No. I mean yes, because we survive and live our lives but we have less space than I would like.

Would you sacrifice some interior space for a private outdoor space?

[Aengus] I'd probably choose to convert the whole balcony into part of the living room. We also have a rooftop terrace for everyone in the building, so that makes a difference, but even if we didn't I still think I would prefer more space in the living room over the balcony space.

I don't use the balcony too much. Honestly, the main thing I use it for is if I'm spray painting stuff, I do it out there. It's ventilated, so it's useful for that. It's a pretty big, chunky balcony. I'd take a quarter of the balcony as a balcony and then have the rest of the space as part of the living room.

Do you feel like you're lacking any specific types of spaces? Is there anything you wish you had?

[Aengus] We've got a laundry thing. I mean, I could always use more storage space. I would also love a separate space to do some painting, an extra room as an art studio and office space. I would prefer that instead of having everything taking place in my bedroom.
Where in the apartment do you spend the most time?

[Aengus] In my room. If I'm working, it's like the whole day, and then I sleep in there. The bulk of my life is spent in that room. My flatmates are also mostly in their room.

Do any spaces change to accommodate different activities? Are some objects not fixed to accommodate this? Do you move furniture around a lot?

[Aengus] In my room, yes, a huge amount. Especially the way it is at the moment. Every so often I go through and I reorganise the paintings. I find places to store them, but I go through phases where it sort of builds up in my room and there's a build-up at the moment. If I want to paint and record it to make content, then I want to move certain things. There's a lot of ever moving things in my room.

There are distinct sections to my room in my mind as well. There's the desk with the seat, the bed and the easel and the bit that's underneath it. There are invisible lines on the floor, but they push and pull as required.

In my cupboard, the left half is just full of paintings. I've also got paintings all over the walls because that's good storage. Part of my desk is the "art side" and the other part is the "work side". My laptop is a bit raised because I use it for calls. I used to have a keyboard and mouse but now I just take it down when I want to type on it. On top of my wardrobe I've got a pile of clothes I don't want to wash yet but I definitely won't wear again. There's probably a more efficient way to lay it out but I haven't figured it out yet, I need to figure it out though so I can have some space back.

Did you add or modify anything after you moved in to make the space more livable?

[**Aengus**] No, it came furnished. My flatmates have got the clothing rack and hall and shoe rack they put in. I've got like one tiny drawer thing that has some paint in it, but nothing really. We put the TV on the wall if that counts, but other than that - no.

Can you walk me through what a regular day might look like?

[**Aengus**] Usually, the average day I work from home. I wake up, go to McDonald's around the corner and get some coffee to get the day going. Chill for a little bit, maybe watch something on TV and wake up a bit. Then, start work, work for 4 hours. Then, sometimes I work through the day, sometimes I go get lunch. I'll go for a little walk outside. When I finish work, it varies. Go to the gym, or do some painting or content making or a combination of those. Maybe chill for a bit, watch some more TV, and go to bed. That's probably it for a standard day.

My gym is 10-12 minutes up the road, I wouldn't really work out in the house.

How do your habits change with the seasons?

[**Aengus**] Not really for the most part, I don't think. Just like less outdoor activities.

Are there any communal spaces or amenities in the neighbourhood that you use?

[**Aengus**] I do talk to people sometimes in the lift. I know a few people from just having random conversations, that kind of thing. But I wouldn't say there's a great sense of community in the building.

As for communal space, there's the rooftop terrace and there's a courtyard that you come through to get to the building, there are benches and things out there. There's also bike storage which I've never been to and a car park for people who can afford a car parking space. I've been told there's no spaces available in the car park but it's only about a third full so that's a bit weird.

What are your thoughts about the affordability and cost of living in London?

[Aengus] I always wonder how someone who comes and makes an entry level salary survives because to me it seems unlivable. More broadly speaking, I can definitely afford it but I guess you rent what you can afford based on whatever your salary is. It is kind of affordable but I also think if I lived outside of London I'd be able to afford to live somewhere really nice, whereas here I'm living in a relatively cramped apartment. You are just confined by rent, especially if you want to live quite centrally. We've basically had the same rent since I moved in. Every year they send an email to say that they need to put up the rent, and I say "that's a shame, I'll have to move out because I won't be able to afford it", and they come back and say "okay, fine, just keep it". I think if I were to look at flats now you'd get much less for what you pay, it seems like it's way worse. We're getting a good value deal based on how I can see that things have changed. I think London is expensive, but it's manageable...kind of.

London

Caitlin & Sara Transcript

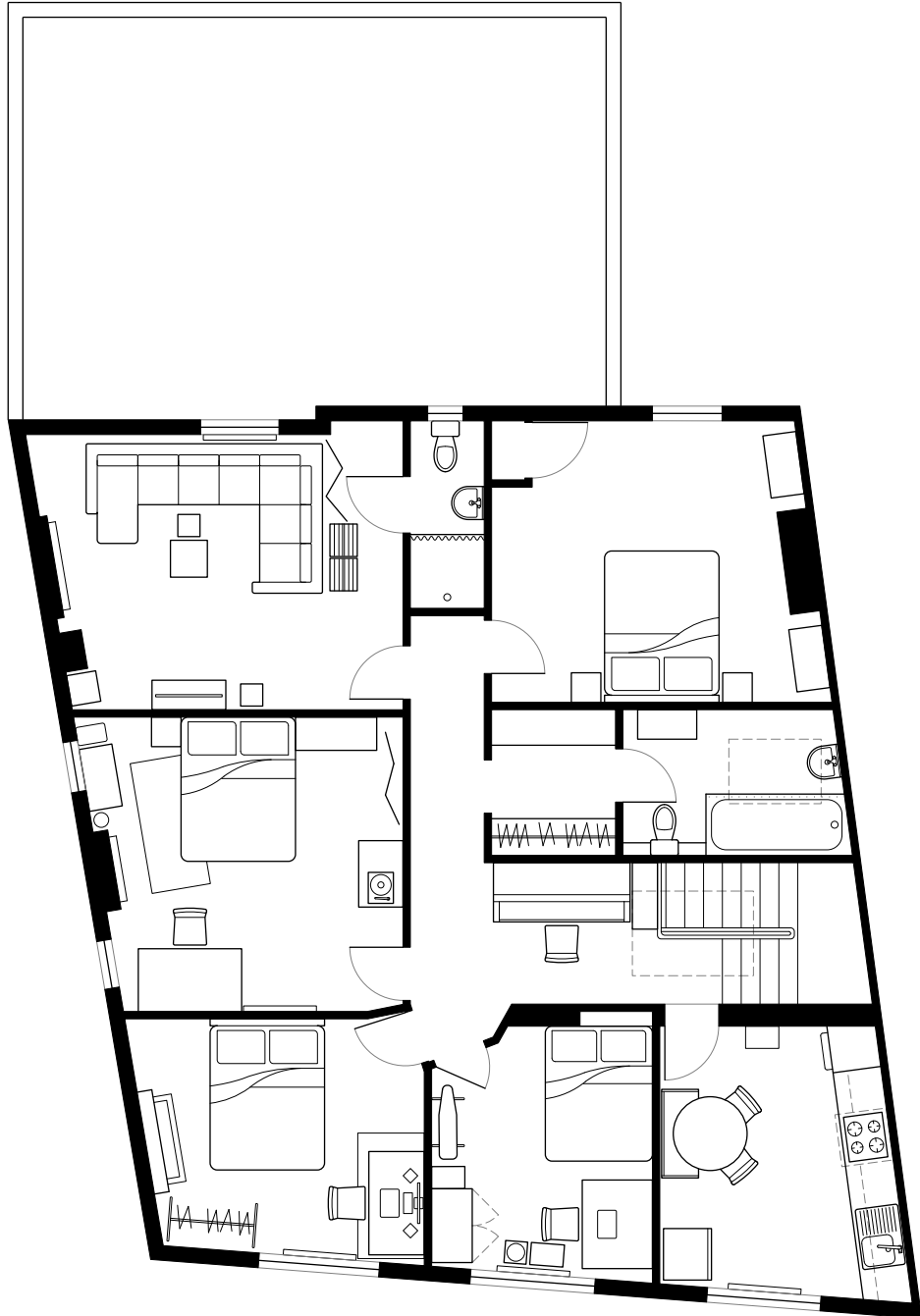
of Occupants: 4
Relationship: Friends
Neighbourhood: Sydenham, Lewisham, Zone 3
Bed/Bath: 4 bed, 2 bath
Size: 111.7 m² + 42.4 m² Private Outdoor Space
Rent-to-Income: 50%

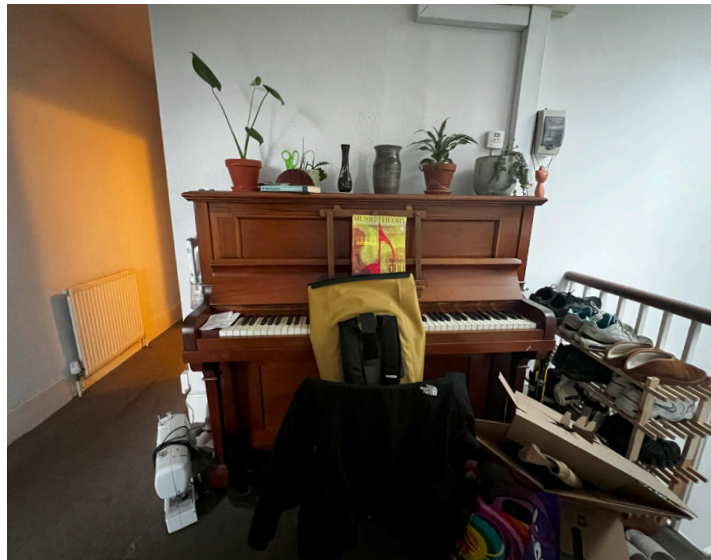
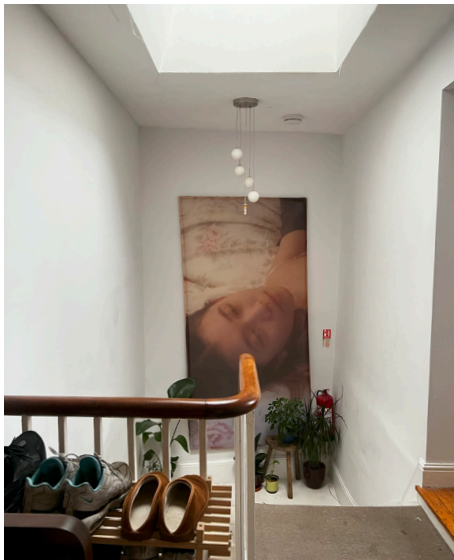
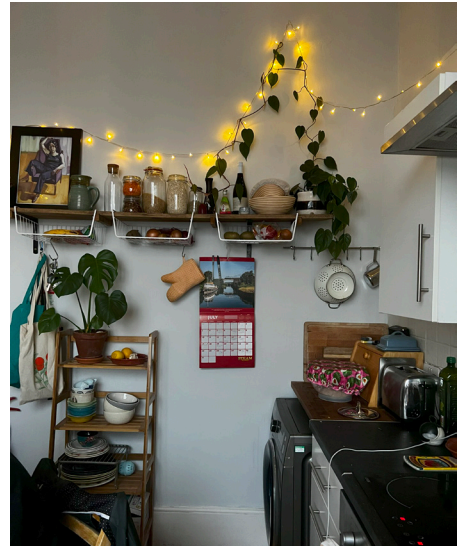
Sara
Age: 28
Gender: F
Occupation: Trainee Teacher

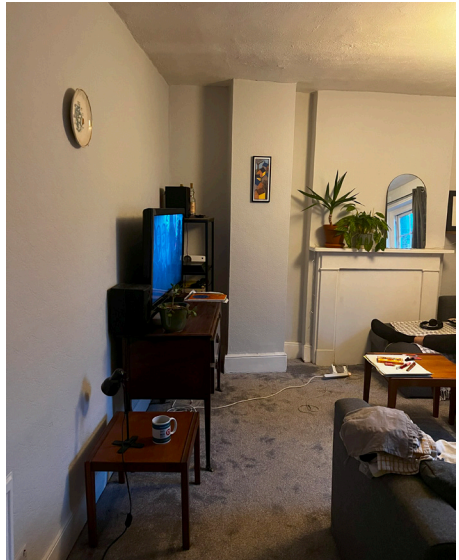
Caitlin
Age: 28
Gender: F
Occupation: ADHD Practitioner in a Prison

Adam
Age: 28
Gender: M

Benedict
Age: 28
Gender: M







Can you tell me a bit about your home?

[Sara] We moved in here a year ago. Before this we lived in Brockley, which is two stops away on the Overground. We had to move out because the landlord put the rent up, so we moved a bit further out and I'm quite liking it here.

[Caitlin] The previous landlord basically hadn't put the rent up during COVID, there wasn't a yearly increase, then when COVID finished, they then decided to put the rent up to make up for it. It was a massive increase. So we moved further out, which is why we're now in Zone 3, we were in Zone 2 before. We were really lucky to find this place because we did a couple of viewings and the other places we looked at were just horrible.

[Sara] We only had a month to look which made it stressful, but it's been a pretty good find. It came on the market and I saw it and the second the letting agent opened for viewings I called and went to view it that day. Adam and I were the first one's to view the property. We basically had to pay a deposit that day. People were bidding on rent and the other places we saw were really expensive but terrible. I liked Brockley a lot, location wise, but I think when you live somewhere for longer you like it more because you're used to it. Maybe because we've only been here a year I just don't know everything yet.

There's lots of green space here, it's known for the woods, parks, and Crystal Palace where people go for days out. There are definitely more green areas but we don't really go that often, I don't know why.

[Caitlin] We live here with two other boys as well. It's a nice balance in the house. We all lived together in the Brockley house as well, we decided to all stay and live together when we moved which has been nice.

[Sara] It's probably easier to find a room for just one person, it's a bit difficult finding a whole place sometimes.

[Caitlin] It came part furnished, so we've been collecting little bits as well. The longer we've been here the more homely it's getting. It'll be a year in August that we've been here. The cabinet in the kitchen is a little treat from the street that Adam brought home one day.

[Sara] There's lots of furniture on the street which is good, people put their stuff out, especially in the fancier little suburbs. There's some really big houses around the back of Sydenham station.

How many people other than you are in this flat on a regular basis? A semi-regular basis? Where do they stay?

[Caitlin] Four of us live here. This place has 4 bedrooms and a living room so it could technically be 5 bedrooms, but we've chosen to keep one as a living room. We occasionally have some people come and stay over. I've got a partner and he lives 15 minutes down the road, and when he comes over he'll stay. So in that sense people come and stay. Now that we've got the living room, we have guests come and they can stay the night, which is quite nice. We've got quite a big sofa so you can make it up into a bed. We've got lots of parents over this weekend. There is space for people to stay over which we didn't really have before. In our old house we didn't have a living room, we had 4 bedrooms and a kitchen which was maybe a little bigger than the one here, maybe about the same size. The kitchen was the same but with an extra pantry room. So that was our social area. It was really frustrating, because it's really expensive to stay in hotels or AirBnBs in London and we couldn't accommodate people who wanted to come visit us unless they stayed in our beds with us, which happened. So it's nice to be able to have people come stay over in the living room, or in the case of Sara's parents coming to visit, she stayed on the sofa and her parents were able to stay in her room.

How long have you lived in London?

[Sara] Five years. Caitlin lived in Brockley first, I lived in Hendon which is really far north. We lived in Camberwell after that, then Brockley, now here. When people first come to the city they normally move every year because they normally end up in a year contract and it's normally not that nice. The last place we stayed in for like 3 years.

[Caitlin] That was because of COVID, people weren't getting evicted and they were just staying put. I moved to London in 2017 as well and I moved for university which was on this side of London. I was staying in share houses where landlords were happy to have a whole house of students. That's why we had to move as well, you don't really get to stay in those for longer than a year.

Do you entertain a lot? What do you do when you have people over?

[Sara] We have a little deck in the back, we have people over for drinks. I don't think it's meant to be used for anything. You have to climb out the window to get to it. It's nice that we have space now to do that, and we do it every now and again. We haven't had a party

but we've had dinners. We have people over for food or drinks. We always collect everything from all the rooms when we have people over, stools and stuff to sit on. We did want to have a party but it fell through, so we haven't done it yet.

[Caitlin] There are certain close friends that we'd have over for food or drinks, but otherwise we meet people at the pub and it's like meeting in the middle. London is so big that you'd feel bad to say to someone "Why don't you travel an hour and a half to come to mine?" Then they have to travel all the way home. So if you're meeting friends that live far away, it makes more sense to meet in the middle. Especially if you're going to stay out late, once the Overground stops you'd need to take a bus. It's good that we have them but it would still be a pretty long journey to get home from someone's house. People that live nearby are more likely to come over.

We would go to pubs to meet people more regularly, we would do something like that weekly. We'd have people over here once a month.

If people are over here we would hang out in the kitchen usually. You can have a little more access to things like bringing drinks through.

Do you work from home? If so, what's your set-up?

[Caitlin] I work from home sometimes, just in my room at a little desk. I'm not very productive when I work from home so I try to avoid it. Benedict works from home sometimes, on Mondays and Fridays. We've just got little desks in our rooms. Adam was saying that I should put my desk in the living room and work from there, there's just wasted space. It's kind of dark in there sometimes. It's a little cold in the winter to work from home. When I was working in the winter I would just go to the office. Sometimes very rarely people might work in the kitchen or something, but only if no one is home because otherwise it would feel like you're taking over the communal space.

[Sara] The flat gets really cold and really hot. I have a fan, but my room is really hot. It's like a glasshouse and the fan just blows around the warm air. I think the windows let out a lot of the heat in the winter time. They're single glazed, but because it's a listed building they don't want to change them, or they can't. I don't know the rules. There are radiators which will heat the place up, the living room will get nice and warm.

[Caitlin] I think we lose a lot of heat from the floor as well, because of the old floors and then the living rooms carpeted. It's cosy there.

Do you have any hobbies? How do they take up space in the apartment?

[Caitlin] There's a piano that was actually left here by the landlord. We thought it was a really nice gesture. He was like "Oh, the old tenants are leaving the piano if you like it before they get rid of it". So we said yes, then we realised it would be really hard to take the piano out. He left it on the condition that we would get it removed when we leave. I'm pretty happy with the piano but we don't use it.

There are tennis courts in the park around the corner, which we only just realised. We've done that a couple of times.

I like cooking, I'm in the kitchen a lot. To be fair, we all like cooking.

[Sara] I cook in phases, sometimes I do it then I won't cook for weeks.

I've been sewing today, sometimes I do some drawing. I have a good set-up in my room, I have a desk that can be folded out to make it even bigger which makes a whole workspace for my sewing machine. I've got an ironing board in there too, it's like a whole studio in there sometimes. Then it's a mess.

Outside the house, I like to go to the cinema. We also go on walks.

[Caitlin] I've started to try going running and we go swimming.

There's a team effort in the house taking care of the plants too. Adam does a good job of taking care of the communal ones and we've all got individual ones in our rooms. My plants don't survive very well.

[Sara] I store a lot of my hobby stuff in boxes in the storage room. The rest is under my bed or on my desk.

[Caitlin] We've played the occasional board game in the kitchen or the living room. We played twister once in the living room.

Do you have any issues with regard to privacy?

[Caitlin] We don't have any neighbours, which is pretty good. Apart from Adam who has neighbours across the street who can look into his room, he looks into their kitchen. It's rare that they would see each other at the same time.

[Sara] I've got buses that come past my window and the top deck is the same level as mine. I've got sheer curtains now which help.

[Caitlin] There's also a little barber shop just across the way and when he's quiet, he sits on his little chair on the phone and he looks in here a lot. If I'm just waiting for the kettle to boil or making some food, I'll stand near the window and just stare out. Inevitably we'll just be looking at each other.

[Sara] He can see all the front windows and he follows you as you move through the house. If I'm in the kitchen making tea and I see him looking at me I might move to my room and I'll catch him looking at me in there as well. I guess it must be entertaining for him. I would probably do that too if that was my job.

[Caitlin] There's a cafe below us. There are never any noise issues on either side but they're a bit funny about our bin bags, when we put them out during the day. The lady who runs it is really nice but we don't really go down there anymore because it feels like a waste of money when we can make good coffee here. So instead we walk 10 minutes down the road to get coffees instead. Other than that there's not really any issues. The neighbour's dog is a bit yappy, but they're moving. There's barely any noticeable neighbours though, it's really quiet.

Between everyone in the flat there's a good dynamic. Now, we might be saying this and the boys might be listening to this and think the opposite. Sara and I are very close, we've been best friends since we were 7, so there's just no privacy there. We act like siblings instead of housemates, we just barge into each other's rooms. We're all quite respectful, no body's too loud or obnoxious, and we've got two bathrooms split by boys-girls. It's very rare that someone would come home late and play loud music. I feel like that wouldn't happen, and if it did happen it would be so rare that it wouldn't be an issue. Or we would wake up and come to join. In terms of privacy, everyone's rooms are big enough and people can just close their doors. If your door is closed people wouldn't really come knocking. Everything else is communal, we all share.

Do you have enough space?

[Sara] Yeah, it's pretty good. I think it just depends where you've been before. Every move we've had more space so it feels like a lot of space for us. We've had flats where the rooms we had didn't really even count as rooms. All of us feel a lot more comfortable here. The boys' rooms were a lot smaller in the last place as well, so they're quite happy.

[**Caitlin**] In everyone's rooms there's enough space for your bed and a hobby space. It's not like one person's being shortchanged where they're having to use the communal space for stuff. You could use it though if you wanted, you could work in the kitchen or living room or whatever.

Do you feel like you're lacking any specific types of spaces? Is there anything you wish you had?

[**Caitlin**] Not really. The only thing that I think is it's really annoying is that you have to climb out the window to get to the outdoor space, but the fact that we've got that little deck area is really nice.

[**Sara**] I would love to have a garden if we're wishing for things, but I mean the space is good as it is. It would be nice to have an outdoor space where you can just sit. We don't really use the space that much because it's uncomfortable to climb over and it's uncomfortable to sit. Sometimes you'd like to have coffee and read your book right outside your house instead of having to pack a bag and go to the park. I just want to sit outside for an hour and go back to what I'm doing.

[**Caitlin**] We had a garden in our last place, it was a small garden but it was really nice. I'd rather have the space that we have inside this place than the place we had before with the garden. The sun is not great here so it's not as important, though it has been hot recently.

A tumble dryer would be good if we were wishing for things. We've got enough storage, we've got a little hallway that you can store stuff in. It's pretty useful, you can store bulky stuff like suitcases and things you don't want just like hanging around in your room, you can tuck them away. When we viewed the place there was a tumble dryer in that hallway but it must have been owned by the people that lived here before. It just means that part of the living room becomes the laundry area to dry all of our stuff. In winter the flat is so cold, we're lucky that we've got a little laundrette across the road which costs £2 or £3 to dry a couple of loads of laundry. So it's not really an issue, it just would be nice because it takes up a lot of space. There's always laundry up because as soon as one person is done, the next person puts theirs up. It would create more space in that room. We have the space for it though and we're accustomed to it now.

Did you add or modify anything after you moved in to make the space more livable?

[Caitlin] In the kitchen we mounted a little hook on the wall. We also added a little shelf at the end of the counter over the laundry machine. It was annoying that stuff was on the washing machine and things would just fall over when the washing machine was on. My dad and I built that shelf when he was over here on holiday visiting. Adam puts pictures up, he might have other stuff put up in his room.

Do you have enough storage space?

[Caitlin] In terms of storage, it's ok. When we first moved in I thought that there would be no storage in the kitchen. In our last place we have a separate little pantry room. We've actually got loads of space.

[Sara] The more space you have, the more you'll fill it up so you'll actually have a lot more clutter.

[Caitlin] The bit downstairs is really handy because the boys keep their bikes there. It's nice that those are out of the way.

Where in the flat do you spend the most time?

[Caitlin] It depends what we're doing, really. As housemates we spend quite a lot of time in the kitchen because we'll all eat at similar times, and then we'll all just sit around and then end up sitting in the kitchen for ages. We got a TV recently, so sometimes we'll watch that together in the living room.

[Sara] If we're all home, we'll probably be in the kitchen or the living room.

[Caitlin] I feel like we wouldn't hang out in the living room unless we're watching TV though. We would sit and socialise in the kitchen.

[Sara] If people aren't really home we'll be in our rooms. You come out of your room to see people.

Do any spaces change to accommodate different activities? Are some objects not fixed to accommodate this? Do you move furniture around a lot?

[Sara] Not really. We just have chairs that come into the kitchen when there's more people, but otherwise no. Sometimes I'll try to bring stuff into the living room to do something there but it's too much walking back and forth, you'll always forget something and have to go back to get it.

Where did you get the furniture from?

[Caitlin] There were beds here when we moved in, as well as the sofa and the piano. There was also the cabinet in the living room. Adam had his own mattress so they took one mattress away. His bed was broken so they tried to fix it, but they didn't fix it properly. Adam just got his own bed. The mattresses are very used, we all need to get new ones.

There's the cafe downstairs, which is owned by the same letting agent or landlord that rents this flat. They've got a group of workmen that come. When we moved in, the shower in the girls' bathroom was broken and they were trying to fix it before we moved in but they didn't manage. They were around a lot when we first moved in. We still see them all the time because they've got their workshop downstairs. Outside my window there's a view of the back of their workshop. It's basically just a dump for all their stuff. We spoke to the landlord about it, saying that we were worried that people would be able to climb up all the stuff and get into the house. We just wanted them to clean it.

[Sara] We originally thought it was all the stuff from cleaning out this place before we moved in. They said they would clean it, and they sort of got rid of some of it. They tidied it at least but now they just seem to be adding more and more to it slowly. We had to set some boundaries with them because they would just come in, they have a key. They'll just come to fix things but without warning. At least they're very friendly.

[Caitlin] With a lot of landlords people have trouble getting them to come and fix things, at least our landlord tries to come and fix things.

Can you walk me through what a regular day might look like?

[Sara] I work different shifts. So say tomorrow, I will be getting up slowly because I don't start work until 3. I would try to relax before going to work. When I come I would see if people are still up watching TV or having dinner. I work at the Barbican which is an arts centre that's open late so they have different shifts.

[Caitlin] Benedict and I work Monday to Friday, 9 until 5. Sara and Adam work different hours with their shifts. It's common for at least one person to be home at any given time. It depends on the week and how busy people are. There isn't a strict routine. Some days if me and Benedict are working we might be working from home.

[Sara] Everyone's at home now. It's summer and I think people are more relaxed, we're taking our time.

How do your habits change with the seasons?

[Sara] It's a lot colder in the winter, but I feel like I'm normally busier and out more.

[Caitlin] It does feel different in the summer. I don't know whether it's just because it's light for so much longer that it feels like we're out of our rooms longer. When it's light, the end of the day feels much later so there's a much higher chance that we might spontaneously decide to go and do something. In the winter I would already be in my pyjamas and be ready to finish the day and go to bed.

What are your thoughts about the affordability and cost of living in London?

[Caitlin] We're waiting to find out what our landlord is going to put our rent up to. This is a 4 bed, maybe classed as a 5 bed, and we pay £687.50 each - we split the rent evenly. It's £2750 a month for the whole flat, no bills. That's actually what our previous landlord at the place in Brockley said that they were going to put our rent up to and we said it was too expensive. For what we get here it's worth it, for what we were getting at the previous place it wasn't worth it. That place was actually a 3 bed and the living room was converted into a room.

[Sara] It's a lot more expensive now in London than ever before. Rents have been going up 5 to 10% every year. We've talked to other people and we definitely don't pay as much, other people pay a lot more. It's definitely expensive here but everywhere seems to be so I don't know how to gauge it.

[Caitlin] I reckon rent and bills probably make up about half or a bit more than half of my income. That's working for a job where I am qualified with a university degree, not a minimum wage job. I'm not sure if I could afford to live here on much less. You could, but you'd have to cut a lot of other stuff out.

[Sara] Having drinks and going out to socialise is expensive. It depends what kind of lifestyle you have I guess. Salaries are not going up so affordability is not great. There are lots of people in London who work in industries like finance so their salaries have always been high so those people don't really struggle. Most people I know don't earn enough to be able to afford everything.

[Caitlin] Rent and bills are expensive, but the cost of everything else is also so expensive.

[Sara] Over the last year the cost of food has become noticeably a lot more expensive. I used to not notice the cost of things as much and now you really notice when prices jump randomly really high. I guess Brexit might have something to do with it.

[Caitlin] Transport here has also become really expensive. Adam has a bike, he cycles a lot, so his transport costs are minimised. However, there are certain parts of London that you just have to get transport to. My office is in Stratford so that would be 2 trains in the morning, if I do that 4 days a week my transport costs come up to about £150 a month. That's on top of rent and it's just a cost that you have to pay, you have no choice. Those types of things are what make London more unaffordable rather than just the cost of rent. We'll see what our rent increase is, it might be that in a couple of weeks we're packing our bags and moving to Bromley.

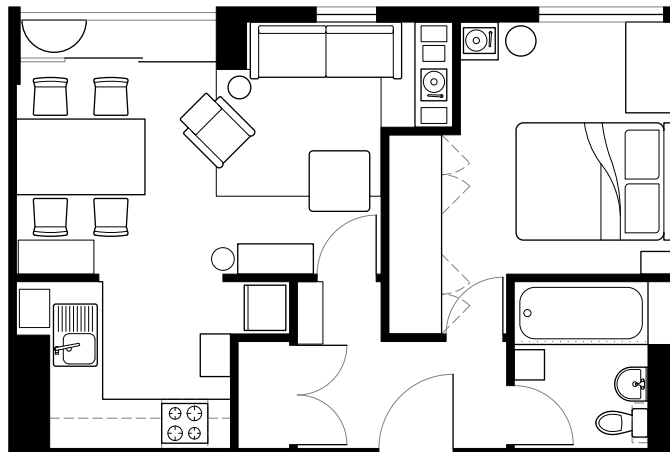
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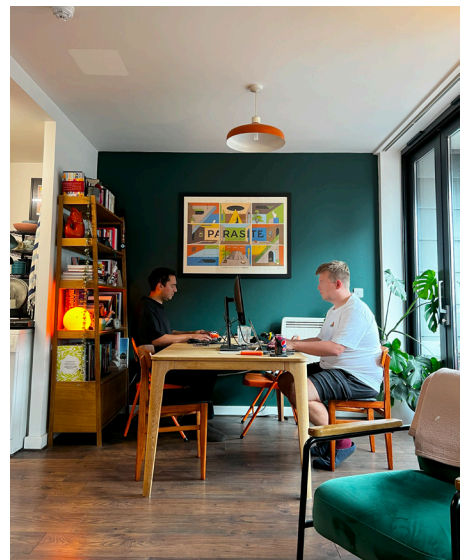
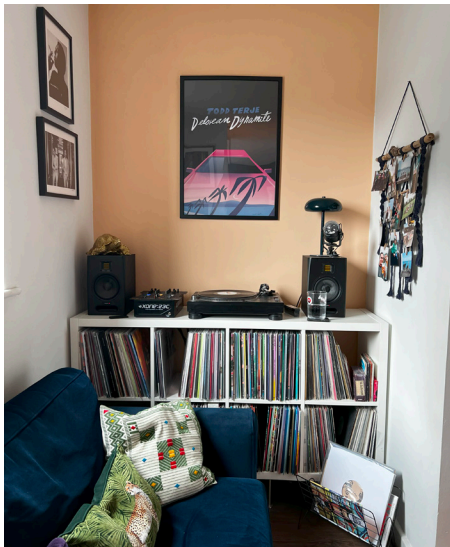
Casper Transcript

of Occupants: 2
Relationship: Couple
Neighbourhood: Drayton Park, Zone 2
Bed/Bath: 1 bed, 1 bath
Size: 44.6 m² + 1.3 m² Private Outdoor Space
Rent-to-Income: 35%

Casper
Age: 31
Gender: M
Occupation: Content Manager for a Record Label

Ashley
Age: 33
Gender: M
Occupation: Content Manager for a Digital Agency







Can you tell me a bit about your home?

[Casper] We've lived here since November 2020. It's coming up to 3 years. We rent this place from a private landlord who actually lived here before us, a lot of the way that it's set up is actually for them. They had a baby and they decided to rent out, so we moved in. It was pandemic times, so it was quite weird. There were a lot of things on the market at that time, actually, so it wasn't too hard to actually get a place. Whereas now it's a completely different time, crazy market conditions. We got this place unfurnished, so most of the things in here are ours and we had to source them in the first few months of living here. There's a lot of second-hand things, some stuff we had before, but most of it we brought in. Since we've been in London we've been in the Islington area. A big part of the appeal was it being a new-build, because we lived in a lot of places in London which have got structural problems, problems with mice, or with mould. All those usual things you have to accept when there's not a lot of places available. So we really wanted a new-build place and we also wanted a place that was a bit more central than the last place we were living so it would be easier to get to central London.

And then also the appeal of being close to the stadium was quite a big draw because Ashley is a big football fan, well Arsenal fan, so that was an added bonus. This is actually the first place that we lived alone without roommates. We really wanted to have a one bed place which met all those conditions and wasn't unaffordable as well.

I like being beside the stadium because it's kind of like a public park beside us. A concrete park. There's always different people doing their thing around there. I really like that aspect of it. Sometimes it's a bit annoying with the noise.

Ashley is a season ticket holder for Arsenal, so pretty much every other weekend he's watching football there. There are 60,000 people that invade the area that is essentially our front garden. That always makes it quite interesting. We go for a walk, at least, around the stadium every day.

We were a lot more into running before we lived here and we used to run around the stadium. That change doesn't correlate with us living here really, we're just doing different things now. We walk quite a lot. We're both cyclists as well, we both cycle to work. Which is another thing to mention, there is a bike storage in the corridor that's shared with everyone on the floor. We're quite active in using our bikes instead of using public transport. We also use a lot of the city e-bikes as well.

There's a couple that live next door that we really hate and they're really noisy. They guy plays Xbox really loud and really late at night. When we moved in we made a point not to put speakers against the shared wall. Our speakers are quite loud and so we made sure to put them against our bedroom wall. When the neighbours moved in they installed a speaker and TV on the shared wall. They've lived there for about 2 years. Recently they both got bikes. There's an unspoken rule in the bike storage room that people have their spots. So if you're new and you get a bike you're expected to fit in with the current system. When moved in there was a free spot for both of our bikes and we've just had those spots since we moved in. One of the neighbours got a bike and put their bike in my spot and I came home from work one day to see the bike there and I moved it. The other one then also got a bike and she started putting it in Ashley's spot. It was so annoying that they were getting home before us and were just taking our bike spots. One day Ashley decided he would just lock his bike over their's. The next day there was a really angry note on Ashley's bike that said something like "You moron, you don't own this spot". Now she's actually moved her bike and she parks it in a different spot.

There's a communal garden in the building but it's horrible.

Where did you live before?

[Casper] We lived just by Finsbury Park, on the 'Manor House' side of it. There are 4 corners of Finsbury Park and we lived on the South East corner. It's only about a 15 minute walk from here but it actually makes a big difference. Finsbury Park tends to attract a lot of people our age and similar people to us but there's a lot of crime going on around the park. This area feels a lot more safe, it's a bit quieter, plus there's less traffic and pollution even though we're next to a main road. We lived there in a 2 bedroom place that we shared with another couple.

I've been in London since 2017, 6 years.

How long do you intend to stay?

[Casper] That's up for debate, probably at least another year. A big part of it is determined by jobs and career. My job is really London based, at the moment it's quite important for me to be here. If that changed, I think we would leave, mainly because of being stuck in the rental market here. Ashley's job is a little bit more flexible. When you have a tenancy agreement you always have a bit of a deadline and you're always trying to think "what will I be doing when this tenancy is up?". Our tenancy is up here in three months and we're just in

discussions now about renewing it. So the result of that conversation will play a big part in our decision to stay. If it becomes unaffordable to live here we would consider leaving London. For now we're happy here but we are both here predominantly because of our jobs.

I work in music. I work for a record label and my job is the visual stuff that they do, anything which isn't music- videos, photography, graphic design, or animation. All geared heavily towards the digital side of things, so social media and channels, digital content basically. Ashley does a very similar thing but he works for a digital agency so he has much bigger clients like Google.

I'm from the South, from a small town between Swindon and Oxford. I'm from the countryside in the middle of the South, a town called Faringdon. Ashley is from Stoke on Trent which is a town between Birmingham and Manchester.

Do you entertain a lot? What do you do when you have people over?

[Casper] We have friends around quite a lot, at least once a week we'll have someone come around for dinner. We always eat at the table when people come around. Usually the set-up when people are over is how the living room is laid out. Two or three people will sit on the couch, someone will sit on the chair, and another person will sit on the ottoman. If there's more people we'll bring the dining chairs around and form a bit of a circle. We never had a TV before and we didn't want the TV to be the centre of focus. I guess everything does still face in that direction a bit.

The living room is very much defined, the dining room is beside which we also use to work. There's also a desk in the bedroom. It's a small space so there's zones as best as we can.

We don't really have parties here. We have drinks that sometimes go on quite late but we've never had a house party because it's quite a small space and there are better options for house parties among our friends.

How many people other than you are in this apartment on a regular basis? A semi-regular basis? Where do they stay?

[Casper] We have a bit of an air bed set-up that we do in the living room when anyone comes to stay over. It's infrequent, it was a lot more regular in the pandemic, or the period right after. We'd have people stay over because there wasn't anything to do outside.

We have two friends that moved into an apartment two doors down from here, they moved in less than a year ago. We're sharing dates about when each of us are away so we have access to another apartment in this building, so say if our family are coming to visit for a week or something we might try to coordinate it with a week or weekend that they're away. We haven't actually done it yet but we're hoping to do it soon. That's created an extra dynamic to our space. We go to their place to hang out with them and they come over here to spend time with us, we watch TV together and stuff.

The thing about going away might be a bit one sided, we've suggested it quite a lot and have been really good about giving them all our dates, we go away a lot. We're probably away 1 out of every 4 weekends. We haven't quite managed to make it work with them yet.

[Ashley] Whenever we're away I circulate the dates to my brother and all our friends in the North because accommodation in the city is so expensive. It's nice to be able to give people the chance to come and stay for the week.

[Casper] We're really happy to have people come and stay in our place if we're not here. We have a little set-up, Ashley has a handbook that he sends to people that describes the house and how to get in. So we do actually have people come to stay when we're not here. Sometimes we'll actually have two different people come in, so they'll have to handover to another person, which is fun.

We were actually thinking about trying to start up more of a 'friends-of-friends-of-friends' thing where people might pay a small amount to stay here, but it's a bit too complicated. I think if we owned the place we probably would do that. We pay quite a lot of rent to live here and with the amount we go away it would make sense to do that. It's becoming more common in London to sublet your room when you're away for a week, but we haven't done that yet. We like knowing the people that are staying here.

Do you have any hobbies? How do they take up space in the apartment?

[Casper] So we're both record collectors, and the nook where we keep all of that still makes me really happy every time I look at it. We have the white shelf and it's just like a classic IKEA KALLAX. We had it in the last place, and we had about six weeks before we moved in here and we got the floor plan and we were sketching out different arrangements because having that was a non-negotiable. It fits absolutely perfectly in the alcove. We thought "if this doesn't fit it's going to ruin us living in this place", we only had about an inch of tolerance. I would like the record area to be a bit more accessible, it's

a bit tricky to get around the couch. We're also both into DJing. We don't always have our equipment set up on top of the record shelf but we can if we need to. I don't really know what else you could do with that type of alcove. Well, the couple who used to live here had a desk and actually that's what our friends down the hall have in their space as well.

Other than that there's not really anything. We don't have anything that we take up and down. We don't do things like yoga or fitness things. We dry clothes on a rack sometimes.

Do you have any issues with regard to privacy?

[Casper] The noise coming from our neighbours is annoying. It's probably also annoying coming from us sometimes. In this building they did some things really well and for the most part soundproofing is one of them. The neighbours have attached speakers to the wall and so that's why we're having this issue.

With regards to privacy, I always feel like people can see into here from the stadium. When you go into the stadium on a clear day you can see directly into the flat. There aren't people in there often enough to be too conscious of it. I do think the security guards in the building are sometimes lurking in the shadows. You can see into a lot of people's apartments from there, basically. I always shut the blinds when I'm getting changes, Ashley doesn't care.

We don't have issues of privacy with each other though. It works well in our relationship because we spend a lot of time with each other anyway. I feel like if you were more independent in a relationship this might be too small of a space to live in together. For a long time we were both working from here full time. We got the desk in the other room mainly for calls. We both go through different phases of how we like to work, at the moment we're both going into the office quite a lot. Sometimes we'll go through periods when one of us wants to work from the room a bit more. We also have 2 tabletop standing desks which we'll sometimes use. They're good for some tasks. If I'm speaking a lot I think they're quite good. I speak better when I'm standing because I move around when I'm speaking. When you really need to focus though, you don't realise how much of a difference sitting down can actually make.

What are your thoughts about the affordability and cost of living in London?

[Casper] It's changed a lot in the time we've lived here. When we moved in they reduced the rent because of the pandemic, which I think is pretty common everywhere. It was very affordable for us when we moved in. They actually kept it the same for another year, which is really nice. Last year, they proposed a £200 increase every month, which we got down to £100. I just think this year it's probably going to go up by at least £200. The average is about rents going up by about £350 a month - that's an average based on a sample of my friends. I don't know if that's actually a real average, but I think it's averaging around £200 per room. The interest rates for mortgages in the UK are really, really high. Anyone who has a mortgage which doesn't have a fixed rate is paying much more per month because of that. Landlords that have those kinds of mortgages are passing on the cost to their tenants. The landlords that don't have mortgages are still citing the same reason and taking advantage. The estate agents are egging on these landlords because it means that their cut goes up. I think the real reason for the crisis though is that new buyers are holding off because of these high interest rates - they're waiting for interest rates to drop and mortgage rates to come back down. We're in that position. We have the funds to be able to buy a place, we could stretch to buy in London. We're just waiting but it makes more sense to carry on renting at the moment and I think there are a lot of other people in that position who are waiting for the conditions to buy a house in the UK to become more stable. Everyone is just waiting for this big crash to happen. I have new colleagues who are trying to find places and the conditions are so bad. It's really competitive and there's lots of bidding going on, people are offering way above asking on rent and putting down 6 months rent up front. In this building, the price of a one bed is now £1700 a month. Estate agents are trying to get £1700 for these flats now because of what 1 beds in the area are going for.

The market in London is insane right now and a lot of our friends have been forced to move because of rental prices just being increased by more than they can afford. This week we're probably going to get an email explaining the new terms of our tenancy, which renews in November. We'll have to consider whether we can stay here or not, probably this week. We've made the decision already that we'll just pay whatever it goes to, there will be a limit to that based on our own principles. We really can't be bothered to move and this place suits us perfectly for now.

***Do you feel like you're lacking any specific types of spaces?
Is there anything you wish you had?***

[Casper] We would like a second bedroom for guests and for other purposes. It could be a separate music room or a room with a permanent desk. Those would be the main things. One thing we've discussed is a music and cinema room. Ashley's big interest is film. That's actually another big thing we do in this area, we go to the cinema two times a week, there's a few good local cinemas around here. We'd really like a large kitchen, we're into cooking and into coffee and drinks. We'd like a bit more space, it's very crowded there at the moment with the appliances and stuff and we really want to have a dishwasher. In periods when we're cooking a lot we feel the impact of having a small kitchen.

We have a washing machine in the kitchen but we'd really like a tumble dryer. In the last place we lived everything had been set up so well. We had a really good kitchen and they had a washing machine and tumble dryer stacked in the bathroom in a nice cupboard. I think because we have those really nice facilities in our last place, going to not having them is a bit of a shock. It's actually quite common for people not to have a tumble dryer.

We're really happy with the space that we have. I think we've made good use of what we've got here. Some of the other flats in this building don't have a dining table because they have a much bigger sofa, including the people that lived here before.

We'd like a larger balcony as well. The balcony is so narrow, we can just about sit out there. It's so uncomfortable. We'd like any outdoor space, it's good to get some fresh air.

Would you sacrifice some interior space for a private outdoor space?

[Casper] I'd give up a bit of interior space to have a larger outdoor space. Imagine if we just had less corridor and more outdoor space?

There's a lot of smart storage in this space. It would be a bit of a deal breaker if that wasn't here. Seeing our friends' flat down the hall, they have way less storage because their landlord isn't as smart as ours. It's because our landlord actually lived here before, they made the space actually work.

Where in the flat do you spend the most time?

[Casper] The sofa. We sit on the sofa a lot. Watching TV, hanging out, and we actually eat on the sofa the majority of the time. We tend to leave the table for our computer stuff there if we're working a few days in a row.

Do any spaces change to accommodate different activities? Are some objects not fixed to accommodate this?

[Casper] It's really just moving chairs around to be honest. This is the way it is, week in, week out.

Can you walk me through what a regular day might look like?

[Casper] We'll both come into the living space first thing after we wake up. One of us will do breakfast and coffee, and we'll sit and listen to some music for about 20 minutes. Let's say it's a work from home day; we'll both get ready, set up the equipment on the table, take first calls, then we'll go out for a walk at lunchtime, and then make lunch in the kitchen. We'll eat at the table if we're carrying on with work or we might sit on the sofa and watch a bit of TV before going back to work. At the end of the work day we'll usually go for a walk before we have dinner in the evenings if we're staying at home. We'll usually watch something and have dinner on the sofa. We spend very little time in our room, we just sleep in there. That's what a day would look like if we were home for the day, but we're usually quite busy in the evenings. One or two nights a week we'll actually be here, and the rest of the time we'll have plans with work friends or together outside the house.

How do your habits change with the seasons?

[Casper] We spend more time here at the flat in winter. London is a city which is at its best in summer and autumn. We're more inclined to have people over here in wintertime, we might cook something warm. It doesn't really get that cold here actually. We're here more in winter for sure.

Do you have enough storage space?

[Casper] I would say yes, actually. I think we do. Ashley doesn't agree. We have a lot of stuff. There are things like the bookcase in the dining room which is quite full. We've got storage under the bed, three huge wardrobes in the bedroom, a lot of storage in the hallway, and in the kitchen we've got a few extra things that we've done to help fit all of our stuff. We've got a butcher block which is an extra surface, we mainly use that for the underneath storage. There's a bit of a wine rack. There's another thing in the alcove which adds open cupboard space.

Do you have enough space?

[Casper] Just about. Yeah, we'd like more. If the living space was twice the size, it would be good.

London

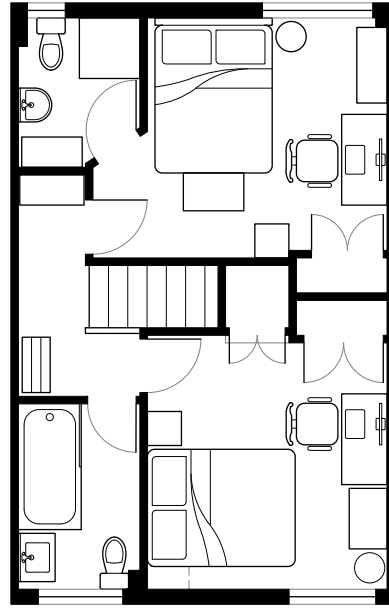
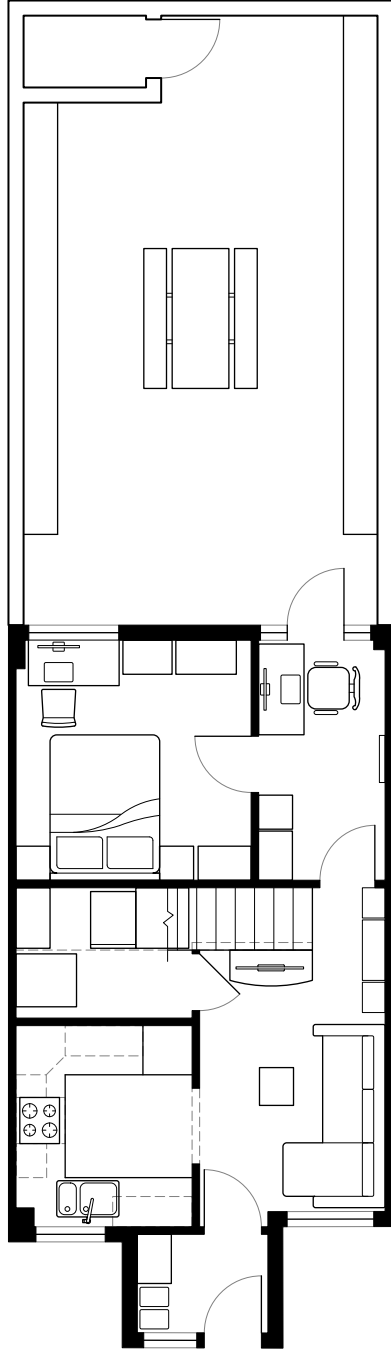
Fern Transcript

of Occupants: 3
Relationship: Friends
Neighbourhood: Battersea, Zone 1
Bed/Bath: 2 bed, 2 bath
Size: 74m² + 35 m² Private Outdoor Space
Rent-to-Income: 50%

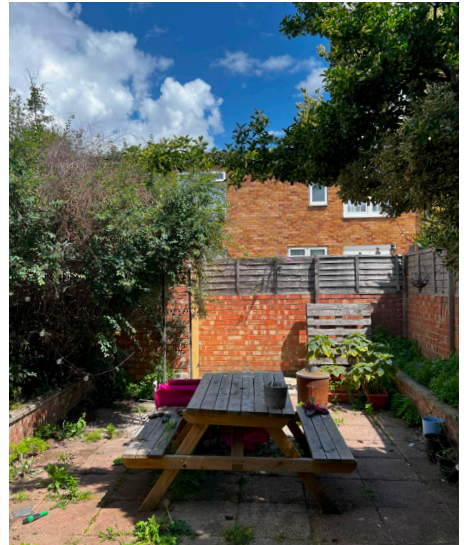
Fern
Age: 31
Gender: F
Occupation: Technologies Salesperson

Liz
Age: 31
Gender: F
Occupation: Procurement Analyst

Kate
Age: 29
Gender: F
Occupation: Publisher







Can you tell me a bit about your home?

[Fern] We moved here in August of 2020, so it was pandemic summer. Three of us originally moved in, we had a different girl, Caitlin, who's another one of our friends. We were friends from school, but we were living separately through the first big long lockdown stretch. We knew we were going to have to do lockdowns again, it was very clear it was going to happen again, and we wanted to be together. So we decided to move out of our respective places and move in together. We looked around for houses, well I did most of it because I was on furlough, so I was looking for houses and we were very specific that we had to have a garden because Liz already had Zach, the dog. It's quite unusual for anyone our age who's renting to have a pet. It was one of the first things I asked when I was looking at places, "Would you take a dog?". This place is run by an agent, we don't speak to the landlord, and they're the worst agents I've ever had. I really hate them. They're really dishonest and money grabbing. But they said, "I think that should be fine. We'll check with the landlord". So it was all fine. The priority for us was having a garden for the dogs and a bath. There's a bath in their bathroom, Liz loves a bath. They said that it was discounted at the time because I think in the summer of 2020 people were hesitant about moving, so we found this a fairly good deal for the area that it's in.

Shortly after we moved here, they opened up the Nine Elms branch of the Northern Line, which now puts this technically in zone one, right, which it hadn't been before. When we first moved in, it was £2100 a month between us, so it was about £733 each and we signed onto that for a two year contract. After the two years, it's gone up to £766. For the year coming up, in August, the agency called us and said "Your renewal's coming up, what are you thinking of doing?". I just said "I don't know" and they just said "The market value has gone up, we would estimate that your place is worth £2700 a month." That's £400 on top of what it was. Then they went on to say "We haven't spoken to your landlord yet and we wanted to know what your best offer would be". So I refused to give them an offer, there's lots of things that were wrong with the place. There's a shed out there that had a broken down door and there were foxes coming in and out of it, which the dog went mad about. That was among other things that we've been asking to get fixed from day one, that just never happened. I went back and said, "No way, I'm not making an offer. There's all these things I'm super dissatisfied with". I'm really glad I stood my ground because eventually they came back and said, "Okay". I told them to just find out what the landlord wants and then we would tell them if we were going to stay or not. Eventually they came back to us and the landlord was happy with a £100 increase per month, which considering some things I've heard from other people who I know that are renting, that's quite light. I know of quite a few other people who've had £400 increases just put on them from the landlord and that's it, they're not able to question it

or fight it or anything. We know Kate is moving out, so Liz and I were thinking that we might leave and find a two bedroom place together, but prices were insane. So when the landlord came back and said he was ok with only a £100 increase we decided to stay and find another house mate, which we have now done. So price wise, we've actually been quite lucky - it's not been too extortionate. I mean, it's definitely still high. When I first moved to London I was paying £542 a month for a room in a house, it was a smaller room for sure and didn't have an ensuite like my room here does. That was about 4 years ago and it's gone up quite significantly since.

We like this house. Liz and I stay here all the time, we're very, very close friends. This place is not technically big enough for three people. It should be a two person house. So when we're in the living room, if all three of us are around or somebody has got a friend around, it can feel quite cramped. It doesn't have a dining table... It has a dining table but you can't fit chairs around it, so Liz uses it as a desk. I personally care about sitting at a table to eat, that's something I can't do. We have a picnic bench in the garden, so in summer it feels like you gain a whole extra room. A garden is obviously quite special in London and it's not a little patio, it's a fairly decent garden, so in the summer it feels like it's a bit more space. In the winter it can be a bit miserable because you don't really go out there and you're always sitting on the sofa. If I had a date that I wanted to cook for, we have to sit on the sofa to eat, which for me is not the vibe. I think Liz's room was supposed to be the dining room or a separate living room. But like a lot of places in London, they've converted it into an extra bedroom to get another person in to make it more affordable. These houses were built in the sixties, so they're more modern than some of the Victorian places. They're standardised and they're nice and the area we're in is nice and it feels very safe because we have neighbours overlooking the terrace. I never worry about anybody going into our garden. We've left the back door open by accident and I'm not worried about people like burgling us or anything, obviously we have a dog too and that helps. We do have a sense of community in this little row because the neighbours are all facing each other. We got Christmas cards from number six and number ten, which I've never experienced in London before. We feel pretty lucky to be in this spot and we know that we've got a good deal, so we're happy to hold onto it while other things feel really out of reach. My goal would be to live alone, although recently it's been a goal of mine to live abroad - that's more important to me now. Ultimately, down the line I'm saving for a deposit for a house that I would like to do on my own. There's definitely a sense that you can't do those things unless you're part of a couple. I know a few people have done it alone, and when you speak to them in more depth you realise they've had help from a parent or had an inheritance or something like that. That's not the impressions you'll get from looking on social media or hearing somebody talk about it themselves.

The economy is such a mess. Mortgages are such a mess. This country is such a mess. Everyday I hate being in Britain a bit more. I'm way more interested in getting abroad where the cost of living space is cheaper and the quality of life is better, where there's more sun and more days, that makes me a bit happier. Speaking Spanish is something I'm really passionate about and something I want to improve on. My priorities have really changed in the last year or so. So I'm thinking about Spain.

Obviously, Brexit is a big factor which is so annoying, but, Spain has recently introduced a digital nomad visa. That means if you've been working remotely for a year, you can apply for it. So my new job that I started in April is technically remote working. I do have access to a few office spaces in town and I do go in and use them a lot because I don;t like working from home. I have a desk here, in my room, but I really struggle to switch into work mode in my sleep room. So though I do go in a lot, technically it is a remote working job, so once I've been doing that for a year I'll look into applying for the digital nomad visa. Our contract here will be up next August so in theory I'm working towards flying away then.

I hope moving to Spain will be a long-term move. The goal is to get fluent in Spanish. A broader goal is to go back and do my Ph.D., but do it in Spain. So my bachelor's and my master's are in film studies. Before I did the job I'm doing now, I worked for BAFTA, which is like the British Oscars. The British Film Academy is a charity, but it's very much an arts organisation and I really got a lot out of that in terms of it being what I'm interested in. Ultimately, the pay was low, the progression was not happening, and my priorities changed because I want to be abroad. I would love to go and do my Ph.D. in film, but do it in Espanol in a Spanish university. That would be something like five years down the line. I've never lived abroad though, I'm one of the only ones in our group who hasn't gone and spent a decent amount of time abroad. So it's also a bit of a scary challenge. The longest I've been out of the UK was for a month, in Mexico. I never did a long stretch of travel or a year abroad or anything.

One thing worth flagging is that we have bins. In certain boroughs where I've lived, we didn't have an outdoor bin. You would keep all your trash until the night before the binman came, you'd put it out then. So when we moved here it was a luxury to have the area for the bins outside at the front. We had to get our own bins, they weren't provided. We've also got a dishwasher. I don't know if that's a big deal for people in New York but in London it's a big bonus and it's something that doesn't affect the price of the place. I didn't know we had one here until we moved in.

How long have you lived in London?

[Fern] I moved to London in the winter of 2018. I moved in with some friends in Fulham who had a room to fill for a month before our other friend took the room. I was at home living with my mum and I felt like I had lived there for too long, so I said to my friend Caitlin who was going to take the room that I would take it for the month before she moved in and that we could share the room while I found my own place, which we did. We shared the room for about a month and I really needed my own space. So I moved out to another flatshare in Stockwell with some really great girls for a few weeks. After that I moved to the place that I was in during the pandemic, which is close to here, in Battersea. All my places have been in the Southwest. I like it here, it's got lots of green spaces. It's really easy to get to the parks. I don't like going out here on the weekends evenings though, because there's like a Clapham type of person. That's not my vibe. Well-off people, from the area I grew up in to be honest, are typically very white and wealthy upper class. The type of people who probably play rugby or cricket, marry off really early, and live quite traditional lives. If you go to a pub in Clapham on a Saturday night it's just a room full of all the same people and I don't love it. If I wanted to go out I'd go into central London or something. That's about 40 minutes from here. As long as you're going between somewhere central and wherever you are, transport times are fine, but if you're trying to get across the city it takes over an hour usually. Since I've lived in London it's seemed like so much work to get to somewhere like Hackney or Shoreditch. Whereas when I lived outside London I'd make much bigger trips to get to places around London that now seem like too much effort.

What are your thoughts about the affordability and cost of living in London?

[Fern] Affordability has become a real thing. When I first moved here in 2018, people would often say to me, "London is so expensive". I would think "it's as pricey as any capital city would be pricey". Certainly since the pandemic "finished", not really finished but since the world came back from that, it started to just accelerate in really unreasonable stretches, at really unreasonable rates. Now I think that this is ridiculous. I found with my old job, I was working technically for charity, so I was on a charity salary even though it was quite a glamorous organisation. It became quite clear really quickly that I would be clawing for a wage increase and as soon as you would get a small one, the cost of something else would shoot up like rent or energy bills which have been insane here.

Plus, with the whole political backdrop... I really love following the news. I feel very engaged with what's going on, to my detriment because it's really depressing. I said to someone the other day "I don't want to be British, I don't feel British" and he said to me "I definitely see you as culturally British". I am culturally British, but politically I don't want to be and I don't identify with British politics anymore.

I have to work really hard to be considered for a higher role, and even then for every push there's a pull even if the pay increase is substantial. I finally got a promotion at BAFTA and the cost of living started increasing. For a long time I did two jobs and my goal has been to do one job and to live well off of it - I don't know why that's so hard. So at the same time I got this job, which makes quite a lot more money, the rent call came in to say that they were going to increase rent. It makes it feel like such a slow climb up to get to any sort of better quality of life. Then on top of that you live in one of the biggest cities in Europe that's supposed to have loads of culture and loads of things that you can do but as soon as you step out your door it feels like you've spent £50 just walking around. I don't go out to eat a lot here, I don't go to a lot of things generally but if I do it's because I know people or because I can do it for free. For example, if I worked at one of the bars maybe I can go in for free, lots of that kind of stuff. It's hard to go away for weekends or anything like that, I very rarely do that. It becomes a real money thing. When I first started at BAFTA I saw a lot of really inspiring influential women in higher positions and I thought it was a really cool place to be. I was there for about 5 years and towards the end I was seeing diminishing rewards. I personally am not interested in settling down or getting married, and a lot of people around me are doing that. There is definitely a single person tax here. The job wasn't quite what I needed, I need something that's going to be giving me more money and more freedom to do the things I care about, which is definitely travel.

In London I've always lived in older buildings and in New York I know they have a lot of newer built tower blocks that have been there for a long time; I've never lived in one of them. My impression in London is, aside from those you have really tall council tower blocks, but the majority of tower blocks being built now are brand new builds and they're going for millions.

The only people I know who live in what I call "swish flats", new build white and grey buildings, they will be earning well. Most people I know who don't have loads and loads of money, are living in older buildings that have been repurposed. I find that quite a stark contrast. I personally never wanted to live in a swish flat because I feel almost out of place in it. I like buildings that feel cosy, I don't want to feel like I'm moving around a steel white box. I want them to have character and to be able to be messy in them and feel like the mess fits. It's certainly not attainable in London anyway.

I know a few people who live in warehouses and I know one guy who lives as a property guardian in an old bank, not unlike the show “Crashing”. I thought about being a property guardian myself, but I’m 31 now and actually I don’t think I could hack it, living with all those other people. I need a space of my own now. It costs more to have your own space, but for my own sanity I don’t think I could live with 20 other people in a converted bank.

How many people other than you are in this apartment on a regular basis? A semi-regular basis? Where do they stay?

[Fern] Kate’s partner’s here almost every weekend. I have like a couple of people over now but they tend to not stay over. Liz tends to go to her partner’s because he lives on his own. In every partnership, it depends on who’s got the better living situation as to who stays where. I had a boyfriend for a while last year who actually lived in a much nicer flat than I did, but he didn’t like it because he lived with a couple and didn’t want to hang out with them. So he would come here all the time. I’d say we have one extra person here a week, generally. A couple times a month there will be two extra people and it feels crowded. When we were looking for a new flatmate to replace Kate we were definitely giving higher priority to finding a single person.

Do you entertain a lot? What do you do when you have people over?

[Fern] I would love to have a dinner party. I don’t have a dining table and it makes a big difference. In summer, we have people over more. We had a barbecue in the garden with Kate’s parents. I had a birthday party in the garden in the first year we were here. We can’t entertain loads, but I would like to do more of it.

Do you have any hobbies? How do they take up space in the apartment?

[Fern] The first year we were here, because it was lockdown, we all got a lot more into hobbies. I was doing a lot of sewing for calmness, Liz and Caitlyn got into acrylic pouring. Since the world’s opened up more I definitely have less time for hobbies, but Liz I take our fitness quite seriously now. I’ve gotten into running quite a lot, I do a lot of swimming. I’m trying to get into biking, I really want to cycle around the city. My birthday present this year from Liz was a bike helmet. I don’t have a bike but we have some Santander bikes just at the end of the road.

I sometimes do a workout on the floor in my room, I've got a mat that I put out. That's a hangover from COVID when I started working out at home. Liz sometimes works out in the garden, but mostly she'll go to the gym. I'd prefer to swim but I do work out in this tiny little space. The pool where I go to swim is just up the hill in Clapham which is about a 25 minute walk or a quick bus.

When we do things together in the house we often will just sit and watch movies. Or we'll get into a TV series obsessively for a bit. We probably went out more just as the world was opening up again. As the cost of living has gone up more, like the cost of food which has just gotten crazy, we're just not going out as much. It is tangibly more expensive. If we do plan to go out to dinner we'll probably plan for it to be just after pay day, which is once a month. Being paid monthly definitely changes how you handle your money. By comparison, I have a friend who was telling me she gets paid weekly because she lives abroad and it's unbelievable. Once a month I do all this moving around money and then once I've done that I just think "That's it?". Invariably, any ideas I might have had about going out are just gone. The general rule is that you should only be paying 30% of your income towards living expenses, that's just not the case. Mine is 50% at least and that doesn't even include bills.

Everyone is just a bit worse off. At the age I'm at, I felt like I was just breaking into adulthood and was a bit more stable. Now everything has just become unstable again.

How does your pet take up space in your flat?

[Fern] He certainly impacts how we live. Liz got him on the first day of the first lockdown, so he's one of those dogs that's not been left alone for long stretches of time. That impacts how we work, Liz will mostly work from home but when she needs to be out we'll communicate in our Whatsapp chat about if anyone is around to feed him. We wouldn't all tend to go out for long stretches of time. If we're all going to go out, we might go for dinner and come back because we don't want to leave the house empty for a long time while he's here. He keeps us tethered to him a bit more but we all love having him. He gives me reasons to go out for a walk.

Having Zach in the house absolutely makes everything better. If we didn't have a dog around I probably find all of the issues of affordability harder. When I feel like I can't do things and I can't go out, it's ok because I'll just stay home and hang out with him.

What's your work-from-home set-up?

[Fern] I will work from home two days a week, generally. If it's more days a week then I'm not working so well, I work better if I go in. I very rarely do five days a week in the office though because it's pricey to get there. I found a bus that goes all the way to the office that I generally work in which is a massive saving because the buses are cheaper than the tube. It all adds up. For example, if I haven't organised my lunch then I'll probably stay home. I try not to buy lunch because it adds up so quickly, it makes such a difference. My food prep habits have changed over the years that I've lived in London because it's really in my best interest to prepare food, otherwise it's usually between £7-10 to buy lunch.

One thing that I've noticed in offices is that none of the men would bring their lunches in. I have male bosses who will all go out to eat for lunch everyday. I assume they must be making a lot of money to be able to afford to do that every day.

Some days all three of us who live here will be working at home. I probably go into the office the most because I really value being out and about, I'm an extrovert while Liz is an introvert and prefers to stay in. It's interesting to think about the different jobs that people do. When we first moved here we lived with Caitlin who is a nurse, she was doing shift work - sometimes she would be working night shifts and be sleeping during the day. Ultimately that didn't gel very well because we might be on calls while we're working from home while she's sleeping. No one liked it, so that was another thing we considered when we were finding another flatmate. It becomes really important, the people who you share your space with and it creates a bit of a segregation between shift workers and 9-5ers

Do you have any issues with regard to privacy?

[Fern] No, not really. Liz and I are friends so we're around in each other's rooms a lot. Whenever we've looked at new people who are going to move in, we always make sure that we're going to be friends with them as well. We would never want a random person to move in who's just going to stay in their room, that's probably my worst nightmare, someone who just doesn't come out of their room. There's not a huge amount of privacy here. I go to see a therapist and there were times during the pandemic where those meetings had to be online. Having therapy at my desk, it's not very private. I can hear what's going on downstairs and if both mine and Kate's doors are

open I can hear everything going on in her room as well. It's not a very private space but because we're all comfortable with each other we can just accept it. Sometimes we'll have people over, it's fine, we're all just trying to live in this big city in this tiny space that we're allowed. It's not hugely private.

We don't have any issues with the neighbours or anything. Actually, for a long time we were the noisy neighbours, now it's quite relaxed. The neighbours are all very friendly.

Do you have enough space?

[Fern] Not really. Well, we have enough. The room I was in before was really small and I couldn't have a desk. We have enough space, we get by. I'd like more, but I do see where other people live and I think we've lucked out. I don't have enough room for a dining table though which is a priority to me. The house where I used to live with the smaller room, we have a really big living area with the sofas and even had a futon, so we could have people stay over really easily. We also had a really big lovely dining table. That is the sacrifice for my own space. I need to be able to have my desk in the room so I can't sacrifice that, I care about doing well in my work. The old room I had was pre-pandemic. The way that life has changed now, space matters. The pandemic has changed everyone's lives. Brexit matters in terms of money, but in terms of people's priorities about home living space, the pandemic has changed everything. we're all living through our collective trauma and nobody's dealt with it. The way it's affected office work has been huge, most people have an option to work from home now. If you don't have the option to work from home, you're missing out on an aspect of freedom and life everyone now feels that they are entitled to.

If you had asked me these questions 5 years ago my answers would be really different. I was happy to take a tiny room because it was in a really good location and I could walk to work in an hour. I was close to central London and that mattered more than having space. I had a tiny room but the shared space was bigger, but I also wasn't home all the time. During the pandemic everyone lost a lot of those carefree years where you feel very vulnerable, but I really valued that time. I got 9 months off of work. I got furlough from 2 jobs where I learned to care for my body. It's where I learned to take care of my money, I had never had a savings account before then. It gave me a chance to reset and think about my life and my priorities.

***Do you feel like you're lacking any specific types of spaces?
Is there anything you wish you had?***

[Fern] Honestly, no. We've got that room for the washing machines, we really lucked out with that. If it was all in the kitchen, I would feel we were missing space. A bigger kitchen would be nicer. If one person starts cooking and somebody else wants to start we start to 'Tetris' around. For me the dining table is the biggest thing that is missing, it doesn't even have to be a dining room.

I definitely noticed at my old job, which was at a much bigger company vs. the start-up I'm at now, there was a big divide between the people who would come into the office a lot and people who pretty much didn't come back after the pandemic. You could almost perfectly separate those as people who lived in shared housing and people who had a place with a study, respectively. If I had a separate working space at home I'd be happy to use it. I would like to see how that would look.

How valuable is your outdoor space to you?

[Fern] The outdoor space means the world. It's summer and it means an awful lot. When we first moved in it was lockdown and having that space meant that we could go outside. In my last place, my room had a teeny tiny balcony, which is kind of why I was ok with such a small room. The balcony was quite small, I'd say smaller than my bed. It was probably a 2 metre by 1 metre rectangle. The rest of that house didn't have any outdoor space which meant we would have to walk 5 minutes down the street to go to the park. People who were in much more built up areas were getting cabin fever. So it was such a relief when we moved here and we were able to go outside to the garden. A lot of people were going through this thing where they had to self-isolate for 10 days if they caught COVID. When we had to do that it was ok because we could just hang out in the garden, and we were even able to distance ourselves from each other because one of us didn't have it. Being able to go outdoors and dry clothes outside makes a huge difference. Sometimes one of us gets into gardening and we have the space to do that out there and when it's been really hot we've had a little paddling pool out there which is really nice. Even when we were looking at it the agent brought up how everyone is talking about needing the outside space. Everybody who didn't have an outdoor space thought "I can't live like this". Even though I don't think we'll ever go through a lockdown like that again I think it still has shaped the way people think about their outdoor space at home.

Would you sacrifice your outdoor space for more interior space?

[Fern] I probably have to say no, because we haven't. The outside space has been really valuable. The dining table is a want, it's not a need. The outside space is probably non-negotiable now. If we did move I would really struggle if we moved somewhere that didn't even have a balcony, it would need a balcony at the very least. Seeing as I have already compromised on a dining table, I probably would again.

Where in the flat do you spend the most time?

[Fern] I probably spend most of my time in my room because I sleep in there and I sometimes work there. We do spend a lot of time together in the living room. That's probably the only communal space because our living room is kind of attached to the kitchen. So you've got this big reception area. We do cook and sit together and we spend a lot of time doing that. All of us probably spend the most time in our rooms because even if we're spending the evening watching TV together, I think all of us go to bed probably about 45 minutes to an hour before we're going to go to sleep, because we need that private time to decompress. The living room is definitely the hub. If other people are home when I get in I'll stay there for a bit, I won't go straight up to my room or anything.

Do any spaces change to accommodate different activities? Are some objects not fixed to accommodate this? Do you move furniture around a lot?

[Fern] Everything is fixed here. In the pandemic, in my old house with the small room, I rearranged all my furniture so I had a space to do a little workout indoors. It meant that I couldn't open my door fully because the bed was in the way. I'd get in my room and then crawl in the bed, and that stayed that way for about six months. I have a bit more floor space here. When I first moved in, I rearranged the room because it was set up in a way that was silly to me. I moved things so I could have more floor space to do some workouts and fit my desk in, which is mine. All the other furniture in the house came with it. The bed juts out by the bathroom which I don't perceive to be a problem. Everything is fixed apart from the dining table in the corridor beside Liz's room that the estate agent called a dining room. The 'dining table' is used as a desk by Liz, that table has moved around a little bit. We've also acquired some furniture from freecycle, mostly storage, which fills up that space now. That table was out in the garden for a whole summer, which gave us a bit more space inside. Then the rain started coming and the gazebo started flying away so we brought

the table in so it's been a bit more fixed since then. Liz would have to take all her stuff off of it for us to move it again. You might have noticed our coffee table downstairs is on wheels, and we do move that around because it's a small space. That actually came with the house and we didn't really know why it had wheels to begin with but now I get it. The TV stand is also on wheels which is handy because it means you can pull it out a bit and move it out of the way of the utility room door. Those two pieces of furniture came on wheels with the intention of being moved around because that space is small.

The TV stand just moves left and right to get it out of the way of the door. The coffee table gets pulled up to wherever we need it. If Liz is working on it she might pull it up to where she's sitting to make a little sofa desk. If we want to make more space, we push it up against the wall next to the kitchen, then you have more of a throughway. When we first moved in, there was a static sofa and a chair in that corner which looked so silly. We had the opportunity for the letting agents to remove any furniture that we didn't want at the beginning so we told them to remove those two pieces. We knew we would get hold of a corner sofa which is a much better use of the space.

So the house came furnished with all the beds, the storage, the "dining" table, and some chairs that we've put away because they don't fit anywhere. Everything apart from our individual desks. I've never moved into a place in the city that didn't come furnished. I know you can get them but I would never choose that as a renter. Renting always feels temporary. This is the longest I've ever rented anywhere, almost 3 years. I wouldn't want to fill a rented place with my own stuff with the knowledge that I might leave, not on my own terms.

Do you have enough storage space?

[Fern] Here we do. All three of us feel pretty good. Kate's room has loads of built-in wardrobe space. Mine has a built-in wardrobe. Liz and I both have beds with storage built-in underneath. Liz would probably say that she's annoyed that her room doesn't have any built-in storage, that's because her room isn't meant to be a bedroom. Her room came with a free-standing wardrobe and she's since bought another one. The corridor next to her room is now also filled with some of her storage stuff. Having the utility room is also great for storage of things that you don't really want to see, we can just shove it in there and we don't really have to think about it.

Did you add or modify anything after you moved in to make the space more livable?

[Fern] The shelf above my bed was not there, Liz put that up for me with her tools. That's probably against our rental agreement, but it means I can have my projector up there which projects onto the wall across from my bed which is really nice. I know has also put a few things up on her wall. It was the pandemic when we moved in so the agent was never coming around and the agency is so unengaged so we've just gone ahead with it. We'll see what happens when we move out. We didn;t get prior approval from the landlord like it says in our agreement, but we do plan on covering up the holes that we made when we leave.

Are there any communal spaces or services in the neighbourhood that you use?

[Fern] We are quite close to what I assume is a large council estate. I think some of the houses in the neighbourhood are probably council houses but I don't know. There's a communal basketball court nearby which I do see people playing in. We sometimes take the dog in there because it shuts and we can let him off the lead, he's not great with other dogs so walking him is a whole thing. Just off the main road there's a boutique charity shop which has some really cool stuff. There's definitely a community of people who hang around there. I do think a lot of those people are either homeless or living in unstable conditions, they are out on the street most of the time. We go in there sometimes, you get some good finds. The space around that road is very popular. There's a few green spaces where people congregate, but they're not dedicated other than the basketball court.

Can you walk me through what a regular day might look like?

[Fern] I mean it depends how well I'm doing it. I've got some little self care things that I would do on a good day. I would wake up early, around 6, and go for a run around the common, shower, get dressed, go to get the bus into Trafalgar Square, do my make-up on the bus and go to work in the office until about 6. Things are a bit more turbulent since I started a new job, my routine has been a bit disorganised. When I get back from work I'd probably go to the little Sainsburys to get something to add to dinner, come home and we'd all cook and sit around to watch TV together, then go to bed.

It is that unexciting because we wouldn't go out to the pub unless there was a reason. In the past we would just go for a drink. Sometimes we will just sit around and talk about what we had spent that day and if someone would say they didn't spend any money we'd all say "well done", that's a little challenge we have for ourselves.

How do your habits change with the seasons?

[Fern] When it gets lighter in the summer, I'm able to get up early and do more. There's usually a week in October when it starts to turn cold. Liz and I will talk to each other about our mental health during those periods, it's usually not great. Getting out of bed starts to become really difficult. I'll start using my SAD light, it puts out fake sunlight which is supposed to help with seasonal affective disorder a bit. It helps me wake up a bit more. I would be more likely to do something after work in the summer, when it's dark in the winter I'm more likely to stay in the house once I get home.

London

Harley & Linde Transcript

of Occupants: 3

Relationship: Couple & Friend

Neighbourhood: Highgate, Zone 2

Bed/Bath: 1 bed, 1 bath

Size: 51.9 m² + 6.8 m² Private Outdoor Space

Rent-to-Income: 25%

Harley

Age: 29

Gender: M

Occupation: Architectural Assistant

Linde

Age: 29

Gender: F

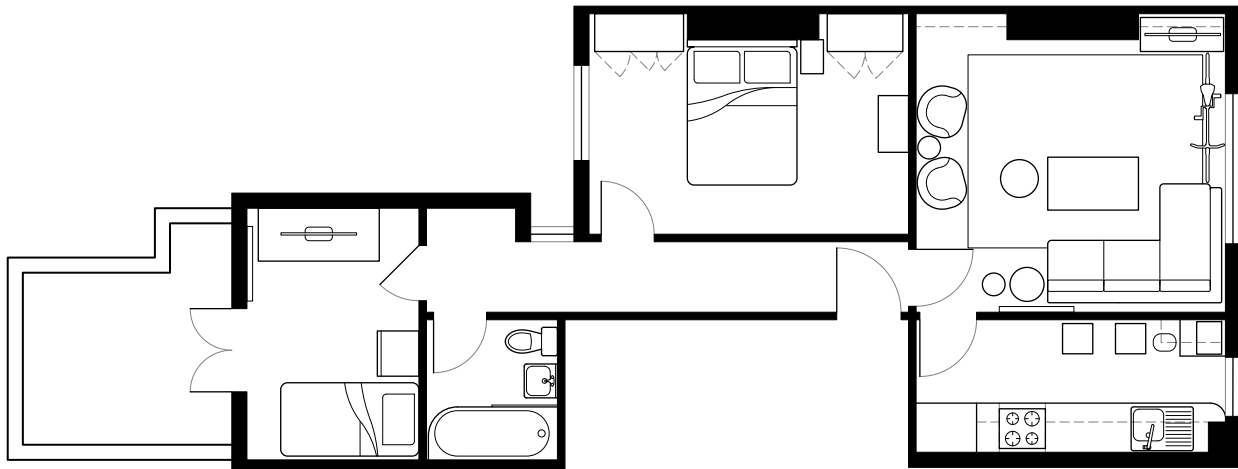
Occupation: Architectural Assistant

Maito

Age: 27

Gender: M

Occupation: Architectural Assistant







Can you tell me a bit about your home?

[Harley] We moved in because it was the only place that was going.

[Linde] We looked at other places but there were very few apartments on the market within our price range so when we spotted one it would be gone immediately.

[Harley] It's not as if we had an option to move anywhere else. We weren't in a position to choose between places. This was our only opportunity. I really like this apartment, I don't think there's anything about it that I would change necessarily. Would I prefer different things? I mean, that depends if that would come with higher rent or other strings attached. It's so hard to make a comparison. I'd probably like a garden, which we don't really have.

[Linde] We do have a terrace which is great. I like the location of our flat. We're in Highgate, it's very green which substitutes having a garden a little bit. I think we got very lucky. We didn't get the flat by choice, but it was a pretty good deal location and layout wise.

[Harley] Up until now we've always been flatting, as in sharing with other people. This was the first place that we moved into on our own. That was different for us. Previously we used to live with at least four people and it was always with people who actually owned the places or had a vested interest in it. They were family of the landlord or something like that so it always felt like we were living with the landlord. It's nice now that the landlord is really hands-off, she's never been back to check in on us or anything. That freedom is quite nice.

In terms of flat, I probably would like a place where we can eat, we don't have a dining table. The place came furnished which is great for us because we don't have any furniture. If we were furnishing it ourselves I'd definitely set it up differently. It's not really set up for living, it feels like an AirBnB where people might stay short term. It doesn't have some of the things that I would probably think to put in it, like a desk or a dining table. There is too much furniture for seating. In general I really like living here and it's a good compromise between us for commuting times for work. Our commute is more or less the same. Location wise it's actually worked out quite well. We're just within Zone 2, which means that it's cheaper for travelling. We've got shops really close so that's useful and the tube station is close as well. There are a lot of parks around too.

How long have you lived in this apartment?

[Harley] I've lived here for 8 months. Linda has been here since February, so we've both been here for about the same time, about 8 months. I've lived in the area before so that was also a factor, this place is close to areas that I already knew. We already had a relationship with the landlord, which is why we get to live here. We probably wouldn't normally have been able to afford something like this, but she's given us 'mates rates', which just means that we have to sort out her problems for her because she's so hands off.

I don't think she's paying tax on the income from this, she's not declaring it. It's quite tricky when it comes to having proof of address and things like that. That's something you would need to set up a bank account in the UK, for example. We both accept the trade off, I'm quite happy with it, but there are things like your credit score which you're not having the opportunity to improve. It's cheap but we're paying for it in another way.

You probably want to know more about how we live here and how we use the space. The big thing is that we don't have a dining table.

[Linde] We use pretty much everything here in a standard way, other than the living room. We use it as our office area if we work from home, as our dining area, and we use it as a guest bedroom as well. We have a fold-out couch so whenever we have guests over they can sleep on the couch. We can actually sleep a maximum of 6 people here, we've had 5. Every room that wasn't the kitchen, corridor, or the bathroom, has had people sleeping in it.

[Harley] The kitchen is tight, when we're both in here or when the three of us are in here it can be really annoying because we have to shuffle around.

[Linde] It's good because we've got our cooking routine with single cooks. Everyone has their own days when they cook so there's usually only one person in the kitchen at a time.

[Harley] We sleep on the mews side, the side where the back terraces and gardens are, away from the street. There's a block and the bedrooms are on the inner side. We've also got double glazing which isn't very common but is great, it's really quiet in our flat. It's not a heavy traffic street but there is a busier street up the road which we don't hear because we have double glazing.

[Linde] It's not the best temperature wise.

[Harley] During the winter, the neighbours downstairs were doing some building work. The apartment downstairs was effectively outside because they had stripped out all the windows. We haven't had a winter here where it's been thermally enclosed. The only thing last winter that was between us and outside was the floorboards which made it really cold. That's not typical but it's the only way we've lived here in the winter so far.

Where did you live before?

[Harley] I lived in London before, Linda hasn't. I was living with my family for a bit. I've also lived in a council flat in London as well, sharing with other people, and I've also lived here with my previous partner.

[Linde] I was living at home in Belgium before I came here, because of Brexit there was a whole procedure to get my work visa organised. I had to find my job first and put together an official job proposal before I could apply. During that time I was living at my parents place while I was looking for jobs and applying, that was about 3 months.

Where did you get the furniture from?

[Harley] The place was furnished. We brought the pressure cooker from my family's house, everything else was here.

[Linde] We were discussing buying a little dining table or a desk for a while, but we never got around to it.

[Harley] This arrangement is quite temporary, we don't know when our landlord will want to move back into the flat. We haven't really invested in the flat much because of that. Currently, she lives in her house in France and she's just had a baby which means for now we're hoping she'll stay there. We'll have a couple of months notice for sure but she might decide that she wants to live in London instead. That's why we haven't bought any furniture. We've never really known what the actual deal was.

[Linde] When she first went she said that we could live here for 6 months and then she was going to come back for the summer. We bought a drying rack for our laundry, that's all. We also bought some blankets and some vegetables for the terrace- very minimal basically.

[Harley] Maito has bought more furniture than we have. Our friend Maito moved to London recently and was originally going to stay with us for a little while before he found a job and a flat of his own. He's going to stay with us for a while now it seems, he said he'll stay until he gets told to leave. So he's staying and we're quite happy with that actually. He's at the whim of our landlord as well now. He's going to start paying rent, he hasn't up until now. He moved in at the end of July.

[Linde] Maito's room came furnished like a spare room because that's what it is. There was nothing in there because it was meant to just be a versatile room, whereas ours was the landlord's room so it had everything.

[Harley] Our landlord used to live in this flat prior to us moving in so it was set up for someone to live in. We didn't really have to get anything so we were quite lucky in that sense. When we eventually move somewhere else we're going to have to get those things.

[Linde] Maybe we'll be in flatshare again depending on the area and the prices.

[Harley] There are also neighbours upstairs and downstairs who we've only spoken to briefly, if that's useful to know.

Do you have enough storage space?

[Linde] We don't have enough storage space for our bikes. We've looked into paying for the hangers on the street which you can park your bike in. They came back and said that they are completely full and they will let us know whenever a spot opens up for us, it's quite unlikely to happen. It would be nice if we had a bike storage shed.

[Harley] We still have a lot of the landlord's stuff in our cupboards, so not all the storage space in the house is ours. It's not that big of a deal. We don't have much stuff of our own because we travelled a lot. We don't own much except for clothes.

How long do you intend to stay?

[Linde] Harley wants to get registered as an architect here which takes a year, but he's basically finished. Now I am probably going to start my registration here as well which will take another year. So we'll be here at least another year but after that it's open basically.

[**Harley**] I'm not fixed on living in London. I'd like to live in an English speaking country, but that's about it. I don't mind travelling around. We'll be here for a year for sure for career commitments.

[**Linde**] The biggest downside of moving from New Zealand to London has been that you can really tell that the money that we save at the end of the month doesn't compare. New Zealand was so much better than London, financially. That's a big factor on whether or not we might decide to stay.

What are your thoughts about the affordability and cost of living in London?

[**Linde**] Rent is a lot higher than other places. Commuting is also quite expensive if you do it on a daily basis like we often do. You could easily spend £150 a month. The cost of food is fine if you're buying from the supermarket but if you're eating out then it really depends where you go.

Do you have any hobbies? How do they take up space in the apartment?

[**Harley**] We've got two skateboards and our bikes but we don't own much other stuff. We have a console for video games that we use with the TV.

Do you work from home?

[**Harley**] I can work from home if I wanted to but I really struggle to work from home so I don't.

[**Linde**] I think us not working from home stems from the fact that we don't have a desk or a dining table, that makes it uncomfortable to work from home. Otherwise, I think it would be fine to work from home. It is also quite easy to get to work because the tube is just here. It takes about half an hour, more or less, for each of us to get to work.

[**Harley**] It's cheaper to work from home, I sometimes opt to do that. For example, if I have a site meeting that's close to the house then I'd opt to work from home because of the commute prices. I would save money by not going into work.

Do you entertain a lot? What do you do when you have people over?

[**Linde**] People that live in London. Like Harley's brother, they would come over a lot. We probably have someone over at least once a week.

[**Harley**] I think the flat's pretty well set up for that actually, we've got so many seats.

[**Linde**] We'd often have people over more in the evening, when we'd be having dinner or to play board games or something like that.

[**Harley**] We have people out on the terrace in the summer too which is nice. We had 6 of us out there the other week. I quite like cooking for people so I do that quite a lot.

How many people other than you are in this apartment on a regular basis? A semi-regular basis? Where do they stay?

[**Harley**] Obviously we've recently collected Maito, though he's somewhat permanent now. We have people stay with us every month or so.

[**Linde**] It was quite frequent for a while because we had a lot of people coming to visit from abroad. My sister came to visit, and then two of my friends from Belgium. We always tell people that they're more than welcome to stay with us on the couch when they come to London.

[**Harley**] You walk through the living room to get to the kitchen so it's not the most private to stay in there. Sometimes in that case we'll let people stay in our room and we'll stay in the living room, especially since Maito is here.

Do any spaces change to accommodate different activities? Are some objects not fixed to accommodate this? Do you move furniture around a lot?

[**Harley**] Yeah, we've got chairs that we sometimes move around. We have a very 'loungy' arrangement, so if we ever just want to sit around something we'll move the chairs around the coffee table. We unfold the fold-out couch and we fold up the coffee table as well.

Do you have any issues with regard to privacy?

[**Linde**] I don't think there is privacy, we're all quite comfortable around each other. I now know that 90% of Maito's boxer shorts have rips in them, not by choice just because he walks around in his boxers all the time.

[**Harley**] Privacy between us and the neighbours is fine. The front rooms which are adjacent to the street are all public functions, like the living room. Whereas the back rooms are all the private rooms, the bedrooms.

[**Linde**] There are heaps of mature trees that cover up the backs of the building. It's a back garden facing the back garden, so I can sit on the terrace and go sunbathing and I'm pretty confident that almost nobody can see me. Now Maito is in the back room so I haven't been sunbathing in a while.

[**Harley**] Previously, our terrace was off a back room that no one lived in but now our terrace is off of a room which someone occupies, so the space is separated a bit. Aside from that, I don't think we have any privacy issues. We do share a bathroom so I think that's the only small thing.

Do you have enough space?

[**Harley**] No, not for bikes. Our bedroom is also quite small, but there is a lot of stuff in our bedroom.

[**Linde**] The bedroom has basically two built in wardrobes, some drawers, a single seater and a lounging couch. So there's quite a bit of furniture in there. I've never felt like it was too small except when it comes to bikes, especially since Maito has been here because he also has a bike. There's my foldable bike, Maito's big bike and Harley's skateboard so it starts to get really busy in the living room.

***Do you feel like you're lacking any specific types of spaces?
Is there anything you wish you had?***

[**Harley**] A dryer or airing cupboard would be great.

[**Linde**] Now it's just in the living room, so when we wash there's a drying rack in the living room where we hang our clothes.

[Harley] It's not really practical but I'd like access to our outdoor space from outside. We have to walk through our flat to access our own private external space. If we get soil or anything, that has to come through the flat. I'd love to have a gym or a swimming pool.

[Linde] That was ideal when we had the spare room, we used it as a gym, that was really quite handy.

[Harley] I'd love a basketball court if we're really wishing. There's heaps of those types of things in the community if we wanted to use them. That ties into our whole idea about wanting a garden as well, there's so many parks in the area that we actually get access to green space from those.

[Linde] Location wise, it's quite good. We have a lot of parks around us, so if you want to go running or just outdoors you could go somewhere like Hempstead Heath. There are also quite a lot of gyms out here.

[Harley] Linda, would you buy this place if you could afford it?

[Linde] I think so, it's in quite a good location.

[Maito] I think I would. I'd knock down the wall between the kitchen and the living room though.

[Harley] I'd like to get some cross-ventilation. There's no cross-ventilation in the bedroom. That really sucks because you can't really get fresh air in there. There's great cross-ventilation through the corridor but not through the bedroom, on hot nights it's really sticky inside. There are windows anywhere where they can be windows, if a wall doesn't have then it's because they can't because we live in a terrace house. There's a chimney breast in the bedroom and the living room along the shared wall. All Victorian buildings would have those running along the wall which run through the whole building which serve all the rooms up and down that stack.

Would you sacrifice some interior space for a private outdoor space?

[Harley] I think in general the interior space is more valuable to us. If that external space was actually another room that would be much more valuable to us, it would be used way more.

[Linde] Then again, it is quite nice to have an exterior space.

[Harley] The terrace is effectively an internal space anyway because it's not really a garden. That decision depends on size, because I think I would sacrifice 2 or 3m² in my flat to have a balcony if there wasn't one.

[Linde] Now, based on our layout and the fact that there are 3 people living here, if we didn't have a terrace I wouldn't sacrifice any space to create an outdoor space.

Where in the apartment do you spend the most time?

[Harley] The living room and kitchen.

[Linde] We all often go to bed an hour before we want to sleep to start reading or whatever else.

Can you walk me through what a regular day might look like?

[Linde] I don't work from home, I go into the office every single day. I wake up early, around 6:00 AM, and I go to do yoga 3-4 times a week. That starts at 6:45. I go to work and come home around 7:00 PM. Depending on who's cooking that night I'll either be in the kitchen or the living room. On the weekend it really depends, could be cooking, going out with friends or reading.

[Harley] I'm pretty much the same, but I get up later. I get up and I go to work, I get up for work exclusively. During the weekend I don't get up that much. Basically go to work, to the kitchen, to the living room, to the bedroom, and back to work. Very basic.

How do your habits change with the seasons?

[Harley] I would tend to stay out more often for a drink or something in the summertime. In general, it really doesn't matter on the season. I would spend more time outside during the summer but I really don't mind if it's light or dark outside.

London

Liz Transcript

of Occupants: 2

Relationship: Friends

Neighbourhood: Tooting Bec, Zone 3

Bed/Bath: 2 bed, 1 bath

Size: 84.2 m² + 140.9 m² Semi-Private Outdoor Space

Rent-to-Income : 35%

Liz

Age: 36

Gender: F

Occupation: Executive Assistant

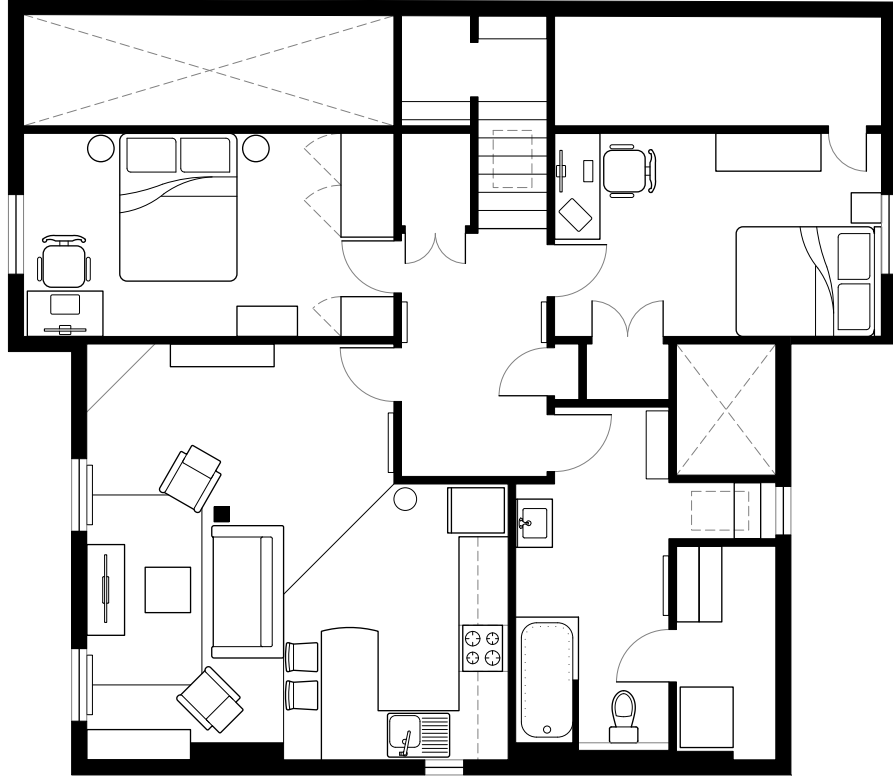
Paddy

Age: 34

Gender: M

Occupation: Medical Advisor









Can you tell me a bit about your home?

[Liz] We've been in this place for 16 months. Paddy and I have been in two other houses together previously, and we moved into this one when the rents on those places went up after COVID. We got priced out of our last house. The cost of this place is still up there but the further out you go, they start to reduce your costs. We used to share with more people, we were originally in a 7 bed, then we moved to a 3 bed, now it's just us. We just met through spareroom, just moving into a flat together in the 7 bedroom flat. We moved in with random people in that house and just ended up making friends. Three of us from that house ended up moving in together in our last place about halfway through the lockdowns, just as they loosened up a little. They reduced rents during COVID to try to get people to stay and then at the end of it all they put all the prices back up. It was ridiculous to try to find this place. We had to offer over asking and there were hundreds of people trying to get into the places. People would just offer without looking and would offer way more than was asked. Landlords could just do whatever they wanted. Our landlord was good, there were so many people that wanted this place, and he was calling people to ask about them a little bit because he didn't want to have to keep re-leasing. He asked how long we would stay and so we signed for 2 years. We still offered more than asking, but he had people offering more than us still and he said he would prefer to have someone who would look after the place and stay in it for a while. Obviously, otherwise London can churn quite a bit. People are in and out of London, they move all the time. It came furnished and a lot of the 'stuff' is ours, well it's mostly me.

We do have a bike locker in the garden, Paddy keeps his bike down there. It's for all the residents and Paddy has a key, he's the only one who uses it though so it works out fine.

Where did you live before?

[Liz] I travelled for a bit and then came from Australia to here. I've always been on this end of London, I started at Clapham and made my way down. So I've been here for 8 years now.

How long do you intend to stay?

[Liz] I used to always have a deadline, I don't anymore. I think if I was going to leave now I'd probably go home to Australia. I don't know where I would go if I were to go back to Australia, I definitely wouldn't go back to the little country town where I'm from and I already did Sydney for 3 years before I left. I'm from Adelaide which is a lot smaller. I left to travel for about a year, my relationship had ended and I hated my job, so I wanted to do something different. I had a 2 year working visa initially so I thought I would travel around the UK for a bit then go back. Then, at the end of my first year I decided to stay until the end of my visa, so I did that. My mom's family is all Maltese so I got a Maltese passport to stay as an EU citizen but at the same time we voted Brexit here in the UK, so I had to go home for 5 months to wait for them to give me my paperwork, then I came back.

During COVID it was weird because I couldn't leave, even when they loosened restrictions here and people were seeing their families I still couldn't. Unless I was committed to staying in Australia I wasn't able to go back. The whole thing was weird because we went from being out all the time and being expected to be at work, to never leaving the house. Ironically that was a really nice summer, which doesn't happen very often. At least at that time we had an outdoor space, so we could at least go outside. So then when we were looking for this place I said "it has to have a backyard". Without a backyard things are very hard to deal with. In Australia backyards are really normal. COVID feels like a lifetime ago now. I've always had an outdoor space in London which is really lucky. There's a lot of places in the city with no outdoor space or sitting rooms, oftentimes it's used as a bedroom to rent out to someone. I've never wanted that, I like having a space where I'm not stuck in my room all the time and I like being outdoors, so I've always looked for that. When I first moved here I was living with a friend that I met when I was travelling. They were living what was technically a one bed flat that they turned into two rooms with a tiny kitchenette. I remember thinking to myself "I could never live like this", it was such a contrast coming from Australia where the houses are massive. Even the apartments in Australia have space, I put some effort into finding an apartment that had space.

How many people other than you are in this apartment on a regular basis? A semi-regular basis? Where do they stay?

[Liz] I've got some mates from all over because I've travelled, and they come to stay. I've had maybe 1 or 2 of them stay over. My friend comes from Canada and she normally just stays in my room. If she comes with her partner I'll let them stay in my room and I'll stay on the couch. Paddy's family will come over and visit from Ireland, but his sister lives down the road so if they come to stay for a while they'll stay with his sister because she's got a spare room.

Do you entertain a lot? What do you do when you have people over?

[Liz] We have people come over for dinner and drinks, we'll just be in the living space. That would be a couple of times a month. We tend to go out more than we have people over. If it's having old housemates over then it's a bit different, but if it's anyone else we'll go out. There's a lot of places around where we are, or for me I will go out straight from work, so I don't come home I'll just go straight to it and come home at the end.

Do any spaces change to accommodate different activities? Are some objects not fixed to accommodate this? Do you move furniture around a lot?

[Liz] Nothing really moves, it all just stays as it is. Originally there was some furniture in the landing bit, but I've disassembled it and put it away.

I've moved my bedroom around a couple of times. I've also moved some furniture in the bathroom/laundry and packed some external storage away.

Do you have any hobbies? How do they take up space in the apartment?

[Liz] We do a bit of yoga in the space out on the landing. Paddy does crossfit nearby, that's about a 5-10 minute walk away. The commons is good for a walk around there as well. My gym is Clapham. Paddy also does park runs.

Do you work from home? If so, what's your set-up?

[Liz] We both work at home sometimes. Paddy is full time at home, he only goes in once or twice a month. I'll be in the office anywhere between 2-4 days a week. We each have a desk set-up in our rooms. I'm an executive assistant and Paddy is a medical advisor.

Do you have any issues with regards to privacy?

[Liz] No. We've lived together for a really long time, we know how it works. We also have relatively different schedules so we don't impact each other. Nothing else in the area that I've noticed.

Do you have enough space?

[Liz] Yeah, we have a pretty good space here. Our rooms are about the same size, but my room probably has more storage. We tried to look for that in a space, I just naturally have more stuff than he does. With same sized rooms we can split the rent more equally, whereas if one was bigger than the other we'd have to do some maths to figure out who pays what. The living room is a nice sized space, we can sit there together and not be on top of each other. We also don't have to be with each other, our rooms have enough space for us to be in there without feeling trapped.

Do you feel like you're lacking any specific types of spaces? Is there anything you wish you had?

[Liz] I'm not a fan of working in my bedroom, I like to have my bedroom and office separate, so I'd like to have that separate space where I could work from. I don't think Paddy minds. That being said, I'm not always home all the time. In the lockdowns when I was home all the time, I didn't like it, in the first place I was in my bedroom all the time and I hated it. When we were looking for this place I needed a living space and an area where I could work. Since we've moved here I've been in the office more and it's not so bad, but it also monopolises space in my room. My office is in Clerkenwell. Paddy's work is out of London.

We do have a laundry machine but we don't have a dryer, so we have drying racks that we put up in the empty spaces of the living room. Normally they will be either side of the TV because then it's near the windows. The other option was the landing space but because there's no air flow, we didn't want to create 'damp'. 'Damp' is a thing in these buildings, they're older and if you try to air clothes they just start to get damp.

Do you have enough storage space?

[Liz] We have heaps of storage. The two big shelf units came in the place which is great because it means we can put a lot of stuff on them. All the kitchen space including under the dining counter is full of cupboard space. The landing area has two big cupboards. My room has an entire wall worth of cupboard space where the door is and Paddy has a cupboard on the side. He's got a cabinet that used to be mine, and a little 'attic' space accessed by a small door which is good for suitcases. In the bathroom there's a chest of drawers and a towel cupboard. There's more shelves also in the laundry room, all our bulky things and cleaning stuff is in there.

Do you have access to any private outdoor space?

[Liz] We have a backyard, which is shared with all three units in the building. We have to let our landlord know when we want to use it, they don't want us using it during working hours because there's a dentist on the ground floor and people can see the backyard. On the weekends, as long as they know that we're using it and cleaning up then it's fine. It's a semi-private space.

Would you sacrifice some interior space for a private outdoor space?

[Liz] Having the space inside matters more. We're close to commons so as long as we can go out it's ok, it's nice to have the outdoor space but interior space is more important. That's why the conditions of the backyard are fine.

Where in the apartment do you spend the most time?

[Liz] For Paddy, that's probably in his room. For me, probably the lounge room.

Can you walk me through what a regular day might look like?

[Liz] If I'm going to the office, I'm up at 5:30 or 6AM and go straight to the gym. I work all day then I come back at nighttime around 5:30 or 6PM. I'll cook, watch TV, and go to bed. Paddy normally wakes up just before 7, will have breakfast here and go to crossfit. He's back home at 8:30AM and he'll log on for work by 9. He normally breaks around midday to cook lunch or go for a walk if it's nice. He'll be back in his room working for the afternoon, and in the evening we might watch some TV together or go out and see other people. On the days I work from home I might wake up at the same time if I'm seeing

my personal trainer, be home for 8:30 or 9, I'll do some chores, and then log on for work. I work wherever I feel comfortable at the time, sometimes that's in my room and sometimes it's in the lounge area if I'm just doing something like emails. I'll finish work between 6 and 7PM. We cook separately here unless we've pre-planned to cook for each other.

Paddy and I are separate most weekends, unless we plan to be with each other. I wake up pretty early, I'll sit around and read my book or watch Netflix for a while in the morning. I'll do things around the house or go to the gym. I'll often talk to people back home on the weekends because that's much easier with the time change. Paddy will have a sleep in, go to crossfit, and probably meet some people. He does a lot more during the day, I tend to do a lot more during the night. Summer is a bit busier and we tend to do more, in winter we're generally around the flat because the weather is worse and it's cold. There's a lot more trips in summertime, Paddy was not here for a lot of July because he had a lot of trips, and I'm not here for more of August. In wintertime we spend a lot more time together watching movies or whatever else. We might brave the cold to go to a museum or a comedy show, in Vauxhall they do comedy shows.

What are your thoughts about the affordability and cost of living in London?

[Liz] It's very expensive. I wouldn't move out because the lifestyle here is what I want, the travel will often outweigh how much I can save on rent. I have a friend that lives in Essex which means that he pays £30-40 return on a train in and out of London, and the last trains are at 12:30. He pays a lot less to pay further out. I pay a lot more to rent in London but I don't pay as much in travel costs and I don't have time restrictions on what I'm doing. My uber will be £30 if I miss the tube, whereas his will be £70-80. I've convinced myself it's worth it. If I want to save money for travelling, then that means I'm not going to be social every night because I'm still paying for rent in London. Buying lunch is also a cost that adds up, we tend to make our own food. You have to think about where your money goes a bit more and you do eventually get priced out of areas, as everything gets more and more popular and central expands you just get priced out. You end up moving that much further. This was where I drew the line, I didn;t want to be any further out unless we really couldn't afford it. You either get further and further away or you end up sacrificing a lot more of what you want for space or location. We are really close to a tube station, we could have sacrificed not being as close and our rent would be a little bit cheaper. When we were looking for a place we wanted a lounge room, some sort of outdoor space, and to be close to a

station. Those things tend to cost money, if we have compromised on those we might have found somewhere cheaper but we wanted those things as part of our quality of living. Paddy doesn't like the buses. If it's pouring while you're coming home at night you don't want to be walking through it so we pay more to be closer to the station.

[Paddy] I'm quite lucky that I've got a decent job, I don't know how a lot of people do it. You just get used to it and that money is just not yours anymore, whenever you get paid you just take a chunk out and pretend it doesn't exist. When you go somewhere else it's quite nice like when you buy a drink in a cheaper city. It is what it is and you have to accept it. You have to think whether you care more about the money or where you live. There are other places that are cheaper, but if you're not as happy or there's not as much going on there, is it really worth living there?

[Liz] The dining room for me was also a compromise, I like kitchens separately but also not one that is too small. We technically have a dining room but it's part of the kitchen counter. If we have someone else over we would tend to eat up there with them, if it's just us we eat in the living room.

London

Nadine Transcript

of Occupants: 3
Relationship: Flatmates
Neighbourhood: Stoke Newington, Zone 2
Bed/Bath: 2 bed, 1 bath
Size: 87.4 m² + 5.3 m² Private Outdoor Space
Rent-to-Income: 55%

Nadine

Age: 27

Gender: F

Occupation: Currently: Unemployed / Creative Endeavours,
Formerly: Marketing & Partnerships

Steph

Age: 31

Gender: F

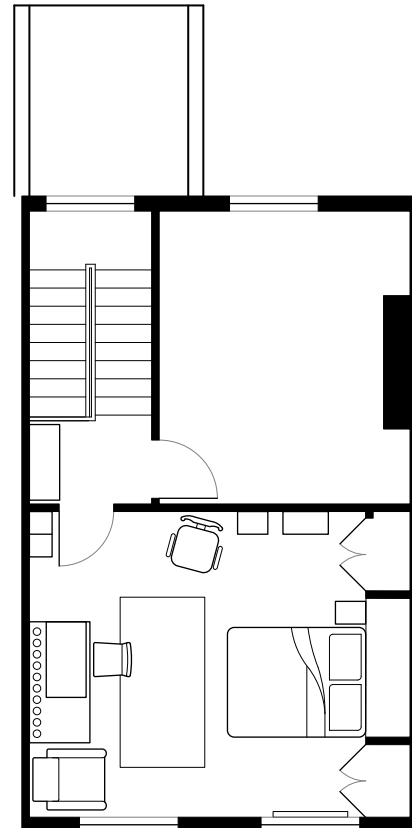
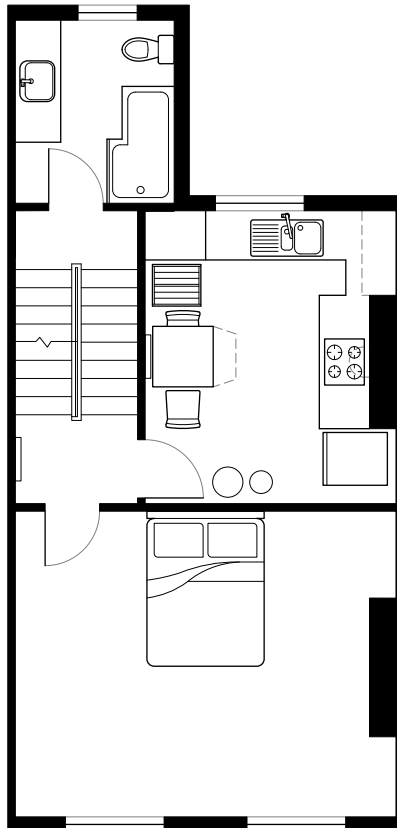
Occupation: Art Director

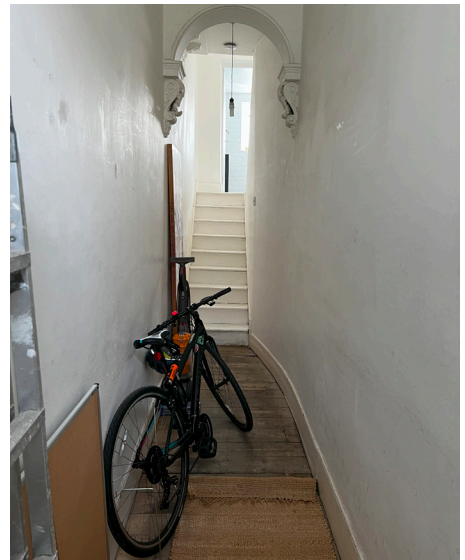
Anna

Age: 31

Gender: F

Occupation: Video Director







Can you tell me a bit about your home?

[Nadine] I moved to Stoke Newington because I feel like it's a really cute area. It's not very well connected, you can only get there by bus but that gives it a nice village feeling. I used to live in a more modern place before I moved into this flat but I much prefer the "cute English townhouse vibe". It has wood floors which are a big deal for me, it has lots of natural light, and the room is massive for the price in London standard. I thought it was very charming. It gets a lot of light, especially in winter, my room is on the side where the sun goes down so I get golden afternoon light all the time

How long have you lived in this apartment?

[Nadine] I moved in 2020, so 3 & 1/2 years

Where did you live before?

[Nadine] In London, a little further up north, in a modern build zero character - though it was much warmer and probably much more practical. It was a 5 bedroom place, I thought there were too many people and I was also living with my boyfriend. The room was too small, we were all working from home, and my stuff didn't fit. So when I found this place I decided to move.

Where did you get the furniture from?

[Nadine] One of the girls I live with has been there much longer than me, I've been there the second longest and the other girl is newer. As far as I know, the place was furnished. I did add a lot of stuff myself, like this armchair I found on the street and a couple of other bits I found on the street like a mirror. It did come with a bed and desk and it also has a built-in wardrobe which is really good. I did buy a lamp and an ergonomic chair because my job was giving us a work from home budget, the rest were random finds from the street. If I put something outside the house people will just take it within 20 minutes.

How long do you intend to stay?

[Nadine] I plan on leaving the house pretty soon. Mainly that's because of personal factors, I'm not sure if I'll stay in London. If I were to stay in London I would want a place for my boyfriend and I, just the 2 of us. It's really cold in the current flat in the winter, it's kind

of unbearable. Even though it's really cute, it's pretty run down and needs a full renovation. We had mice just a month ago, it was a full infestation. I feel like if you're two people you can pay a little bit more and get a place that's a bit better. That being said, the place I'm in now is really cheap for a single person, so it's worth it.

I'm unemployed at the moment so things are up in the air. My boyfriend is in Australia so I could go there. He's on the Sunshine Coast and I don't want to move there because there's no city and I don't have a driver's licence. We could move to Sydney or Melbourne. My sister lives in Berlin so we could also live there. Or we could move to Barcelona, my parents have a place there.

I have a pause in my life now because I'm unemployed so it could be a good time to leave London. When you don't have a job that you want to be in London for, there's no point in killing your savings on rent to live there. It's way too expensive to not be employed. I don't want to go into a job that I don't like. I could either try to find my dream job and stay there or I can leave knowing that I could always go back if I wanted. There's nothing keeping me in London so I might as well leave, I've been in London 4 years now.

People and things in London have changed in my time there, but it's hard to quantify because of COVID. Working from home has been a big change. Other than that, some areas have become more popular than others, which is normal.

Do you work from home? If so, what's your set-up?

[Nadine] I typically would work from home and I also run my own business from there. I had a full time job which was fully remote, we did have a coworking space available to us but no one would go in. The job was very call-based, so every time I had a call I would jump on those calls. Then I would always have my own projects to work on and I would set up my own studio in my room and work on that. I was basically a very bad employee, putting in the bare minimum and trying to benefit from having such a flexible and easy job so that I could pursue my own creative ideas. I might pursue those full time now, I don't know yet. It did feel weird not working in an office, at some points you just feel like you're on your own all the time, I like being on my own though.

I'm doing all this stuff in my room. We don't have a living room, because basically our living room is someone's bedroom. I think if we had a living room, I'd be in there a lot. I like co-working with people, not just hanging out but working beside each other.

Do you have any hobbies? How do they take up space in the apartment?

[**Nadine**] I feel like I can't workout at home, which is a shame because it's such a nice 'budget thing' to be able to do sport at home. Our floorboards are just so creaky that if I tried any sort of workout my flatmates would definitely ask me to stop, so I go to a gym nearby and I would go for runs in the parks as well. The kitchen is really small as well but I'm not much of a cook. I go thrift shopping in the area too.

Do you have any pets?

[**Nadine**] No, because my flatmate is allergic. I would have loved to have a cat to get rid of the mice.

Do you have enough storage space?

[**Nadine**] No, because there's 3 of us living in this house and we have to store everything in our rooms. My room has the most storage, with the built-in wardrobes which are good for clothes. I can fit in a lot but I end up having so much clutter. It would be nice to have a storage room, a laundry room, and a living room where people could put their books and lamps or other things. All of our rooms are fully cluttered because we have to do that.

I think if it were just a couple living in there, then it would be fine because one room would be an office, the other one would be a living room and then you could spread out way better. We pay £650 each for the big rooms and Anna's room is £550, so it's £1850 per month. If the couple both had full time well paying jobs it would be doable to afford it. I haven't looked at what studio flats cost in London but I feel like they would all be at that price. Of course that's not including bills and council tax so maybe it's not that doable actually.

How many people other than you are in this apartment on a regular basis? A semi-regular basis? Where do they stay?

[**Nadine**] The others have never had anyone over. I've had people over twice in the past month, I don't know if my flatmates like that. I had one friend stay over for a week and one friend stay over for 5 days. I like to think I compensate by being away for a lot of time as well. It's not really the best because I feel like if I have people over I'm kind of taking over the kitchen space when we're in there. I get along with the flatmates, we're not really friends, we're flatmates. The two of them do things together but they don't really invite me, I guess because I'm not around a lot. We're friendly and we chit chat in the kitchen or send

each other memes every now and then. It's not like living with friends, which is kind of good because I'm not wasting time chatting and I spend more time getting things done when I'm at home. Work mode is always on. Not having a living room also makes me do more work.

Do you entertain a lot? What do you do when you have people over?

[Nadine] Not really. We would usually meet for coffee or go for a walk in the park. Some people have a little studio or something so I would go over to theirs. If people don't live in the area we would meet halfway, London is so big. I don't have people over unless they're coming from overseas then they stay over.

Do any spaces change to accommodate different activities? Are some objects not fixed to accommodate this? Do you move furniture around a lot?

[Nadine] I've rearranged quite a few times. The bed has been in multiple different locations, the desk has also been in different locations. Now that I have my knitting machine set up for good I don't really move stuff anymore because it's too heavy. I have moved it a lot in the past. Day to day everything is fixed.

Did you add or modify anything after you moved in to make the space more livable?

[Nadine] I added a shelf above my desk for plants and books but nothing else has been added.

Do you have any issues with regard to privacy?

[Nadine] 100%. Between the three of us you can hear everything. One of the other girls is a very sound sensitive sleeper and I'm a night owl so I don't think she likes that. We can look directly into the flats across from us and we can see right into them and they can look into ours and I don't really close my curtains. It doesn't bother me though, I could close the blinds if I wanted. It's kind of fun watching what the neighbours are up to.

Do you have enough space?

[**Nadine**] No. Even though the rooms are really big for London. For the price that they are, they are big but there's still not enough space. The whole house is very narrow and on top of each other. There's no space for us outside our rooms.

Do you feel like you're lacking any specific types of spaces? Is there anything you wish you had?

[**Nadine**] A living room. A dining room would be nice too so the table wasn't right in the kitchen, or at least have a bigger kitchen so we could have a bigger table, then we could have more people over. 4 people is the max for the dinner table right now. Having an ensuite would be great because I have to walk down the stairs to go to the bathroom. If someone else is in the bathroom I have to wait, which has been happening a lot recently. It's fine to have one bathroom if everyone has different hours, but now our schedules are getting closer and closer together. For a while it was only me working from home, which I loved. Then my flatmate Steph started working from home and this new girl Anna moved in and she works from home all the time. When it was just me I used to sit in the kitchen a lot and work from the kitchen. When they're home I don't do that because I feel like the kitchen is for everyone.

Do you have access to any private outdoor space?

[**Nadine**] We've got a little rooftop, but I don't know if it's legal. Our landlord doesn't mind if we use it and he asked if we would be more likely to use it if there was a railing around the edge of it. I don't think he's planning on adding that anytime soon. I don't use it, I might as well go to the park. I used it twice over the summer to tan. Steph uses it daily because she smokes, in the mornings and after lunch. The people underneath us have the garden, I think I would use something like that more. Summer in London isn't great anyway. If you told me I could have a similar place for the same place with a garden I'd take it.

Would you sacrifice some interior space for a private outdoor space?

[**Nadine**] I would prefer to have more indoor space, because London is so cold and wet.

Where in the apartment do you spend the most time?

[Nadine] My room.

Can you walk me through what a regular day might look like?

[Nadine] It's all very straightforward, like anyone's day - coffee, work, shopping. It's very boring. The one thing I would say that's specific to me is that I stay in my area 7 days a week, most weeks. I have everything here that I want - coffee shops, grocery stores, clothing shops, gym, and parks. I stay in the neighbourhood and do my own things.

How do your habits change with the seasons?

[Nadine] In the winter I always have a hot water bottle wrapped around me because it's cold and draughty in the flat. I'm home a lot longer in the winter and in the summer I'm more social and out in Clissold park a lot too.

What are your thoughts about the affordability and cost of living in London?

[Nadine] It's expensive. Even though the price of my room is ok, the salaries are ridiculous, they don't match up. If I look at salaries for someone who's in the same role as me in the US they're always a lot higher. London salaries are way too low, especially in creative industries. I have friends in New York who have their own places in Brooklyn with better space, they have their own living rooms and things, and it makes me wonder what I'm doing here in London sharing a flat with 3 of us in it. If salaries were matched up better then it would be more affordable, especially if you want to join things and be more social. I think my flat is on the cheaper end, if it were renovated and the price went up a bit then it would still be worth it. Since I'm unemployed and it is expensive to live, I am more likely to leave London. You have to have a well paid job or parents who support you to be able to get by in London.

There are so many invisible costs for renting. The bills are not included, there's council tax, and other expenses as well. Our rent increased as well, I used to pay closer to £600. We have a private landlord but he doesn't live in the UK and so he uses an agency to manage the property. The agency reached out to us and told us that they were going to increase our rent by 20%, which was a huge shock. We asked our landlord about it and he said that they never discussed that with

him, so we renegotiated down to a 10% increase. He came by the other day to see the state of the house and we've been complaining about the windows for a long time, they're draughty and mouldy. The quality of the houses in London is so bad. I'm from Germany and these kinds of conditions are not legal, and in London they just get away with it. Houses in places like Germany and Scandinavia and Switzerland are just built better, they're more equipped for bad weather because they have more healthy living standards. I also noticed here that all year round things are slightly moist, my clothes are never really dry. We used to have mould issues in the bathroom and they just painted over it. The new places are better but just soulless and not that affordable. I want to find a balance.

As it stands, I'm probably paying like 60-70% of my wages on my living expenses to be in London. My savings account has not grown since I've been in London. It's managed to stay stable because I've adjusted my expenses to what I earn, but I'm not saving. I'd like to be putting down money for a house in the next 5 years, it seems like the best investment rather than just paying rent and it goes nowhere. If I knew where I wanted to live I would be thinking about putting the money down sooner. I think this is a crisis that a lot of people in my class and similar international people have.

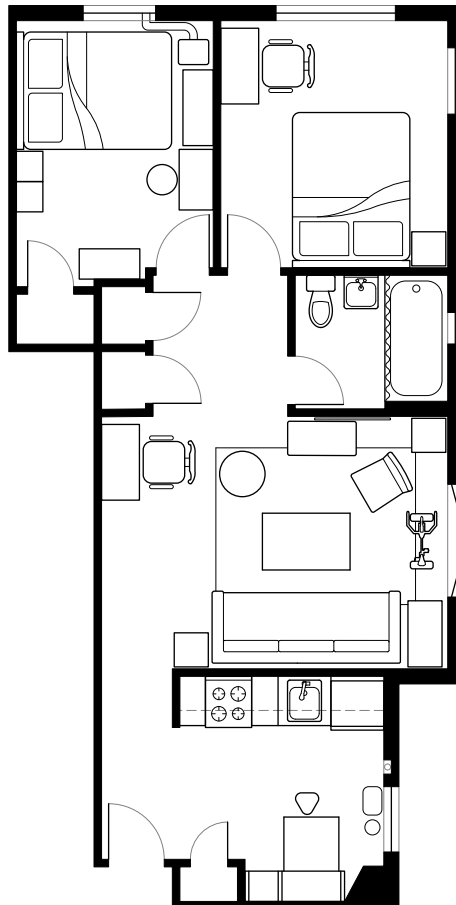
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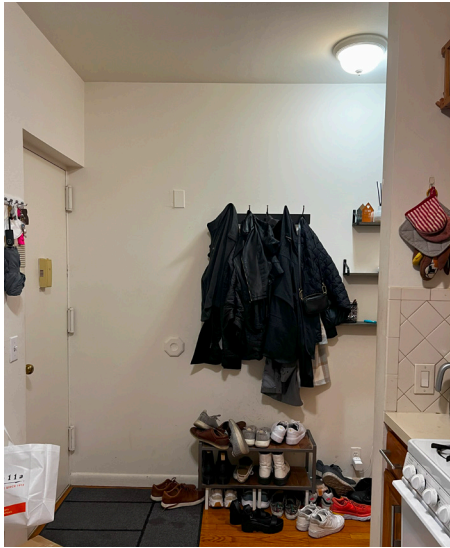
Callum & Carley Transcript

of Occupants: 2
Relationship: Friends
Neighbourhood: West Village, Manhattan
Bed/Bath: 2 bed, 1 bath
Size: 52.8 m²
Rent-to-Income: 20%

Callum
Age: 27
Gender: M
Occupation: Trader at a Bank

Carley
Age: 30
Gender: F
Occupation: Trader at a Bank





Can you tell me a bit about your home?

[Carley] We've got a nice-ish... let's call it a middle-ground apartment. It was a COVID deal. We got super low rent for this neighbourhood during COVID. Then, we got another reduction the year after. When they raised it the following year, they did it very reasonably - relative to some other people. Ours went up about 18-20%. Our friends' place went up something like 112%.

[Callum] They went up like 1500 bucks. They doubled.

[Carley] There's a light in my closet, I put it in there because it's too dark and without it I can't see.

[Callum] Carley has more storage than me.

[Carley] We installed the kitchen storage unit because there wasn't enough storage.

[Callum] I've got some plants. We put a little lock on the outside of my door so Dobby doesn't open the door. He knows how to turn the knobs. We've got the exposed brick wall, they are really popular in New York. They call it a feature but I just see no insulation.

[Carley] Almost everything you look at is some form of storage. The coffee table to storage, the top comes up and it's got storage inside. The ottoman is storage, the little footstool has blankets and pillows in it. The couch pulls out to have storage under it. I did come with a lot of stuff...

[Callum] The thing I wanted to add to that was that everything you're looking at is storage for her items. Nothing I own.

[Carley] I moved out of a two-bedroom house in Toronto that I owned and came here with all my stuff and had to downsize and then downsize again. My couch has Christmas decorations and Halloween costumes and things that you want to have, it has them stored inside it. I don't want to throw those things away and storage units in the city are really expensive. We have a reasonable amount of storage for a city apartment, especially if you consider all the hidden furniture storage. When Callum and I moved in he said "Yes, you can have the room with the closet, and yes, you can have the extra closet outside."

[Callum] Yeah, I think I won there because I've got the most windows.

[Carley] Yeah, he does have a much better room but I wouldn't have survived in there. I like my closets, they're both jam-packed.

[Callum] I actually moved Carley out of her old apartment, and she had six extra-large boxes of clothes. So I had to pack those up for her, which is a bit of a nightmare.

[Carley] I love this apartment. I wish we didn't have to have workstations because it could be so much nicer without them. It's a bit cluttered with them here. We've also got a bit of a gym - we've got weights and a stationary bike. I don't think Callum would have bought the stationary bike had we not gone through COVID when working out at home was a thing. I think if that never happened he would have gone to the gym continuously and not decided to buy that.

[Callum] It was actually a great purchase. I use it all the time, I used it today. I have a gym membership for a gym two blocks over and I still use the bike. When we both moved out of the city for COVID and then came back, both of us came to view this apartment for the first time then I came and viewed it by myself. Every other apartment I saw was way smaller for the same price. This was the first COVID deal that came out.

[Carley] Yeah, we got very lucky with this place because it's relatively spacious for a New York City apartment. The little vestibule is really just a feature of its layout, but it does create a lot of extra space. That was our gym.

[Callum] Peak COVID I was doing my workouts there. Thankfully we realised no one lived in the apartment downstairs because I was jumping up and down and never got any complaints.

[Carley] Yeah, they left during COVID and never came back. I think it was vacant for a long time.

[Callum] A very long time.

[Carley] So, we had a roach problem and my theory is that it came from the apartment downstairs because it was vacant for so long and I think they just up and left and then decided not to come back. I think that they left food and things down there. As soon as they actually cleaned out that apartment, we also did some pest control ourselves to make it manageable, but I'm pretty sure they went away when they cleaned out that apartment.

[Callum] We left the city ourselves in March 2020. I went down to Virginia where my parents live.

[Carley] I went back to Canada. I got across the border less than 24 hours before they closed the borders.

[Callum] So we moved back during the pandemic. Our boss wanted us back on July 1st and I was like “Oh man, that’s too early”. So then I took a holiday and at the end of July I moved back. Carley moved back in October and then went back to Canada for Christmas, which was a month-long event. I feel like she doesn’t live here.

[Carley] I do! I go home at least once a month. Just more recently it’s been a little bit more frequently because I’ve had some events on. During COVID it was harder to get places and I was driving back and forth from Toronto for a while. Plus we were working fully remotely anyway, so I would go for three weeks at a time instead of a weekend or a week like I might do now. We didn’t have to go into work and no one was going into the office when we came back. Our boss made a comment that he was going to expect everyone to be back in the office by a certain date. We probably could have not paid rent at that time. I still had an apartment and all my stuff was there so I had to pay rent. So I never got a period of not paying rent even though I wasn’t living here. Callum moved in and he had a bachelor pad while I was still in Canada. When things started to finally officially open up again. That’s when I came back. So we officially moved into this place in August 2020. So it’s been almost 3 years now, we just renewed for this year which will be our 4th - we actually only renewed for 10 months. Callum’s not sure what his plans are or where he’s going to be. So our landlord agreed to give us a 10-month lease instead of 12. We asked for 8 months.

[Callum] We only got 2 months off the lease.

[Carley] Two months is a lot of money in rent.

[Callum] The plan I’ve heard from my boss is that I’ll be relocated by January 1st, and we’ve got this place until March so that’ll be 3 months of rent after I leave.

Do you have any pets? How do they take up space in your apartment?

[Carley] His bathroom is in the corner of the living room. He sleeps wherever we are, he likes to be with people. He’ll usually sleep in my bed every night. He’s also got a corner in the kitchen with all of his food.

Do you have any hobbies? How do they take up space in the apartment?

[Carley] The black backpack amongst the fitness stuff in my hockey bag. I play ball hockey, so I have my running shoes, my gloves, and my stick which is in the closet by the front door.

[Callum] My hobbies don't take place in the apartment. I do photography and I do sports outside the apartment.

[Carley] We have a lot of board games there, we keep them in the ottoman. We played them more during COVID, we'd just have people over here. I wish we played them more.

How many people other than you are in this apartment on a regular basis? A semi-regular basis? Where do they stay?

[Carley] My parents were just here. Callum's parents have been here, his brother and girlfriend, my sister...

[Callum] My friends have stayed before too. The couch turns into a bed.

[Carley] One night stands... they don't take up a lot of space though.

[Callum] People would stay over once every two months maybe.

[Carley] They'll come for a whole weekend usually. My sister has probably stayed more frequently than anyone else. We've had to let people stay here when we're not here. I had a couple of friends that stayed here because they were visiting. That happens maybe once a year. A hotel in the city is really expensive. I had two of my little sister's friends stay that I know, but I'm not really friends with. I want them to see the city and experience it but it's very expensive to stay in a hotel. So I was like, I'm not going to be here, Callum's not going to be here, I trust them. I also get free cat sitting for when I'm not here, so I let people stay. We don't really own anything valuable enough to get stolen

Did you add or modify anything after you moved in to make the space more livable?

[Carley] Yeah. We fixed some plant hangers and “The Kiwi Room” sign to the wall. The Kiwi room is the name of the bar that we would open if we were to open a bar together. We got that sign made. It’s “The Kiwi Room” because Callum’s from New Zealand and I got to choose the colour.

[Callum] It gives a nice hue to the room. It adds to the ambience

[Carley] I bought the painting behind the living room in Sri Lanka. Callum was not so keen on the almost naked lady on the wall but I think it’s a nice piece of art. The photo of the hockey-playing girl in the living room is also mine. Those came with me from Toronto.

Do you work from home? If so, what’s your set-up?

[Carley] My desk is at the edge of the living room. I work from home once a week. Sometimes it’s once every other week. When we first moved in I was working from home pretty much every day. First, it went down a little, now it’s only about once a week.

[Callum] I have a desk in my room and I also only work at home about once a week these days. They said we were going to move down to 4 days a week in the office but there was no policy change.

[Carley] That announcement only happened two weeks ago. So up until then, it was basically flexible but encouraging you to be in the office at least three days a week. In New York, we’ve all been in almost five days a week for way longer than anyone in our Canadian offices.

[Callum] New York City was empty from 2020 to 2021. In 2022 it rebounded. In 2023, the subway is noticeably busier Tuesday through Thursday. It’s much quieter on Monday and Friday.

[Carley] I was in the city for just under a year before I left. I worked really hard during that first year to make friends and to meet people. Every single person that I had connected with pre-COVID, that wasn’t a work-related friend, didn’t come back to the city. That was across industries. I also have a friend whose brother lives here, and when I first moved here, we went on a big trip with him and a bunch of his friends that are all from New York. A lot of them were native New Yorkers, and they preached that they would never leave the city. During COVID a lot of them went and bought country homes. Someone moved to Montana, someone moved to deep upstate New York - their jobs went remote, so why not have more space?

[**Callum**] I think young people in the city usually come in and then they leave. I don't actually know that many born and bred New Yorkers that are part of our friend group.

[**Carley**] They already have their own friends, they don't need to bring you in. I went on this trip with 12 native New Yorkers and a couple of Canadians, and they were all really, really nice people. I don't talk to any of them anymore, and there was nothing wrong. I just think they just didn't have any more bandwidth for more friends.

Do you have any issues with regard to privacy?

[**Callum**] One of my prerequisites when I was choosing apartments was that I didn't want the bedrooms next to each other. That was a big compromise for me.

[**Carley**] Obviously it would be better if our rooms were not next to each other. We're not in one of those apartments that has the 'temporary wall', with those you can literally hear everything. We have an actual wall so nine times out of ten I can't even hear much if he's on the phone. I hear a little mumble, but I can't tell what he's saying or who he's talking to or anything. We're both adults, so if there's something going on that I don't want to hear, I'll put headphones in, I'll put earplugs in or whatever. He had a girlfriend for almost a year and we never had an issue.

[**Callum**] I probably have more issues with it than Carley does.

Do you have enough space?

[**Carley**] I would say I'd like more space for storage. I would like it if it was way less cluttered, I don't have anywhere to put all my things.

[**Callum**] My approach to that is throwing things out.

[**Carley**] I do that, and then I buy more things.

[**Callum**] Who buys an ice cream machine in a New York City apartment?

[**Carley**] I think that was a great purchase. I haven't opened it yet because Callum is trying to guilt me into returning it. I'm going to leave here anyway to bring it back to Canada, where I have more space for all my appliances anyway. When I move I'm probably going to get a moving company to do it because my company will pay for it. The

company moved us both here. Callum came with zero possessions. I went to his first apartment with him and it was a furnished place, he just had a blanket on his bed. I was like “can you get a throw pillow or something?”

[Callum] Then I bought them and now we’ve got the most pointless pillows here.

[Carley] They make this really terribly uncomfortable IKEA couch more comfortable.

Where did you get the furniture from?

[Carley] I brought all the furniture with me from Canada. Callum complains about me having so much stuff, but he also gets to use all the stuff I brought over. All the pots and pans, all the dishes, all the cutlery, literally everything.

Do you feel like you’re lacking any specific types of spaces? Is there anything you wish you had?

[Carley] No dishwasher, and a very small sink. I think I would pay a lot of money for a dishwasher. We both probably cook more than a lot of other New Yorkers. I’ve always cooked. When we first moved in together, we’d split groceries and I would cook. Then he decided he wanted to eat out all the time. Now he gets meal boxes with recipes. We cook more than a lot of people that I know in the city. This city is really designed for people who don’t want to cook it. All the grocery stores have all this pre-made food, ready-prep meals, and frozen meals. We cook, so a dishwasher would be nice.

[Callum] An in-unit washer and dryer. That would be insane.

[Carley] We have a laundry room in the basement and it only takes quarters. It is actually surprisingly difficult to obtain quarters. It’s \$3.50 for a load and you go through \$10 a week for laundry. The machines are also small. I find the machines we have downstairs are way smaller than the ones I had in my house growing up. For me to do my sheets and a regular load of laundry, every two weeks or two and a half weeks, I have to use three machines. They just don’t fit. Which means more quarters. You go to the bank and ask for quarters and they kind of look at you like, “What? Why?” We’ve both been denied quarters at the bank.

[Callum] I get \$40 worth of quarters at the bank when I go and that lasts a month, maybe.

[Carley] There's no laundromat close by. I mean, not that I've ever noticed. In New York people use "wash & fold". So you drop it off and someone does the laundry for you. I don't think there are laundromats in our neighbourhood.

[Callum] It's more convenient to get quarters than it is to carry your laundry to a laundromat. Even though the quarters are worth more than their value as money. You can get quarters delivered and they charge you a 50% mark-up. I have not been that desperate yet, but it's gone close.

[Carley] Another thing I'd say that I miss is having a full-sized oven. The one we have is apartment-sized. I have baking sheets that are regular-sized that don't fit, that I just have to hold on to because you're not going to throw them out. The oven also doesn't have a broiler. It doesn't really have temperature control either. For anyone that wants to cook or bake it makes things more complicated. I feel like I'm lucky that I have higher ceilings in this apartment so that I can store all the things we have, especially in the kitchen. If we didn't have the coffee machine on that shelf then I could have put something like the air fryer there but Callum needed the fancy espresso machine. We've got a lot of appliances stored above the kitchen cabinets.

Do you have access to any private outdoor space?

[Callum] No. I went up to the rooftop with my girlfriend to drink a bottle of wine and got yelled at by the super who threatened to fine us \$20,000 and to evict us, and sent an email to everyone in the building saying "Do not use the roof!". There's a cell tower on the roof so they don't want people up there.

[Carley] Also, the roof is not suitable to be walked on. There's no railing, it's not safe.

[Callum] The door says it's alarmed but I didn't hear anything. It must be alarmed though because I was up there for 5 minutes and some guy came up.

[Carley] Supposedly it's the guy who lives up there, he hears footsteps and calls the super.

[Carley] We have a fire escape. Technically not allowed to sit on it. I've sat on it, once, and then the guy upstairs told me I'll get into trouble. He's lived here for a long time. It was his parents' apartment when they were teenagers so I think it must be rent-controlled. He and his wife now live there. The fire escape is right on the street and there's a restaurant right there so everyone can see. I absolutely wish we had some outdoor space though. All I want is an

outdoor space where I can sit outside with my coffee and still be in my pyjamas. The size of the fire escape would be fine. To be able to go outside to read a book or drink a coffee without having to get dressed would be a big thing. There are parks everywhere, but I have to be a functional human being to go to them. I just want to go outside and get some rays before I've gotten ready for the day.

[Callum] The thing that gets me down about the apartment is the lack of light in the common area. The windows in the living room and kitchen face an alley. My bedroom is really good, I think if I didn't have natural light in my bedroom I'd be depressed.

[Carley] Yeah, we don't really get much sunlight. We used to have plants in the living room but we moved them all into Callum's room because they didn't get any light and some of them died. Callum's room gets a lot of sun because it has two windows.

[Callum] If my room wasn't really nice I would have left here years ago. During the day there's just about enough light in the apartment that you don't need to turn the lights on.

[Carley] We do have a lot of lights around, and they're all attached to smart plugs. We have 4 "Alexa"s in the house that control them with two different names.

Would you sacrifice some interior space for a private outdoor space?

[Carley] I would choose to downsize and have an outdoor space if it were me alone, with a partner, or with a pet. I think with a roommate having less space than what we have here would make it a lot harder. If I really want to go outside I can go to any of the parks in the city.

[Callum] I would not sacrifice space in our apartment for outdoor space. We barely have enough so I wouldn't get rid of it.

[Carley] Our previous places in the city were way smaller.

[Callum] My previous place didn't have a living room. That was one of my big criteria for moving into a new place. The old place just had a couch in a hallway.

[Carley] My old apartment was a one bedroom, fifth floor walk-up. My bedroom wasn't a bedroom. It was a bed-room because I had a queen sized bed that was wall-to-wall-to-wall, and the only space was the door to enter and there was a little closet there. That was it. There was just the width of a door to get into my room at the end

of the bed. My living room was only about as big as the couch, this couch, and way narrower. It was a decent space for myself but all in my apartment wasn't much. I was just living by myself.

[Callum] I had two roommates. I would say it was smaller than this, it didn't have a living room but it did have a dining table. The kitchen was about the same size. They slipped in a third bedroom instead of having a living room.

[Carley] They do that a lot here. A lot of the apartments that he saw when we were looking for this place were advertised as a two bedroom but they hadn't put the wall up yet to turn the living room into a second bedroom. So, when you go to see it, it looks big and spacious until you realise it has to be divided somewhere to add the second bedroom. Those are the walls that I was talking about, the temporary walls, that are paper thin. They do that because sometimes tenants will move out and the next tenant wants to turn the space into a one bedroom and then it's easy just to take that temporary wall out. Our walls here are all real walls, and there's the same layout in all the apartments above us. Callum's main criteria was to have a living, mine was not to have a "converted two bedroom". That's what they'd call them, it means it used to be a one bedroom.

Do any spaces change to accommodate different activities? Are some objects not fixed to accommodate this? Do you move furniture around a lot?

[Carley] The table in the kitchen can fold up if we want to put it away, but we never really do that. The small appliances too, we store them on top of the cabinets and we bring them down as we need them. The couch turns into a guest bed if we need it to and the coffee table often turns into our dining table. We probably use the coffee table the most, I'd say we use it more than the table in the kitchen. Callum will use the kitchen table sometimes to study or to eat if he wants to be by himself. Other than that, the laundry hanging rack comes out when we need it and moves around if it's in the way.

How do your habits change with the seasons?

[Carley] In the summertime we run the air conditioning. We've got what is basically a window unit that's built into the wall, which is lucky that it's not blocking our window, our view, and our sunlight. The first summer was fine but we just had that AC unit in the living room which meant we had to sleep with our doors open. That was fine when Callum was single because there wasn't a privacy issue. I always sleep with my door slightly open anyway because the cat comes in and out. The following year there was a massive heat wave and it was 100

degrees Fahrenheit every day. Even Dobby, our cat who loves heat, even he was lethargic. Our air conditioner broke, and even when it was repaired it was still so hot that some nights I just had to come to sleep on the couch and angle the AC right towards me. The AC was blowing air but it was just too hot outside and it wasn't cold. I tried to buy another AC unit but they were all sold out because of the heat wave. Now we each have our own supplemental air conditioner. I think it was the best purchase I've ever made. Callum's fits nicely into the window but mine is a bit more annoying but it does the job because otherwise there's just no airflow.

Did you add or modify anything after you moved in to make the space more livable?

[Callum] We've gradually made this place more and more homely. We installed the air conditioners like we said. We put the TV up on the wall. We put up that cabinet in the kitchen, that took about a year for us to do that, it was a big help actually. I've got all these shelves on my wall now.

[Carley] When we first moved in, Callum was very apprehensive about drilling things into the wall. I was not.

[Callum] It's going to be the biggest pain when we leave here. I don't think we have to fill in the holes though. We're due for a new kitchen unit here for sure and I think they're going to renovate this place once we move out, based on what's happened in other units. Every other apartment has a new kitchen. We're dealing with a 1950's kitchen.

[Carley] That's another thing, our stove doesn't have an exhaust. There's not even a fan, there's just a cabinet above. So every time we cook the smoke alarm goes off. It goes off if you even put a slice of toast in the toaster. I like to take it down when I cook but Callum won't take it down.

What are your thoughts about the affordability and cost of living in New York?

[Carley] We pay \$4,650 a month. It used to be \$4,400.

[Callum] Our rent history is \$4,200, \$4,400, \$4,650.

[Carley] We're lucky, but that's still really expensive.

[Callum] We're lucky in that, there's an identical unit right next door that is going for \$5,000. They're trying to keep us as tenants.

[Carley] I own a house in Toronto, in Leslieville, it only cost me \$3,000 CAD to run the whole house. I had a tenant who lived in my basement. Then I moved here and I moved into a one bedroom, very tiny apartment, and it was \$3,000 USD all in. It was tiny, no laundry, five stories of stairs to crawl up, and there was no space. My wardrobe was in my dresser because I had nowhere else for it to be. So, I went from owning my own house and living by myself to now living with a roommate. My expenses have only gone up every year but I've digressed as far as "adulthood". I rented out a two bedroom basement apartment for \$2,400 with two people in it. That's less than what I'm paying for my half of this rent. My experience with affordability is being compared with Toronto, which is obviously a totally different city and a totally different market, but I think it's absolutely insane how expensive it is to live here.

Our friends got a COVID deal and then the next year their landlord came in and tried to raise their rent by \$1,500 per month. That's an absurd increase. A lot of landlords are trying to make up for lost time from COVID. A lot of young people aren't able to afford living in the city with an entry level job. A lot of entry level jobs, in finance and other industries, are ones where you can't work remotely - you have to go into the office. You need to learn, you're junior, and you're expected to be there. How can you afford to live in a city if your job isn't paying you enough to live there?

[Callum] In my experience, when I moved here I was paying half of my income on rent. Then when Carley and I moved in together I was paying \$2,000 and she was paying \$2,200 because that was my maximum budget and it was part of our negotiations. She paid a bit more because she wanted to have her room and then we equalised our rent later. We were having disputes because I was saying if I stayed in the city I would want to move to Brooklyn. I would put up with the commute because I could work from home occasionally. We would get more space and I would pay less money.

[Carley] I wasn't opposed to it. My biggest objection was that it's so expensive to move. You need to get someone to pack your stuff up... I earn enough money at this stage to not want to load all my boxes into a truck by myself but I'm also frugal enough that I know the cost of moving is absurd. It would cost about a month's rent. You have to factor that into your calculations when you think you're saving money by moving to Brooklyn. We weren't even going to save any money but we were going to get some more space.

The other thing about affordability which has changed in the last year is, I used to argue with Callum about how much he would spend eating out and ordering in as opposed to grocery shopping. He was saying "It's not that much cheaper". Two years ago, it definitely was. Now, with the amount you spend on groceries, it costs about the same

to buy those overpriced meal prep boxes as it does to get groceries and cook for yourself. The amount of money it costs to feed just one person is crazy. So not only is the cost of rent high but the cost of eating is high. All the things you need in life to get by have a high price tag associated with it here. Then, they get you with how easy it is to get all your groceries delivered, so I don't have to walk 20 blocks to the grocery store.

[Callum] The most affordable grocery store is Trader Joe's but that's 10 blocks north of here, more than that. It's doable but then you have to walk all the way back with your groceries. So instead, you pay the \$10 fee to get your groceries delivered.

[Carley] We will get some things together, but for meat and produce we'll shop separately but even then we're good at sharing. For other roommates who don't do that it's probably more difficult.

Another thing we can add to the things I miss is having a full sized refrigerator. All the appliances here are small. Growing up in the suburbs of Toronto I had never experienced having a fridge that I was taller than. To me, that was an interesting thing. Once me and Callum have both made a meal and we need to get 4 Tupperware into the fridge with all our other stuff, then it doesn't fit. Also, our sink doesn't give cold water so we have to have a filter thing in the fridge so we can have cold water. In the winter time, the water is cold and the summer is so hot. Our shower is also so temperamental, if you breathe on it one way it's scolding hot and if you blow on it the other way the water is ice. It definitely makes me shower a lot slower because I'm standing there waiting for it to be the right temperature. Sometimes I'll be rinsing my hair and then all of a sudden the temperature changes drastically.

[Callum] We conveniently have a grocery store right next to us but it's extremely expensive. It's a speciality grocery store.

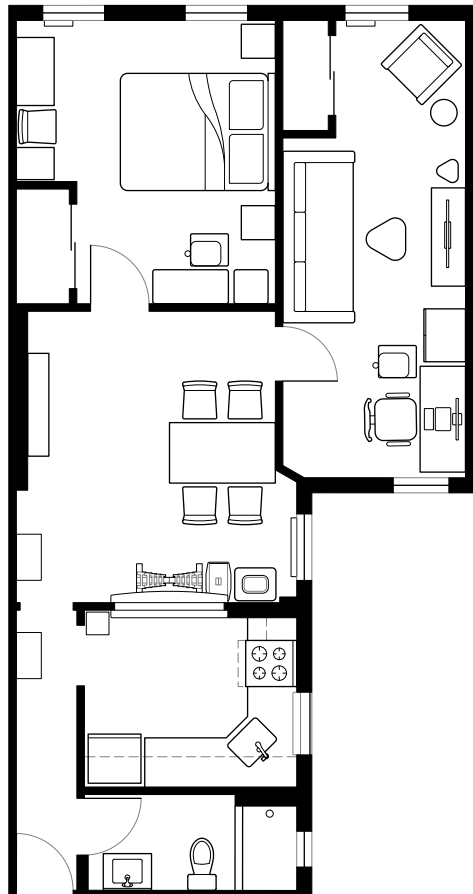
New York

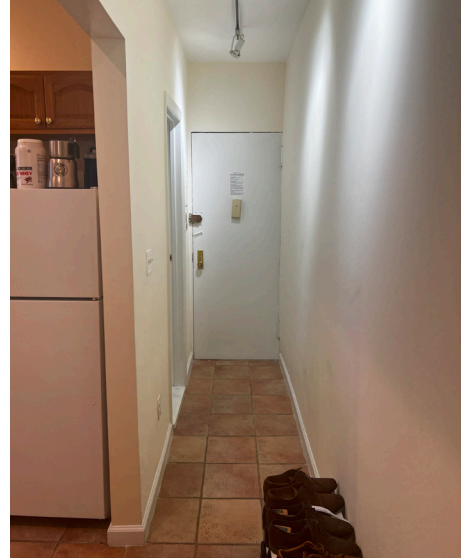
Dean & Sally Transcript

of Occupants: 2
Relationship: Couple
Neighbourhood: Upper East Side, Manhattan
Bed/Bath: 2 bed, 1 bath
Size: 53.7 m²
Rent-to-Income: 20%

Dean
Age: 27
Gender: M
Occupation: Trader at a Bank

Sally
Age: 26
Gender: F
Occupation: Executive Assistant for a Carbon Management/Investing company







Can you tell me a bit about your home?

[Dean] The main thing is that it's a six floor walk up, which is a pain if you have to go up and down a lot during the day. Other than that, it's pretty good. That's probably why we were able to get it, because it was a little cheaper than it would be otherwise. That was good for us and we're young so we don't mind.

[Sally] Yeah. I guess that's not a huge issue for me. It's a lot sometimes, but I like moving my body. Even when it kind of sucks, it just is what it is. It's not an issue in everyday life, at least at this point in our lives. Our neighbour has lived here for over 40 years. She's in her seventies going up these stairs. She knows to go really slowly, she'll stop on most landings, but you'll see her carrying all her groceries up the stairs every time. She doesn't own the apartment, she pays rent.

[Dean] It's a rent controlled apartment so she pays a lot less than everyone else.

[Sally] I think she said that she pays under \$1000. One of the things I really love most about this apartment: the natural light. The reason why it's so nice is because we're on the top floor, which leads to more light. Also the fact that there's no building across from us - it gives you a little bit more of a sense of privacy. I don't feel like anyone's watching me in this room. In most apartments in New York, there would be buildings on the other side with at least ten different windows that can look into one window. So that's really nice. The greenery outside is also really nice, I feel like that's rare.

People are seeking out the natural world within the city - seeking apartments near natural parks, foliage and bringing plants inside

[Dean] We don't have much overlap between the rooms, they're pretty segregated.

[Sally] That's the opposite of our last apartment, that was one continuous room that overlapped in every way. The bedroom was defined, but then the bathroom was through the bedroom. I hated that, it felt like everything was on top of each other. I don't care as much when I'm out and about doing things but as we discussed, in winter when there's not as much to do in the city, you have to be indoors. COVID meant that we had to spend more time in the apartment and so it has become more important to have a comfortable space. Everyone after COVID has this sense that it could happen again that we are stuck inside for a long time, you just never know. I would in theory love to have less stuff and live a nomadic life for a little bit or have a small space and not have much stuff but the pandemic showed me that that's not very secure.

On the point of what I said before, when I was looking for a studio I was just thinking “We’re not paying for an apartment in New York city just so we can stay in our apartment”. Now we’ve clearly made a lot of changes to spend more time in our apartment. I don’t know if that will change, it will probably depend heavily on whether or not I need to work from home.

[Dean] The sound of kids playing is better than most sounds in the city. Ya, it’s a good apartment. Much better than our last one, our last one was one bedroom. The bedroom had one very thin window which looked out onto this really dark alley which had no light at all.

[Sally] It looked into where the pigeons would be, we’d wake up to the pigeons having sex. When we moved into that apartment there was already a piece of cardboard or something over the window because it was just covered in bird poo. The window was just basically looking at a brick wall with someone else’s window anyways, you don’t want to be looking at it. We were in that apartment for a year and a half, November 2019 to June 2021.

[Dean] That apartment was two blocks away from here, in the same neighbourhood. We moved everything ourselves, which took about 30 trips back and forth with all of our bags. And up and down all the stairs. It was so hot, it sucked. I carried the mattress up but it was vacuum packed.

[Sally] We carried everything but the couch, the bedframe, and the bookshelf.

Where did you get the furniture from?

[Dean] There was a guy moving out of our last place, so we got a good deal. We paid for him to just leave a bunch of his stuff behind. How much was it, Sally?

[Sally] About \$600. When I first moved to New York I knew Dean was coming. I’d lived in New York before for a summer internship, but I still didn’t really know where the best place would be for us to live. We both knew we were going to have a job but weren’t really sure about which subway line to be near, the proximity of things, and what was the right neighbourhood. So I moved here and I was subletting, I went to two different sublets for three months. Then once Dean got here to meet me, we then wanted to move into a rented apartment situation. We moved here with basically nothing, because I moved from Seattle, Dean moved from The Netherlands. I was making zero money, so I didn’t want to pay that much. I didn’t know how long we would live here. I think there’s like this story for a lot of people moving for their first job out of college. I found it to

be really good, even though it was not the most comfortable... It was a good set up to start subletting, figuring out where I want to move, and then being able to just buy the stuff from the person moving out when he was leaving. We caught this guy that wanted to move out in the middle of his lease. So we subleased from him. He was having a hard time getting someone, so I was like “okay, we’ll do it - but just give everything in your apartment.” Yeah, for like \$600. So yeah, we still have a decent amount of his stuff. TV and all the stuff in the living room, some of the furniture.

[Dean] We bought the couch from IKEA. When we moved in here. We left the other ones at the other place or we gave them away. And then we bought the bed and mattress, and the bookshelf. The living room chair we actually grabbed off the street because someone left it there.

[Sally] Are you aware of the ‘stooping’ culture in New York? People just leave stuff on the street. In Manhattan, especially the Upper East Side and Brooklyn, people will just put stuff on the street when they don’t want something. Either the truck will pick it up or someone can take it. So if you see a piece of furniture on the street, you just take it. And sometimes it’s really, really nice. Do you know what a ‘buy nothing’ group is? I don’t know if it’s actually outside of the US, but my mom is in her ‘buy nothing’ group in Seattle. There’s ‘buy nothing’ groups in all the cities that I’m aware of. It’s usually on Facebook. They’re for a certain neighbourhood, or in the Upper East Side it’s too big for one group, so they divide it into two or three. It’s basically a Facebook group where you join, verify your address, and then when you don’t want something anymore, you post a picture of it. You’d say “I’m giving away this, this, and this. Pick up (your address) or (the street corner).” Then people can comment saying they would like it. Then you can either do a lottery system or just say like the first person to comment will get it - and people give away such nice stuff! It just creates the sharing economy within a neighbourhood that’s really beautiful. I think New York might have less of this, but for example, my mom’s ‘buy nothing’ group in Seattle; she made muffins with the pears from her tree in her backyard and posted those on ‘buy nothing’. So that’s really sweet and it just creates community and also tries to circulate things when you don’t need them anymore and give them to people who could use them. It’s really helpful for kids’ stuff as well. So, I would have gotten some of the furniture from there. Got some things like weights from facebook marketplace. You have to kind of be on it, because of course, if something nice is posted everyone’s going to want it. So you have to have time to do so. For a short time I thought “this is like a great way to choose the things for the apartment.” When we bought everything in the guy’s apartment it was a really big deal and it was really good at the time. Then COVID hit and about six months in

I felt stuck in this apartment that I didn't love. The floor was peeling, there was not much natural light, and we were living with someone else's stuff. I felt like "this isn't really mine, I didn't pick it out". So it's been nice to do our own thing since then.

[Dean] Our place is a mix between some stuff from our old apartment, some IKEA things, and some stuff from the stoop or 'buy nothing'

[Sally] I like thrifting and like I'd say very little in the apartment is new

How long have you lived in New York?

[Sally] I moved here in August 2019. Dean would have moved in October 2019.

How long do you intend to stay?

[Dean] Another year, basically.

[Sally] We resigned our lease last June for two years, we got a really good deal on how much they increased the rent. I think that this apartment is really great. We clearly, really like it and we think it's worth it. So it's a really good deal for what we have in this location. So we think it's probably worth it to stick out our lease, at least, and we don't really know otherwise. But we know we have a commitment for a year.

[Dean] We haven't really figured out what to do after that.

Do you have any pets? How do they take up space in your apartment?

[Dean] We have a cat named Izzy. She has two of those hammock things. Starting around 5 a.m., she'll start crawling over us on the bed and will be meowing to get breakfast, which is very irritating.

[Sally] Not 5 a.m., more like 6 a.m..

[Dean] Definitely 5 a.m. for me, I think she bugs me first.

[Sally] She knows Dean might give her breakfast earlier.

[Dean] She didn't take up much space. Litter box and stuff. Just a lot of hair. everywhere.

[**Sally**] We vacuum it, otherwise it collects like dust. We vacuum it weekly.

[**Dean**] You might have seen the deep window sill behind the counter. I put a box down there for Izzy because she likes boxes. She uses that space.

[**Sally**] I can't even see it. I wanted to put a plant down there before Izzy's time, I couldn't even water the plant. I don't interact with that space. It's kind of a dead space, it probably could be better utilised.

How many people other than you are in this apartment on a regular basis? A semi-regular basis? Where do they stay?

[**Dean**] Yeah, we have guests. The couch folds out into a bed, so they have their own room which is nice.

[**Sally**] On average we have visitors, one or two people, every month or two.

[**Dean**] Just for a long weekend or a couple of nights. So my mom was here last October, my friend Steven was here in September, my brother came a year ago, Sally's parents came. It's good to have a couch because people know they can come and stop by.

Do you entertain a lot? What do you do when you have people over?

[**Dean**] Sometimes. With Izzy, our cat, she gets crazy around food so we need to eat separately from her. We don't have people over to eat that much.

[**Sally**] Yeah, I mean we did before Izzy.

[**Dean**] Yeah, but we don't have people over that often either.

[**Sally**] Occasionally.

[**Dean**] I feel like in New York, usually if you're going to meet friends it's to get out of your apartments to go do something, rather than going to someone else's apartment.

[**Sally**] I would say people come here just as much as they came to our last apartment, or to our apartment before Izzy. I don't know if Izzy is the reason they don't come over often. People come over occasionally. I would say one of the factors is that we don't have

any close friends living in the neighbourhood. A lot of our friends live in Brooklyn. Callum and Carley live in the West Village, I feel like we'd normally go down to them. They have a better hang out area. This isn't a central area. It's still a relatively central neighbourhood in New York, but it's not super convenient for our friends who live in other areas.

[Dean] Brooklyn is hard to get to, it's like 40 minutes on the subway. If it's an evening or a work night, I'm not going to go all the way there.

[Sally] I mean, our friend's coming over tonight.

[Dean] Yeah, but it's a Saturday. We have a friend over once every couple of months.

[Sally] Probably a little more. I'd say before Izzy, if we had more than 20 people here, we would use the whole apartment. Maybe not our bedroom. We've had a few larger gatherings where we just use the whole space. If we have a few people over we will just use the living room. It's a weird space for people to come because you can't sit opposite each other. We're thinking of rearranging soon and trying to figure out how to create a better social space, because there clearly isn't one right now. It is weird when people come over and we're sitting in a line. We bring in chairs to make the arrangement better when people come over sometimes.

Do any spaces change to accommodate different activities? Are some objects not fixed to accommodate this? Do you move furniture around a lot?

[Dean] Once we had a lot of people over and we took Sally's desk and joined it up with the big table and had a lot of people sitting around for dinner.

[Sally] Oh, and our fold out table.

[Dean] There's the ottoman in the bedroom, which we used as a bench for people to sit on.

[Sally] When people come, we kind of just take all our furniture and put it in one space. I guess the yoga mats move when we need to workout as well. The little tables in the living rooms are nice. You move them around to wherever we need them.

[Dean] We mainly use them for eating here and to put stuff on.

Do you have any hobbies? How do they take up space in the apartment?

[Dean] We have some weights, some yoga mats, but they don't really take up much space - we don't really use those anymore actually.

[Sally] There's some stuff that accumulated during COVID that we would use. Before I had my gym membership for the first year of living here, I would have done all my workouts in the dining room with the yoga mats, the weights, etc. That and our bookshelf take up space.

[Dean] In the living room cupboard there's some park stuff like Frisbees and things, for Central Park.

[Sally] Yeah, we're about a 20 minute walk from Central Park. I have my art supplies under the TV in the living room, but I don't do as much as I wish I did. I have some random art stuff in there. I have painted in the dining room, I've done drawings in the living room. I don't do art in the bedroom because I'm conscious of breathing in the fumes. I like to use oil pastels and paint and it's not great to breathe that stuff in.

[Dean] Do plants count as a hobby? Sally has some plants. I just bought some skis, they're behind that door, but I haven't used them yet. I'll probably put them in the living room cupboard. In the cupboard we have all our park stuff, squash stuff in there too, a lot of coats.

Do you work from home? If so, what's your set-up?

[Sally] I mainly work at home, I have an office that I go into occasionally. A lot of weeks I work from home every day, sometimes 3 or 4 days. The office I got into is not super close, which is why I don't go in that often. If it was walkable it would be much more attractive to go in. It's in a nice location, right next to Battery Park, and it looks at the Statue of Liberty, so it looks out at the water. It adds 2 hours a day, a little less. If I could choose, I'd rather spend my time on something else. Dean would go into the office almost every day.

[Dean] Yeah, I go in pretty much every day. It's a 20 minute walk for me. So it's pretty nice. I sometimes work from home, but very rarely, and if I do, I have to sit at the kitchen table if we're both working from home that day. It's not the best work space, I try not to.

Can you walk me through what a regular day might look like?

[Dean] I'm not a morning person, so I roll out of bed and then probably get ready to go in 5 to 10 minutes. Get dressed, brush my teeth, normal morning stuff. I'll head out and walk to work. If Sally's still working when I get home I'll probably try to make dinner. We would normally eat in the living room around 7:30 or 8 p.m. We haven't watched TV in a while, but normally we'll be watching a Netflix series or something. Then go to bed. On the weekend I get up a little later, normally around 9. I would say we're trying to get out of the apartment if we can. If we're here, then we're probably either cleaning the apartment a bit or I would probably be sitting on the couch reading or something. I play squash in the mornings or on the earlier side. We normally make coffee for breakfast and on the weekends we'll make eggs or toast. I don't know what I would do in the afternoons. If I don't have plans I would probably chill in the living room. On the weekends we would normally have dinner plans.

[Sally] Yeah, cooking, reading, cleaning, or playing with Izzy.

[Dean] Our hobbies are mainly not apartment based.

[Sally] Now, if I want to exercise, I wouldn't do it in the apartment. That's something I would do every day, my gym is nearby.

[Dean] I play squash, that's just over in Queens.

[Sally] We like to go on walks around the neighbourhood. Central Park and the river are both close, there's a nice lake walk along the river. So either we'll go on a walk together on the weekend, we'll grab a coffee and go on a walk in the morning. If I don't want to go to the gym and I want to stretch my legs, I'll plug in a podcast and take a walk.

[Dean] I occasionally go for runs along the river. It's just a few minutes away and it's pretty nice to run.

[Sally] On a weekday, I would get up and feed Izzy. I might do the dishes from the night before, or I might do things around the apartment that need to be done or maybe clean before I work. Breakfast, some coffee... sometimes I'll go for a little walk and get a coffee or something to work. Then I work. I would try to book myself some sort of workout class to make sure I had a deadline to finish my work day at a certain time. One of the things about having your work set up at home is that you can just work any time. So creating those boundaries... I had to learn the hard way. In our last apartment we had one table, so I did all my work on it, we ate out of it, and anything else we wanted to do at a table was done with that table. Now we have

like a few different areas to do different things. So I can use that desk just for my work for the most part, which is nice and it's in the corner. Spatially, it's nice that that's in its own space and they can turn it off. When my work day is over I workout, come home, then either Dean and I would make dinner, or be too lazy and go out to dinner, or get food to come here. We listen to the sounds of the city. Do you see the scaffolding that's on the school? That's being built from the hours of 9:30 p.m. to 11 or 12, and they're just hammering away. They can't do it while the school is running. So that's been our life for the last few months. We just go to bed with it, so I don't even know when it ends really.

[**Dean**] We also get the occasional siren because there's a lot of hospitals around.

[**Sally**] Or people yelling. That could be the case for any apartment in the city.

[**Dean**] When we're outside the city it's so quiet and we sleep so well. The air smells fresh. I don't think I knew what I was getting into.

[**Sally**] I think you always think you know what you're getting into when you move somewhere. I don't think you know all the intricacies of any place until you live there, no matter how many books or movies you read or people you talk to. There are specific things that you just won't know until you live somewhere. Either you accept it or you don't and then you leave.

Do you have any issues with regard to privacy?

[**Sally**] Less than normal, I guess, as I've said we don't have people looking straight into our window. If we're at the kitchen sink the guy across from us will make eye contact with us.

[**Dean**] We can see into their apartment and they can see into ours, but that's it.

[**Sally**] It doesn't always feel private, but our bedroom feels pretty personal. We do share a fire escape with the people next to us.

[**Dean**] I don't know if they go out on the fire escape, maybe they keep their window open, but you can hear them shouting sometimes. I don't mind it. I would prefer it wasn't that way, but it's fine. It's not too big a deal.

Do you have enough space?

[Dean] Yeah, I think so. I would like a bigger kitchen, but I feel like everyone would. The only other thing I would like is more outdoor space, like a garden, but maybe not in the city. Maybe if I were out in the suburbs.

[Sally] Considering where we live and the price point, I'm pretty happy with the amount of space that we have. I think in our last apartment, just to compare the experience, I felt very closed in. I had zero space, everything was in one room because our bedroom really just had our bed in it and the bathroom was through the bedroom. So this feels like we've added two rooms. So yeah, I'm pretty happy with the space we have.

[Dean] Yeah, we have all the furniture we need and there's still space. So yeah it's a decent sized apartment.

[Sally] If we want to, we can be in separate rooms and close the doors. Our last apartment when we were both working from home in COVID, I would have to get on the bed in a really dark room to get on a call if we were both on a call.

[Dean] When we first moved to New York we said we wanted to get a studio.

[Sally] When we first moved I was thinking about location. I was like "We're not going to be in our apartment at all". When I was on an internship here, I lived in an NYU dorm room with four other girls. There were five people in total in one room, with one bathroom. I barely spent any time there because I was constantly going out and doing stuff. That was during the summer, interning for ten weeks, it wasn't probably a sustainable way to live. We didn't have a kitchen, we were eating or dorm food. Just a different situation, but that's what I was thinking. If I'm living here, I don't need to be in the apartment, I want to be out living my life. Of course, COVID hits and I'm glad we didn't have a studio with a foldout couch.

***Do you feel like you're lacking any specific types of spaces?
Is there anything you wish you had?***

[Dean] Yeah, we don't have laundry. Not in the apartment or in the building even.

[Sally] My initial thought when you ask that is: we were just in Seattle for two and a half weeks, and then I met Dean in Colorado, where there's much more nature and green space around, different forms of it, and it's much more accessible. That was really nice. I think

that's one of the reasons we would consider moving away from New York city. That's a large piece that is missing in New York for us. Central Park's lovely and I don't know what we would do if we didn't have it 20 minutes away, or at least a different park, but it definitely feels like we're missing nature. Which makes sense, we're in the middle of New York City. For laundry, we do 'wash and fold' right now, but going home and being able to do laundry ourselves and just do something simple like separate the lights from the darks and hang dry things if I want to. It's such a luxury. I thought laundry was a chore before, and now I think it's so nice to be able to do that and it doesn't take up that much time. If I could have it in my own apartment or even in the building would be really nice. We moved here so close to COVID so we never really tried out going to a laundromat. I think that would be very time consuming. They all look very dirty, I see people with bare feet in the laundromats. It is a luxury to do the 'wash and fold' as well. I'm really specific so I refold all my laundry as well. It's washed and not even the way I would like it washed. It's the easiest option for us right now, and it makes sense, but it's not the option I would choose if we could have the washer and dryer instead.

What does your typical work week look like?

[**Dean**] I'm probably working about 50 hours a week, maybe a little more for Sally.

[**Sally**] Depending on the week, it's very variable. Between 50 and 70 hours, depending on the week. Rarely as high as 70, but usually above 50 for most weeks.

[**Dean**] I start at 7:30, then I get home usually around 5:30 or 6:00. Not too bad.

[**Sally**] I kind of have a choice about when I start, which is nice, but it's based on how much work I think I have.

[**Dean**] She's usually still going when I get home.

How do your habits change with the seasons?

[**Dean**] Normally they get like a couple of pretty big snowfalls here in the winter. I think it's reasonably cold, but not compared to the other parts of the U.S. I feel like we spend less time outside, just naturally because it's colder and darker. We probably spend more time in.

[**Sally**] There's a large period of the winter where it feels like you're starting work in the dark and doing work in the dark, and that just makes me depressed. I still try to do the same stuff like go to the gym. There are different activities around the city in the winter. One of the reasons why I live here is for the stuff going on, like the Christmas villages and the random events around the city. Seasonal stuff, there's so much more to do in the summer though.

[**Dean**] We probably spend so much more in the apartment in the winter.

Do you have access to any private outdoor space?

[**Dean**] No, there's a roof - we've never been up there, I don't think we're allowed. The people who live on the ground floor here have a somewhat private outdoor area, but it's semi-private, shared between all the people on the ground floor, but it's not for us.

[**Sally**] Two years ago, if you ask me, I would have loved private outdoor space here. Now I would not want to upkeep outdoor space in New York City. There are cockroaches and rats, you know? They'll stay out of the apartment but you don't really have control of the outdoor space. Though I guess a balcony would be a bit different, I'm thinking more about a ground floor. A balcony would be nice.

[**Dean**] A rooftop would be great. In newer buildings the whole rooftop area would have seating, barbecues, fire pits and stuff.

[**Sally**] My gym has an outdoor space which should be nice in the summer.

Would you sacrifice some interior space for a private outdoor space?

[**Dean**] I would probably keep the space in the apartment.

[**Sally**] I think we made that decision. When we were touring apartments we could have gotten a more modern studio apartment or one bedroom for a similar, or maybe still even more expensive, price with a rooftop, gym, or other amenities. Specifically a rooftop sounded great, but that would be a shared space, too. I don't think we looked at anything with a balcony. I think that would be very expensive. I think there are so few times that I think I'd be able to get good use out of it in New York. The whole winter you wouldn't really use the balcony. I'd rather have the interior space all year round.

Where in the apartment do you spend the most time?

[Dean] In the kitchen.

[Sally] I spend most of my time working at my desk. I'd say we use all the space in our apartment, except the big room in the middle. We don't really utilise that space much. I think that's because the light in there is not as direct. There's still a window in that room, but it's just a little darker.

[Dean] It's more of a 'walk through' area to get to and from different spaces in the apartment. It's really big, I think if we were roommates, not dating, the couch would be in there. The living room would be a bedroom and the TV would be in that big space and it would probably be used the way it was intended to be used. We like the living room where we have it, it's a little nicer. We eat in the living room too, because of the cat. Last time we had people over we ate in the living room too.

[Sally] We actually have not used the TV in a while which we're proud of. We're trying not to use the TV, we want to get rid of it.

Did you add or modify anything after you moved in to make the space more livable?

[Dean] We put paintings and pictures, those are the only things we fixed into the walls. Just decorations. No structural changes or anything. It was pretty ready to move into. I don't know how much we're allowed to do since we're renting, paintings and things are fine.

Do you have enough storage space?

[Dean] Yeah. I mean, I do.

[Sally] Not for all of my clothing, we have equal storage space but I have more stuff. I think it would be nice to have more storage space, we don't have a lot.

[Dean] We don't have a lot of kitchen appliances, like we don't have a microwave.

[Sally] We don't have much space in the kitchen. We have more space in the kitchen than a lot of places in New York, and we still don't really have enough space. Everything's kind of on top of each other. I think one thing that's nice about not having that much space is that you have to declutter a lot. You can't really just be accumulating things. I think we have the space in our apartment that if we wanted

to buy more storage space like racks, shelving, cabinets, or whatever, we could do that. We have chosen not to. I like more open space. We could choose to create more storage space than our closets and what we have. I also don't like having that much stuff.

[Dean] We'll probably save a little money by not buying a load of more stuff. So that's the benefit I suppose.

What are your thoughts about the affordability and cost of living in New York?

[Dean] It's expensive. Certainly relative to other cities that we've been to in the US. I dropped off laundry today. It was a pretty big load to wash. Usually it'll be like \$30 to wash all that. We probably do that every two weeks or so.

[Sally] I had a really hard time the first year or so living here. Maybe for two or three years living here, I was not making much money and it kind of sucked. Everything is very expensive. It sucks to have to say no to social things or like going to dinner at a certain restaurant because you just simply can't afford it. Our last apartment was not super nice but we couldn't afford something nicer at that time. Luckily we're a few years further into our careers so we can afford more. Not just things but a more livable apartment and more experiences to get out of our apartment. Most things to do in New York out of your apartment aren't free. So you have to make the choice of if you want to spend money each day or not. There's things like walking in the park and some things that I have found to do that don't require you to spend a lot of money, but it's very easy to spend a lot. You have to be wise with your spending.

[Dean] They're putting in a congestion tax for cars entering Manhattan which will be \$24, which is a lot. That's even for residents which is kind of weird in my opinion. They're trying to discourage the use of cars in the city and get people onto public transport if they're coming into Manhattan. They're also trying to stop people from driving through Manhattan, for example if they're trying to get from Long Island to New Jersey they should go around rather than drive through the city. It will probably work. It's a lot of money to have to pay every time you come into the city, especially if you live here.

[Sally] I think it's nice for us, I don't want cars in the city. If you want to have a car in New York, that's already expensive.

New York

Isabel Transcript

of Occupants: 1

Neighbourhood: Lower East Side, Manhattan

Bed/Bath: Studio, 1 bath

Size: 25.1 m²

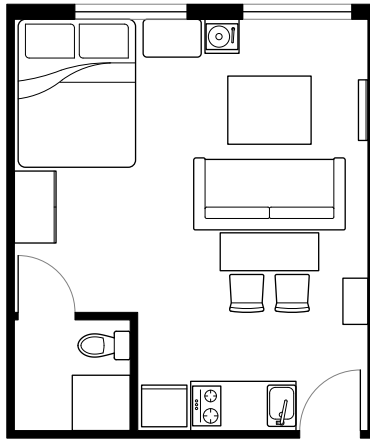
Rent-to-Income: 35%

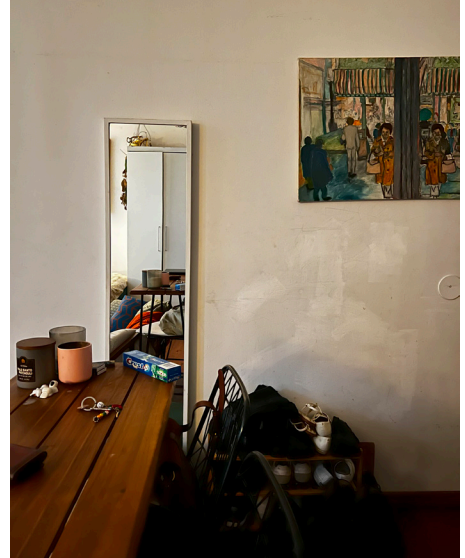
Isabel

Age: 26

Gender: F

Occupation: Nurse & Student





Can you tell me a bit about your home?

[Isabel] It's a studio; I kind of like that it's small because I'm just one person. It's easier to tidy up and it helps me keep control over how much stuff I have. I also feel a little bit safer in here because I can see the whole apartment from wherever I am.

There's only a half kitchen, so I only have two burners and there's no oven and it's a smaller sized fridge - not quite a mini fridge but the size of fridge you might have in an RV, not a full sized one. So that's a little annoying, having no oven, but I'm not really a big cook. I order all my groceries to the house and I order food out. It's not like I'm cooking a ton of meals or meal prepping. I get meal delivery boxes, not like hellofresh, it's a lot faster. So the food comes already prepared and you just heat it up. I do that for work and everything, that's my version of meal prep. I guess that would probably be a big turnoff for you if you're more into cooking. It suits my vibe at this current stage of my life, so I don't really care.

I get all my groceries delivered so I don't go to the grocery store. I have a gym membership that I don't really use and am going to cancel. There's a laundromat 2 blocks down that I drop my laundry off at and they do my laundry for me. I really like that actually, your laundry comes back folded. It's \$30 for 30 pounds of laundry. I probably have to do it more than most people because of my scrubs. It's annoying sometimes when you keep forgetting to do it, but it's not a negative point and I honestly really like it.

I find it really spacious for what it is. I like the way it's laid out, I never feel cramped in here. I do wish I had a full bath, there's just a stand up shower. I do miss baths but that's just a ridiculous expectation for a studio. That would take up a huge chunk of my apartment. It's hard to get a place with a bath here. I had a friend who was looking for an apartment and a bath was a non-negotiable requirement for her. That would definitely push up the budget... her boyfriend has a lot of money though.

How long have you lived in this apartment? Where did you live before?

[Isabel] I moved in here in March of this year, it's been 4 months but it feels like so much longer.

I was in Brooklyn before, I didn't really like that area at all. I was in Bedside, which is cute and everything. If I had a lot of friends there, then it probably would have been fine, but my social circle is here on the Lower East Side. It's really annoying to have to take a 30 minute transit to get to where your friends are and then take a 30 minute Uber

home at the end of the night, especially if you're going to someone's house afterwards. Then you're Ubering home at 9 in the morning and it costs \$50. So this is very nice and I'm so close to all my friends and a lot of them will come here after a night out too, which has been very advantageous because I can change into pyjamas when people come over. Then when I'm ready to go to bed I just tell everyone to leave.

It's easy to get to work from here too, the train is right beside here and it's 5 stops to get to work which is only a 15 minute train journey, and then a 6 minute walk from the 59th subway station. Where I work is not quite the Upper West Side, but just at the beginning of Central Park. At most it takes 20 minutes to get to work. Before, when I used to live in Brooklyn it would take an hour.

How long have you lived in New York? How long do you intend to stay?

[Isabel] I've lived here about a year, off and on. I moved to Helem, I'm not sure if that would be considered New York, it's upstate a little. You would take the train into Grand Central from there, it's near White Plains, in the suburbs. When I was living there I was working in Connecticut, I was there for about 3 months, May-August of 2021. I would train into New York on my days off and I made friends in this area. Then I got a job offer in New York City so I moved to Brooklyn where I lived for 2-3 months. The job didn't start and I was running out of money so I moved back home to Canada in mid November. Then I was in Boston for a while and I would come into the city once a month or so to visit friends. I moved back to New York in October of 2022.

I'm hoping to stay indefinitely. I've seen one bedroom apartments online listed for \$500,000 or so, older style apartments in the area. I could maybe afford to buy something like that at some stage. Once I finish school, get a green card, and have been working for a few years as a nurse practitioner, then I may work with a real estate agent on getting my own apartment. It would be nice to have a one bedroom that I owned but it's not a #1 priority. I don't think I'll ever be in a place where I own a million dollar apartment or anything but there are more reasonable things available. I saw that one for about \$500,00, a small one bedroom, that kind of thing would be perfect for me. Maybe you would get there and it would be awful, who knows, but I don't really need a lot of space. This is me envisioning my future without a partner, if that ever changes that changes and I'll reevaluate then, but at the moment it's just me. Dual income would open a lot of doors in terms of what you could afford to live in.

I hope I'll be able to stay in this apartment for a while. The sublet is over in September and I'd like to speak to the landlord about taking over the lease in my name. That's my hope, I feel very comfortable here.

How do you feel about this neighbourhood?

[Isabel] I like this neighbourhood a lot. I feel like Chinatown can be a bit busy sometimes, especially during the day, I get a little overwhelmed with how many people are out in the streets sometimes. I like that there's always movement though, it makes me feel safe that there's so much energy. Where I hang out is very close by so it's very walkable for me. Also the subway lines that are nearby take me to the places that I need to go. It's all very convenient.

Where did you get the furniture from?

[Isabel] Most things were already here. When the girl who I'm subletting this place from moved in here a lot of the stuff was already here as well, so I guess the person who owns the building owns it. I don't like to look a gift horse in the mouth. There were thin pillows here when I moved in so I bought fluffy queen sized pillows. I'm slowly trying to convert the apartment to be a little girlier. I didn't buy the sofa pillows. I bought this sage green throw which I regret. I'd like a pink throw and I generally want to add girly touches to the apartment, right now it's a bit earthy for me. Like I said, a lot of this stuff was just here when I moved in. There were a lot of dead plants in the apartment not too long ago which I recently got rid of. I just don't care for plants.

The girl who I'm subletting from said she wants the art back because her mom painted them but she's not making any effort to do that. I have these Barbie paintings at home, at my parent's house, that I want to bring down. I also want to get prints made of romance novel cover art. I want to put three of them up where the blue painting is over my bed now. I don't think anyone sells those, I might need to have them custom made. I've also always wanted vintage celebrity photos, like Pattie Boyd and Jane Birkin. I think that type of stuff would be more me. These paintings are cute but they're not me.

I don't really like the high table. I like the bar table idea but I'd rather have something a bit sturdier and with different chairs. I've always wanted a sectional couch but I don't really think it would fit. Alternatively, since I don't really like eating on tables, I could get rid of that table and get a mini sectional and move it back. That way when you walked into the apartment it would be a living room-bedroom. Or instead of moving the couch back I could get a smaller coffee table,

this coffee table is a little obnoxious. I also don't know if I can get rid of this furniture because I don't know who it belongs to. There's no point in me stressing over the decor that much until I know if I'll be taking over the lease.

Do you have any hobbies? How do they take up space in the apartment?

[Isabel] I have my crochet stuff under the bed. Just a ton of yarn and everything. I've been slacking on it a little since school's picked up because I've been kind of stressed, but that would be my biggest hobby. I also have my makeup stuff and my records. Books too, I read a lot but mostly on my kindle. I want a little shelf or something for all my makeup. I found a vanity on urban outfitters that I love and I want so badly but it's \$1,000. I'm trying to figure out if I can find a dupe for it. It looks like a basket with the seat inside it and it flips open with a mirror. Because I saw it online, I don't really know how big it is either. If I were to get that though, I would move the big mirror to the right and put the vanity in the corner and have it be a makeup corner.

Do you have any issues with regards to privacy?

[Isabel] Not at all. If you go into the hallway you can hear what's going on in the other apartment but once you're in here you can't hear anything at all. I'm assuming it's the same for him. There's a guy that lives next to me, the "emergency exit" is actually his apartment. There's someone who lives in the first floor apartment who I have never seen. I don't know if they're even there because there have just been packages sitting at the front door for them for a while. I've played music at 4 or 5am and haven't had any issues with anyone saying anything. When my girl friends from college came to visit, there were 6 people staying over and there were never any issues.

Do you entertain a lot? What do you do when you have people over?

[Isabel] I have people over a couple times a week. Normally 3-5 people come over for drinks after the bar.

How many people other than you are in this apartment on a regular basis? A semi-regular basis? Where do they stay?

[Isabel] Yeah. I have friends that'll crash in the bed with me or on the couch, which I have been told is very comfortable. I don't really think it's that comfortable but multiple people have said it to me. I have extra blankets that people would use.

I mentioned before that my friends from college came to visit, 6 of them, one girl slept on the couch, one girl slept in the bed with me, three of them slept on the floor in the living room, they brought camping pads, and one girl slept on the kitchen floor because she's allergic to cats and didn't want to sleep on the carpet.

Do you have any pets? How do they take up space in your apartment?

[Isabel] The girl who used to live here left Taco behind, he's a cat. I don't know if she's coming back for him or if he's just mine now. The girl has not been messaging me about him. I was asking her to send money for him for a while and then I did an experiment where I stopped asking to see how she would respond and she never once asked me from then on if he was doing ok. She also had a falling out with most of my close friends so I don't talk to her as much anymore, because most of my friends hate her now and I got this apartment through them. It's a very weird situation. If I can keep the apartment he can stay. I have no idea what's going to happen to him if I can't keep this apartment. It's hard to find places that will let you take a pet and I don't even know how to move him. He's an old cat, I don't have a carrier, and I don't even know if he's my pet. He doesn't take up much time or space at all. Once a week I change his litter. His food is automatic but I give him a bit extra because he's fat and he likes food. I went to a wedding not long ago and I was able to leave him for a couple days with the automatic feeder and water and he was totally fine when I came home.

Do you have enough storage space?

[Isabel] No. The girl who used to be here had a storage unit. I think that's what a lot of people who live in small spaces do, they rent storage units. I haven't gotten to the point yet where the benefit of that would outweigh the cost. The way things are right now I'd rather get rid of things as they pile up rather than pay a few hundred dollars a month to keep them in storage.

There's a bunch of stuff the other girl left under the bed and on top of the wardrobe. I've looked at it a little bit but I'm scared of ladders so I'd need someone else to properly investigate it. The wardrobe is my main closet which is really tall. I've got most of my clothes between the wardrobe and the unit beside my bed. I've got one big coat that I've hung up above my bed because I think it looks 'aesthetic'. I've also got a couple of coats that I keep next to the door on little hooks. I want to get new hooks because those ones don't really stick to the wall that well. I've got other coats that hang on the back of the bathroom door.

Do you work from home? If so, what's your set-up?

[Isabel] I don't work from home, but I study at home. I never wake up early and I'm not very active during the day with my schedule, so it's hard to be a coffee shop study person. I also accidentally bought a giant laptop that isn't practical to carry around and try to study elsewhere. My study is fully remote. So I study on my bed and sometimes I sit on the floor and put my legs under the coffee table. I also eat at that table most of the time and sit on the couch, sometimes I sit up on the high table. I eat on the high table before work but otherwise I'll sit on the floor and eat and watch TV on my computer, or I'll sit on the bed.

What does your typical work week look like? Can you walk me through what a regular day might look like?

[Isabel] I work 36 hours a week and I work every other weekend. It varies a lot. This week I was off the whole of last weekend, I worked Tuesday, I was off Wednesday and Thursday, then worked Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. Now it's Tuesday and I'm off today. Sometimes it's more split up like a shift every other day and sometimes I have a bunch of shifts in a row, which I prefer. I have class every Wednesday so I don't work on Wednesdays. I always work night shifts, 7pm-7am.

On my days off I sleep in because I go to bed late, I'll potter around the house, if I have an errand to run I'll do it, I'll eat, do some school work, then around 11 I'll go out with friends. Unless I have specific plans like a comedy show or a musical, then I'll usually be out of the house a little earlier. A lot of the people I know get off work around 1 or 2am, at bars, so I come around near the end of their shift and we'll just go out after that. I've always attracted people who work late and get up late.

Do you feel like you're lacking any specific types of spaces? Is there anything you wish you had?

[Isabel] I wish I had more storage space, there's a lot of knick knacks around that I don't really know where to put. The top drawer beside my bed is half underwear and half junk drawer and it's filling up. It would be nice if there was space to store things in the bathroom. I've never been the most organised person so it would just be nice if there was more place to put things. There's also a lot of stuff here that's not mine. The stove is annoying sometimes, sometimes I want an oven pizza or have a microwave. It's fine but it's a little annoying. I've always liked big bathroom spaces, the space there is a little cramped. It's all very livable still. Bugs are also kind of annoying here. I've had to put cockroaches in bug traps. It's all manageable.

Do you have access to any private outdoor space?

[Isabel] No. I've never even thought about it. You know what, I do wish I had a balcony because when people come over and they want to smoke it's really annoying. They have to go downstairs, but sometimes if I have one friend over I'll let them smoke in the bathroom but I do regret it because it smells afterwards. I just put the fan on, I definitely just shouldn't let them do it because every time I do I wonder why. Only one of the windows opens and it's really difficult and there's no screen. The other one doesn't open at all because of the AC unit. For me, lacking green space or being outside is just not something that I think about.

Where in the apartment do you spend the most time?

[Isabel] On my bed. I study and eat and watch TV here. It's so comfy, one of the comfiest beds I've ever owned. I also spend a lot of time on the floor. I'll crochet on the floor, do my class, watch TV, eat... I do a lot of things on the floor. I also sit on the floor to do my makeup.

My bedroom and the living room overlap a lot. My bedroom is basically just my bed, but when people come over the bed doubles as a second couch.

Do any spaces change to accommodate different activities? Are some objects not fixed to accommodate this? Do you move furniture around a lot?

[Isabel] When I had all my friends stay over we moved the coffee table. The coffee table moves around depending on what I'm doing.

How do your habits change with the seasons?

[Isabel] I haven't been here for the full range of seasons but I have never been the kind of person who changes what I do all that much throughout the year. I went to the beach last week, which is a summer activity.

What are your thoughts about the affordability and cost of living in New York?

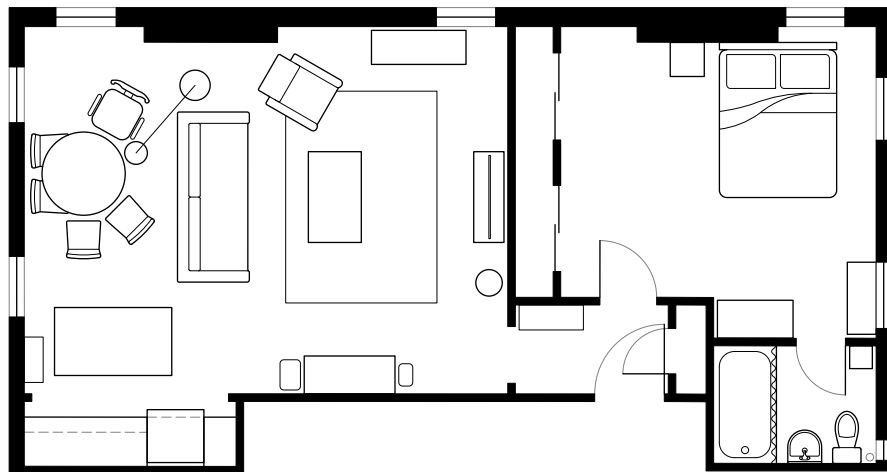
[Isabel] The city's expensive. Lots of activities are also expensive. I like that better than living without having things to do around me. I'd like to be able to go to dinners and time I want, go out late, and see concerts when they're on - those are activities I like. The cost is worth it to me.

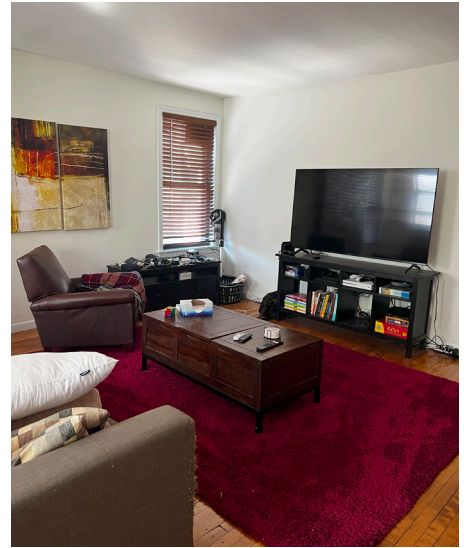
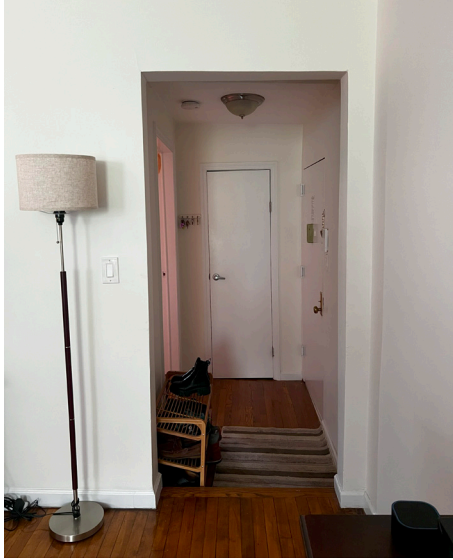
New York

James Transcript

of Occupants: 1
Neighbourhood: Hell's Kitchen, Manhattan
Bed/Bath: 1 bed, 1 bath
Size: 57.5 m²
Rent-to-Income: 50%

James
Age: 35
Gender: M
Occupation: Internal Auditor







Can you tell me a bit about your home?

[James] I knew the girl I took this place over from, from work. She moved to Switzerland so I took over the lease. She wanted to move out and I was like “OK” and so they terminated her lease and I just started a new lease with the management company. She just left all the things here. It just happened that the timing worked out when I was coming back from New Zealand.

How long have you lived in this apartment?

[James] Moved in August 2021. So maybe less than two years. Before that, I was in New Zealand for two years. Before that, I was in Hoboken, New Jersey, for maybe about 10 years. I’m born and raised in New Jersey.

How long do you intend to stay?

[James] I plan to move to Hoboken probably at the end of my lease which is at the end of August. Other than that I have no plans to move

How many people other than you are in this apartment on a regular basis? Do you entertain a lot? What do you do when you have people over?

[James] I have people come to visit, so I have friends that largely live in New Jersey, and so whenever we’re doing things in the city we start here before going elsewhere. Staying over, not often. On Friday, maybe 2 weeks ago, friends from Hoboken came into the city and played Catan. Unfortunately the distance between Hoboken and New York is a bit of a struggle so I often find myself going out there since most of the people I know are based there. So the Catan doesn’t get played very often.

Do you have any hobbies? How do they take up space in the apartment?

[James] No, I have a whole bunch of stuff from the girl that lived here before; a bike tool to essentially use your bike as a stationary but I’ve never used it, it’s still in my closet. I don’t have a bike, it will be part of the many things I’m probably selling when I wanna move out of here.

There's a 1500 piece puzzle that was given to me during the pandemic when there was a possibility that I might have to isolate, but that was never really an issue when I got back in August 2021. Other places were still locked down a little bit but it wasn't as much of an issue here, all the 'freedom' stuff.

I have video games, I never play them. I probably played them for a week or two after I bought the system, then I got engrossed in it, then I hated the fact that I wasted so much time playing them and I gave up on them.

I watch TV in my free time. Up until late last year I was taking the CPA, which is a certification here in the US, there's four tests associated with that. I was supposed to do it when I was in New Zealand but I couldn't leave the country and I wanted to take it in the US. I've spent a decent amount of time on that over the last couple months and now I'm trying to figure out what I'm doing with my free time. I get down to the gym a little bit more, but other than that there's not as much. I've planned some trips. I was applying for jobs too which was part of it.

There's a decent amount of bars in this particular area. There's an Irish bar, and a few other bars around. For me it's more to meet up with people, I wouldn't go to a bar by myself. I more often go and meet up with people in different places. I'd either go down to go to a 'Comedy Cellar' show or go to Hoboken and get drinks out there. Or I'd go to something closer to the office.

Where did you get the furniture from?

[James] Most of it was here when I moved in from the girl that lived here before - 80% of the furniture, probably. The big stuff. All the weights and things were all hers, I don't use those either. I have a gym across the street that I occasionally use.

Do you work from home? If so, what's your set-up?

[James] I work at home two days a week on average. Then I probably go into the office three days a week. My office is a 15 minute walk away, so it's super close. So that probably makes me go there more often than I would otherwise.

When I work from home I just use the dining table. I've got a monitor which is usually on the table. Usually the table is in the corner with the desk chair pulled up to it and the monitor on top. The other chairs would typically be stacked up on each other.

What does your typical work week look like?

[James] When I work from home I'm probably working about 10 hours a day, 9-10 hours, probably similar to days in the office. Some peaks and valleys in terms of late nights and whatnot, but on average about 50 hours a week. 60% the office, 40% here.

I try to do things around the city. Most of my friends are in New Jersey, which I recognized over my time here. So I often find myself going out to Hoboken or Jersey City, both on the other side of the river. Sometimes I might just meet someone after work for drinks or something like that. I'll say on average, probably no more than once a week.

Do you have any issues with regards to privacy?

[James] No, I don't have issues. I keep the window open all the time. I feel like in the city privacy is not expected. I have one of the windows open for sun and things. There is a big tree in front of the other one. In the bedroom I'll keep the curtains closed 80% of the time but in the living room I don't care.

Do you have enough space?

[James] Yeah.

***Do you feel like you're lacking any specific types of spaces?
Is there anything you wish you had?***

[James] Some people might say laundry. Separate from living at home, I've always lived in apartments that typically don't have washers and dryers. So I've kind of got used to the idea of other people doing my laundry for me and paying for it, paying for the privilege. I go to a laundromat, but they have a service - there's a 'wash-and-fold' across the street where I drop off my laundry.

When I was in New Zealand I had to do my laundry because it was frowned upon to do anything other than that. Everyone I was living with was doing laundry so I felt compelled to do it. That was more laundry than I've probably done in my adult life. I used the drier more than I was probably supposed to there, I feel like that was also frowned upon. They would say "why are you using the dryer, there's good weather out there". I feel like there are a lot of 'greener' people over there. Sometimes it was just wet, nothing dried. So when I was doing my wash I'd try to focus in on it and get it done with, but I feel like it would just take forever. You'd leave it out on the line and if it dries it dries.

Here most of the places have no washer and dryer, in the unit or in the building and so I'd have to use the laundromats and I'm not spending hours in those laundromats. They wash and fold it for me at the 'wash-and-fold', and for me that's the biggest thing. Folding I think is the worst part because it just takes forever. They fold it better than I can and they return it to me in the laundry bag that I gave it to them in, and it's like a dollar a pound. I drop off like 25-30 pounds. When I need to wear dress clothes, which is very infrequent nowadays, I have a dry cleaner, maybe four or five blocks that way, and I can just walk there. I usually do laundry at the same time so I'll go to the laundromat with my wash-and-fold and I'll head down to the dry cleaner on the same trip.

Package delivery, as you might suspect. When someone rings the doorbell I can buzz them in from my phone, on an app, I could do that from anywhere. So either I can buzz in a delivery person or there's a delivery button at the front door that they can hit. There's a 'remote doorman' who can let them in. So packages come in, and there's always the chance that people might sneak in behind other people and steal stuff. You probably can't just leave packages there for very long. I have a dishwasher, but I don't use the kitchen that much. There's frying pans in the oven right now. I've probably turned the oven on only once probably. I don't think I'm missing anything. Storage space isn't really an issue, I don't have that many things. I can see that being an issue probably for some. There's storage space in the coffee table. I probably have what I need but I probably don't even really think about what else I need.

How do your habits change with the seasons?

[James] Not really, winter's not that bad. There's never that much snow here, it's usually only about 3 inches, they can shovel it pretty quick. If it was that bad, I would just wait until it was a bit clearer. There's never really an urgency with getting laundry done or anything else.

Do you have access to any private outdoor space?

[James] Central Park is 15 blocks away. I've got the roof which I have access to, though I'm not sure if we're supposed to use it. I don't really use it anyway. There's nothing up on the roof. I don't know what the rules are of being up there and what not. I think if I bought stuff up they might remove it. I go on walks, because there's so much going on. I find myself walking through Times Square because it's so busy and full of so many people, it's nice for people watching. I'll walk to work, it's not too far away. I'll sometimes go to the gym or just to get food. On weekends is probably when I do most of my outdoor activity.

So city bikes make it pretty easy to get around the city, they are quite nice. A lot of cities are adopting the bike-sharing thing, it works pretty well. Here in New York City it's \$100 a year, there's just a dock not far from here. You can go all around the city. You don't need to worry about bringing a bike all the way up the stairs - the prior tenant had that. There's a lot more stuff which is not as touristy in downtown Manhattan so I might go there if I want to walk around. Being so close to Times Square, there are pros and cons to it but most of the better bars and restaurants are there.

Would you sacrifice some interior space for a private outdoor space?

[James] I think I'm adaptable. I think if I had more outdoor space I'd probably use it. A more livable outdoor space. I don't think I feel like I'm missing anything by not having outdoor space but I would probably choose having more usable outdoor space over more interior space. I think there's a cut off though. I feel like there's a decent amount of indoor space for me here. I have a smaller apartment in Hoboken, which is like 500 square feet, there I might choose more indoor space.

Where in the apartment do you spend the most time?

[James] In the living space. Working in the dining room, and on the couch probably. I'm usually pretty focused when I'm working and I just stay there, I can go about 80% of a work day without getting up.

What does your typical work week look like?

[James] I have a standard Monday to Friday work schedule. I have standard chargeable hours, 45 hours a week. I have teams in India, China, and Japan. I just work when I need to work. I work in public accounting so in that industry it's a pretty average work week, but I'd say that industry probably sits on the higher side of average work hours. US work culture would probably have people working more hours than they would in New Zealand for example. So here the expectation is that most people are charging 45 hours a week to clients - that means billable hours. There are things like admin and training on top of that. I would say probably a decent number of our young people are probably working 50-55 hours a week.

Do any spaces change to accommodate different activities? Are some objects not fixed to accommodate this? Do you move furniture around a lot?

[James] Other than the things around the table for my desk, everything else is pretty fixed. Since I've moved in here I've pushed the table against the wall. That's it. The island can move, but it doesn't move.

Can you walk me through what a regular day might look like?

[James] Yeah, sure. On a normal work day I probably wake up maybe around 7:00. On a day that I'm working from home, I would probably take a shower. I'd look at my phone for about 30-40 minutes before that. Then I would either be cooking breakfast myself or going out. If I'm cooking breakfast I'll have eggs, that's one thing I can cook. Or I just go downstairs to either the deli on the corner and get a bacon, egg, cheese or the bagel place a little further down. And then get a coffee, there's a good amish grocery downstairs - I get coffee there. I'd come back up here and probably around 8:00 I would start my work day. Between 8am and 6:30-7pm I'm working 90% of the time. At some point during the day I'll break for lunch, but it won't be at a specific time. I'm trying to eat fewer meals so I'll just go for another meal at some point. I might go out, especially if I made breakfast. So then in terms of where I'd go, it probably varies. There's a Peruvian place over here that has a lunch special for like \$12, or go to the bar and get a burger, or chipotle's down the street. I try to go to different places, but again, after a while you just kind of start going to the same place over and over again. When it gets to 7:00 or so, I'd sometimes go to the gym 2-3 days a week for an hour or so. I'd also watch TV, or maybe call people. I don't do anything before I start work so if I wanted to do anything personal like CPA, call friends or family, or something, I'd do that afterwards until about 10pm then I'd go to sleep. On the weekend it changes every week. I had a wedding this past weekend down in South Jersey, so I drove down - picked up a rental car here, drove down the shore, stayed in a hotel down the shore and then came back, stopped over to see a friend who still lives in Jersey on the way back. The weekend before that I went to visit friends in Jersey City, so I stayed over there on one of the nights because I just didn't feel like coming back. We were just hanging out, barbecuing and his place. They have a lot more amenities over there because they have nicer apartments, so they have the set up where they have rooftop pools, barbecues, TVs, etc. It's a high amenity type place like that. So I hung out there for the day and just stayed over and came back in the morning. I don't often but I do work on Sundays. It's like there's just things that come up and there's some things I'd rather get done then stress about later on. So maybe 4 hours of work on a Sunday, on

average, I kind of ease my way into it - 2:00 o'clock I'd get started. The whole reason I live in the city is trying to see different things, and to have different food so I often have a list on Google and think "Alright, well I haven't tried this restaurant before. I'll try to go". So sometimes I'll do that. I like to see Broadway plays every once in a while. On work days when my team is in the office, I'll try to do the same thing as my work from home days, but instead of making breakfast I'll go there and get something. I'll pick up breakfast on the way and probably go out to lunch with someone on the team.

The appeal of being in the city is outweighed by my desire to be closer to the people in my life, though. I moved here just to do it, it wasn't necessarily something that I thought I would really enjoy. Now I've done it, I think 2 years is probably long enough. Some people I know are moving out and away from the city. I'm 35, people are getting older and becoming parents and whatnot. It's a more affordable option to move back to New Jersey.

What are your thoughts about the affordability and cost of living in New York?

[James] This apartment is \$3500 a month to rent. I think it increased 18% last year. It was \$3200 and then it went up to \$3500. When it was \$3200 there was also a 1 month credit as a COVID special - they had a hard time getting people so, part of when I took over the lease was that the girl I took over from passed on the 1 month credit as part of the agreement. The apartment I own in New Jersey is currently renting out for \$2000 per month. This apartment is definitely a lot better but I'd be saving \$1500 a month in rent, that's appealing. There's also a New York City residents tax, so if you live here you have to pay a portion of your income to the city - it's not based on where you work, it's where you live. So that's another kind of tax. Sales tax is 8.875% here. I think it's 6 or 7% in New Jersey. They have also increased the minimum wage for drivers - Uber drivers, delivery drivers, so I think that's going to impact residents. Tips used to be included in the calculation of minimum wage, now it's going to be on top of it. So that's new and that'll be in effect soon. So that's definitely going to increase the cost of my Uber eats. I think incomes here in the city are probably higher than what they are in the suburbs and things like that. It's actually ideal to live in the suburbs and commute to the city, that's what a lot of people do. New Jersey has grown with largely commuters in the city. A large number of commuters that come into New York either live in New Jersey or live in Long Island - which is not in New York city proper. So they're not paying the resident tax and they have more space out there too.

The issue of affordability radiates from the city, it extends to New Jersey as well. Probably Midtown is a more expensive area. You get down to the Lower East Side, that's probably also a fairly high demand place as well. You're in the city. I think Jersey City has the highest average rent in the world for a city. I think it actually beats New York, but it's because New York includes the Bronx and the other outer boroughs. Once you include all that I think Jersey City is more expensive on average. There's also a lot of more upscale apartments over there as opposed to a lot of older buildings here. So there's newer, more expensive places there and fewer places that are smaller and more affordable. I think my apartment's probably the smallest or the least expensive apartment in New Jersey. I bought the place and I've been renting it out for two years, I'm planning to move back in. I lived there for 5 years before I moved to New Zealand. I would guess that this apartment is 2.5 times bigger than my apartment in New Jersey.

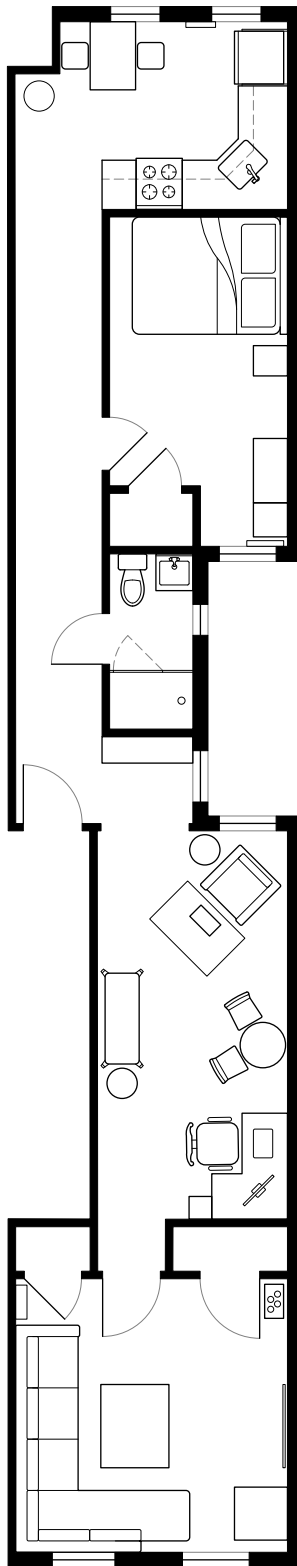
New York

Jesse Transcript

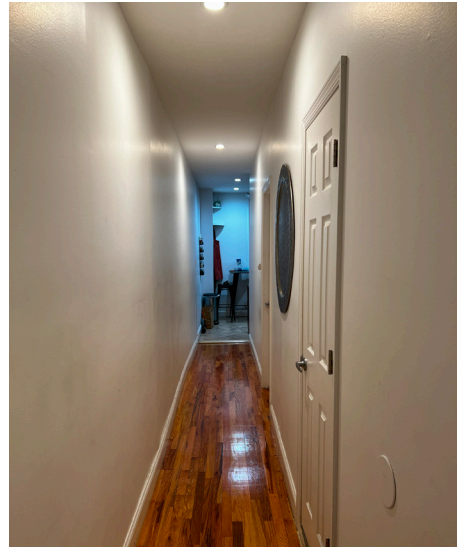
of Occupants: 2
Relationship: Couple
Neighbourhood: Bushwick, Brooklyn
Bed/Bath: 2 bed, 1 bath
Size: 60.3 m²
Rent-to-Income: 40%

Jesse
Age: 28
Gender: M
Occupation: Booking Agent

Daniella
Age: 29
Gender: F
Occupation: Booking Agent









Can you tell me a bit about your home?

[Jesse] I live with my girlfriend. This is a two bedroom apartment that's turned into a 1 bedroom with two living rooms. I initially lived here with another guy, a roommate. The second living room was his room. My room is the other one down the hall. When he moved out my girlfriend moved in. That was about six months into having this spot. The primary living room is a smaller living room slash office. This block that we're on right now, Gratton Street, is a pretty industrial area. In terms of the overall area there's a lot of garages that are manufacturing wood or certain kinds of metals or recycling plants. More so than apartments. It's a little loud, but there's not a lot of people in this area. It's good here. Part of the reason I live in this area specifically is because I work in entertainment, in music. This is where a lot of the music venues are. I'm walking distance to probably six or seven pretty popular venues. It helps me for work. There's six units total in this building, three floors, two units on each one. I think they're all the same layout as this. Almost all the other units, other than one girl below, have been here for 30-40 years.

How long have you lived in this apartment? How long do you intend to stay?

[Jesse] Two years. A year and a half with my girlfriend. I've been in New York since January 2018 - 5 and a half years. I wasn't in the city during COVID. I'm lucky that I have a lot of extended family in the suburbs. I grew up in Washington D.C. which is only about a 5 hour drive away from here. I was just staying with extended family outside of the city where there's a little more space. I didn't have to worry about New York, which was a global epicentre of COVID for about a year or so. I managed to get out of my place when that was happening. I was lucky that my landlord at the time just didn't send me a contract after my second year of living where I was. I kept asking my landlord to send in the contract to re-sign and he just wouldn't. I don't know why he didn't do it, but it ended up coming in very handy because I could just back out. Once COVID happened I just told him I was done, stopped paying rent, it was easy. Then I moved here in June of 2021 just to restart life, you know.

Everything is totally back to normal, I would say. I'm not saying it's the same as before, but I would say it's back to normal, whatever normal is. It's very hard to find apartments because everywhere is full. Everyone's back for sure. When I moved into this apartment, there were a lot of places to rent, and there were a lot of deals. I got my first month and a half of rent free here. That was very common. Some places got 2 to 6 months of free rent, just as an incentive to get people back into the city. Once a lot of people started coming back, everyone started coming. From there rent prices went way up and now you can't find places to rent. Good ol' New York.

That hasn't really affected me as much. I mean, we're wanting to move away from here, out of this place for several reasons. We're not in a huge rush to move, which is why I'm saying there's not a lot of pressure to find a new spot. We also have a good relationship with our landlord, who owns something like 40 buildings in the area and has given us a couple options that are not public yet. Let's say we had to move out at the end of the month then, yeah, it would be a little difficult to find the right spot, in the right location.

As for why we might want to move, I mentioned that this is a pretty industrial area - I really prefer trees, or at least more trees than there are here. I'd say there are probably like 3 trees on the entire block. It makes a difference when you walk outside three or four times a day. That's especially true when you work from home. The plants help, that's why I've got so many plants here. I just want to be in a prettier area than this. This street is not the nicest.

Also, the people next door are insane. The people next door are squatters who have been squatting for two years. They fight all the time, the walls shake, there are people in and out all the time. It's a vibe that we don't want to be around every day. After two years it gets old and there's also a security component with random people coming in and out all the time. We always have all the windows shut, the doors locked 24/7, and we hear yelling and banging all the time. We'd rather not.

There's a lot of characters in this building, the squatters next door are just the tip of the iceberg. We know the story of the woman who lives in another apartment in the building from the landlord. She is legally disabled from a drug overdose. She lives with her partner who is a bit of a shady guy. The landlord has told us that 2 years ago they decided to stop paying rent. You might be familiar with something called squatters rights in New York, it's a thing around the country, but specifically in New York you can just not pay rent and the landlord can't just call the police and get you kicked out. It's a very long process, it doesn't happen overnight or over a couple months. When it's someone who's disabled who is squatting it becomes even more difficult. The landlord told me that he was reimbursed by the state for the first year that they didn't pay rent, which was about \$30,000-40,000. Another year has gone by and he still hasn't gotten anything from them, from what I understand his attorney has just said "Good luck trying to get them out". It hasn't impacted us directly, they're nice to us and we haven't had any incidents with them. The bigger issue is always hearing yelling through the wall, you wonder if that might have an impact on your mental health and enjoyment of life, for me it does.

If I were to think about where I might move, most neighbourhoods would meet “the green requirement” for me. We have a lot of friends in Bed-Stuy, which is a neighbourhood about 2 or 3 miles away from here. It’s a little more residential and has more parks. Maybe we would move to Williamsburg which is closeby. Even other parts of Bushwick have more greenery than this, it just happens that our street isn’t the nicest.

I picked this place because it is nice, you know, it’s a nice apartment. The area is good for my work as I said. It’s spacious, it’s near all the stuff for work, it’s near the subway, and we got a decent deal on the spot. When you’re looking for apartments in New York you need to decide quickly. Most places that are on the market for rent get seized up in a couple days, if they’re nice. That’s just a demand thing. Even if you have 10,000 apartments available, with the amount of people that move every month there’s just always this pressure. I called the broker that I got this with the night that I saw it, I had to decide right on the spot.

How many people other than you are in this apartment on a regular basis? A semi-regular basis? Where do they stay? Do you entertain a lot? What do you do when you have people over?

[Jesse] We just had a couple stay with us. Our couch pulls out and the second living room becomes a guest room. You’ve got to make the most of your space, you know. We had a big party on Friday as well, we host a lot. We have a lot of dinners and things as well. When we have people over for food we usually sit around the big coffee table, it’s very informal. I’ll cook a bunch of stuff and put it out on the desk, buffet style. We’ll have some people in the primary living room and then a bunch of people sitting around the floor in the second living room.

Do any spaces change to accommodate different activities? Are some objects not fixed to accommodate this? Do you move furniture around a lot?

[Jesse] No, not really. When we have company over it’s usually just for dinners and people will just sit on the couches or on the floor. We don’t have fold out chairs or anything else. Everything you see is the way it always is.

Do you have any hobbies? How do they take up space in the apartment?

[Jesse] Yeah, we've got some plants. I've also got a saxophone and a flute. I cook a lot, so that's a big thing. My girlfriend, Daniella, paints a bit. She paints on that coffee table, she'll often sit on the floor and paint there. She stores her paints in the coffee table.

Do you have enough storage space?

[Jesse] There's not a lot of storage in here. There's the closet in the second living room which is tiny. There's also a closet in the bedroom which is the same tiny size as the one in the second room. There's not even a foot of clearance on the top shelf so you can barely put anything up there. This is not the best laid out apartment. The placement of the lightswitches is all wrong, it doesn't really make any sense. Pretty bad craftsmanship overall, you could just punch a hole through the wall if you wanted to.

How long do you intend to stay?

[Jesse] I'd say a few more years at least. I mean, we're kind of figuring it out. We each have a little bit of a different vision on where we're going to end up. Kids are going to be in the next couple of years. I think the plan is to be in Brooklyn, or at least somewhere in New York City, for a minimum of four or five years. Then we'll figure out the next move.

Do you have any issues with regards to privacy?

[Jesse] No issues. There's really the only two windows that anyone can see us through, in the second living room. We have blinds, but it's New York, and I mean, everyone just sees crazy stuff every day. So, we don't really care, if someone sees someone walking around without wearing clothes or there's a crazy party going on, whatever. In terms of privacy with each other, we give each other space. We've obviously been with each other for some time, we like being with each other. The good thing is that we have two living rooms with doors and we also have a separate bedroom. Danielle has an office but she works from home a good amount, so if she's working from home we can be in separate rooms doing calls. I am fully remote myself. Mondays and Fridays we'll usually both be here. Anywhere you can sit, we've worked. But usually she'll be on the couch and I'll be on the desk.

Do you have enough space?

[Jesse] Yeah. We don't have enough storage space, but we have enough space to live. We have several duffels of camping gear, skis, and clothes. The bedroom is not that big, it's smaller than the second living room. We have a full sized bed and a dresser which take up most of the room. Having a medium sized dresser and a small closet for two people is not enough space. It would be nice to have more space for shoes and cleaning supplies too. We keep a good amount of stuff in the coffee table. We've found places to put things. We've got the bar on the wall, we've got a shelving unit in the second living room, and Daniella is great with getting organisers for cabinets. We're close to making the most of our cabinet space for cooking utensils and cleaning supplies. We've got a little nook, about 6", in between the fridge and the wall where we've got these little things that hold mops and brooms and stuff. We've just got to get a little creative. We use every inch, which can be exhausting and messes happen faster because there's less room for the mess to go. It's just something you've got to live with.

The reason we chose to make the other room our bedroom, instead of the second living room which is a bit bigger, is because of the location. There's one welding garage and on any given day at 7am there's significant noise. It's so bad that my previous roommate wanted to switch rooms with me despite having a bigger room and more windows. The only window in the bedroom looks into the air shaft. It's very quiet after business hours but there are usually very loud trucks, garbage trucks, and it sounds like a blacksmith is sitting outside the window. The second reason is that we like hosting and so having the bigger area which is adjacent to the other living room allows us to use both spaces and have more people over. You can keep the door open and you can have 30-40 people here all in the same general area.

Do you have access to any private outdoor space?

[Jesse] Zero. The rooftop is off limits, and there's no patio, balcony, or backyard.

Would you sacrifice some interior space for a private outdoor space?

[Jesse] That's tough, because we do use every inch. Here's what I'm going to say, because I work from home, I would say no. I work about 10 hours a day so having the space is very important to me. If I was only here in the morning and the evening I would probably trade off to have the private outdoor space.

***Do you feel like you're lacking any specific types of spaces?
Is there anything you wish you had?***

[Jesse] Laundry is a huge one for us. We had laundry when we moved here, it was in the basement, and then the dryer broke and now the landlord won't fix it - he says it's too expensive to get a permit. We would have to walk 8 minutes with our laundry to a laundromat or we can have someone come and pick it up and do it for us. What we typically do is take it to her family, which is about 2 hours away from here on the shore - New Jersey. Or we take it to some of my extended family, take it to their place and wash it. When you've got to get the laundry together, bring it downstairs, put it in the car, take it out of the car, put it in the wash, and then whatever else, it's a long process. We have a car, which is somewhat unusual. It's not normal but is not very uncommon. It's not too bad to find parking for the car here and we have a small car. There's free street parking here. Storage is a big thing that's missing for us. Storage and laundry are the two major things. Also, we'd like a bigger bedroom. If we're really thinking, I'd like a dedicated parking space but that's not common. Even if you have a car in the city it's not common to have a parking garage or a driveway.

Where in the apartment do you spend the most time?

[Jesse] We spend the . We eat 50/50 between the table and on the couch. When Daniella comes home from work she'll hang out on the couch, and me too.

Can you walk me through what a regular day might look like?

[Jesse] I wake up at 8:30 in the morning. I typically will make breakfast, and sometimes play the wooden flute. I start working around 9:30-10:00. I usually get off work at around 6:30 to 7:00. Between that, during my work day I'll usually make a quick lunch or go out and get something. I typically don't leave the house for any other reason. Sometimes I have business lunches or doctor's appointments but usually I just have a quick 30 minute break during the day. Half the time I stay in after work and cook dinner, I hang out here for the night, I'll play some music, do more work, or talk to friends and family on the phone. The other half of the time I'd be going to a concert, which is typically tied to my job. Or I'd just be at a concert with my friends. Live music is a big thing for me. Daniella is in the same line of work as me, she just does stand-up comedy, she books comedians so she goes to comedy shows often. We go to each other's shows pretty often, we're always doing something, it's hard to be bored here. It's

why I like living here. I perform as well, I'm in a New Orleans style brass band. We do a lot of the big parades in New York and play random shows in the city. I perform every now and then, every 3-4 weeks. We practise in a big arts studio in Long Island city, we all go there every Sunday.

How do your habits change with the seasons?

[Jesse] Things definitely change. It's a rough winter in New York for sure. Summer Fridays are a common thing in New York, where people leave early at 2 o'clock. In summer I just get out earlier. If my average is to be off at 6:30/7:00, in summer I'm usually off by about 6:00. That's between April and September. I use the city bikes and bike around a lot in the summertime, and I'm more social. More bars, more parks, more shows. Things in the apartment are more or less the same throughout the months though.

What are your thoughts about the affordability and cost of living in New York?

[Jesse] New York City is generally a rich person's city. Just to throw out a number, I'd say you need to be in the top 10% in earnings to live in a way that any person would say is comfortable. I don't know what the median income is in the U.S.. I'm not very wealthy but I think I make above what the median income is and I struggle to be able to live here and I do not live an extravagant life. All the shows that I go to, I don't pay for, so my entertainment expenses are not that high. The rent I pay here is not that high for what I get. If you want to live in New York City, it's important to distinguish how big of an area it is. Most places in Manhattan and near Manhattan, like in Brooklyn where we live, are astronomically expensive - that is, in terms of rent, how much you might pay for lunch, or something like a pair of jeans. Brooklyn is huge, let's just talk about Brooklyn for a second. 80% of Brooklyn that's not right next to Manhattan is somewhat affordable. If you want to be anywhere near the city and be in a decent area with general amenities, it's just not worth what you pay for. You pay to be in a special place that can't be replicated in many other places. It's a unique place to live, and there's a lot of demand, so the people who control what the prices are have a lot of leverage because of that demand. That's the situation. I'm willing to pay for it because I enjoy it. I don't need to sell you on New York City because you and everyone else already knows about this city, a lot of people want to live here. There are millions of people who want to live in Manhattan or close to Manhattan and they're willing to pay a premium to do that. As a result they'll also pay a premium for their eggs and a pair of jeans and coffee.

New York

Sean Transcript

of Occupants: 2

Relationship: Flatmates

Neighbourhood: Upper East Side, Manhattan

Bed/Bath: 2 bed, 1 bath

Size: 41 m²

Rent-to-Income: 25%

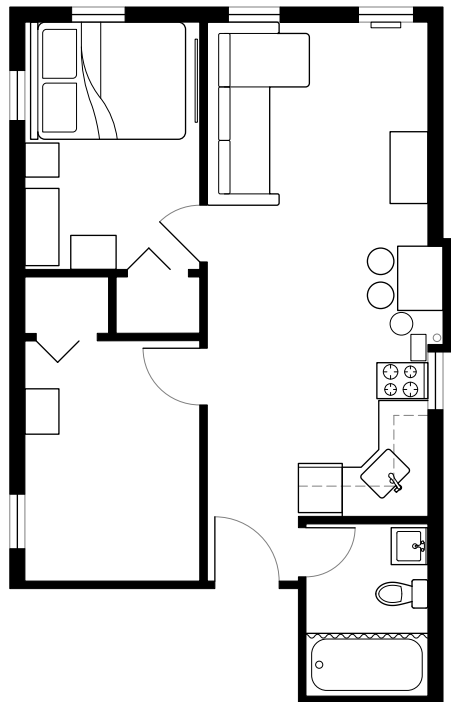
Sean

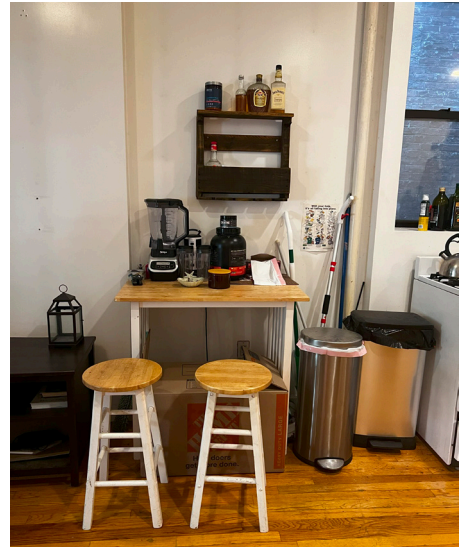
Age: 28

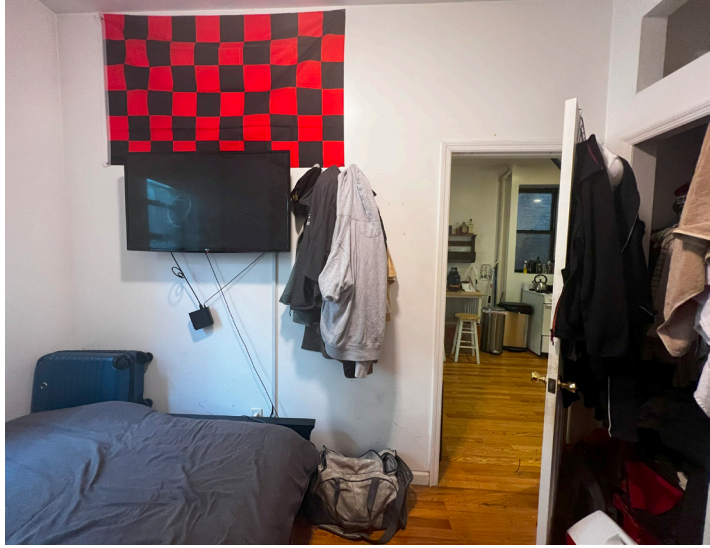
Gender: M

Occupation: Bartender / Plumber

Rotating Occupants, Irish Community







Can you tell me a bit about your home?

[Sean] This has been a place for Irish lads, every time one moves out another one moves in. The guy that just moved out left because he got a job offer in Miami so he's got another mate moving in on July 1st. He'll be taking it for 2 months, he's another Irish guy. I was asking my girlfriend if she'd take the room but she said it's too dark, it's a very dark apartment. The windows face into the courtyard. So, I'm actually moving out of here myself in September. Staying on the Upper East Side, just looking for an apartment.

How long have you lived in this apartment?

[Sean] I've been here for a year now, a year and a bit. I came here for the last two months of a lad's lease, then I started a new lease last September which will be finished this coming September. I moved in here with random people I didn't know. My friend knew the guy who was living here and knew he was moving out. I was on the way to Chicago, I had a job lined up there, then I got this apartment and at the same time I started talking to my current girlfriend. So now I'm very excited to stay.

How long do you intend to stay?

[Sean] That's a good question. In September my girlfriend and I are moving in together and we'll both be 29. She has an idea in her head that she'd like to be out of New York by 32, so I'd say we'll be living in the Upper East Side until then. Her sister lives up the street as well, at 4th and 2nd. She likes this area, it's close to her sister and close to work. I work at a bar which is a 5 minute walk away from here, fairly handy. No need for transport. It is handy to be able to make a bit of money and save at the same time. The Upper East Side isn't as expensive as everyone thinks it is. The Upper West Side, from what I hear, is a lot more expensive. At the moment I'm hearing of couples getting one bedroom apartments from \$2800 to \$3000 per month, which is terrible for New York City. \$1500 per month each, just terrible. It's a good location in the city, you're down in the city, it's quiet, there's a lot of bars and restaurants, and it's cleaner than most parts of New York. All the places around here have these gated courtyards, they have their own privacy. Thursday is garbage day and Friday is for recycling. In some places with the rats, it's hard to walk sometimes. For me anyway, I hate rodents. This is a good area, it's a really nice area. There's no trouble up here. Another thing I'll say about this apartment as well, I've never seen a single cockroach or rat. I know guys out in apartments in Brooklyn and Astoria and they tell me stories of cockroach infestations. They have to be worried about food and stuff, and clean their apartments constantly. I've never seen

any of that, thank god. One thing I would not like here is to be in a ground floor apartment, street level floors. That's where people mostly see rodents. You want at least one or two levels of separation.

My girlfriend is in New Jersey now, in Hoboken, which is about 40 minutes from here. In terms of apartments over there it's nice, price wise it's a bit expensive. She wants to come into the city to make it easier for herself. If we were a little bit older and wanted to stay in New York, we'd work in New York and live somewhere like Hoboken I'd say. I'd say we'd sooner leave here and head somewhere else, maybe California. We're going to stay in the U.S. I'd say, it's better for her industry. I can go anywhere with the bartending, she's doing fashion so she wants to be somewhere with some of the industry there for herself. Maybe Los Angeles or San Diego. She's American, she's from upstate New York. She's got a great landlord where she is, they've never put up her rent or given her any issues. She pays \$1500 for a one bed to herself, so she's happy to stay up there.

Where did you live before?

[Sean] I lived in Long Island City for the first 3 months. I spent 3 months taking over that lease and I was meant to move to Chicago then after that. At the time I was just taking over a lease for a guy I knew who was heading back to Ireland for visa reasons. It was in a brand new building with laundry downstairs, gym downstairs, common area with a pool table, and you could just take free scooters out of the building. On the rooftop there were these barbecues, a seating area, and a fireplace. It had a view of the East River and the skyline of the city. It was really nice. You can see from the East River here where the three chimneys are, they're white and red, that's Long Island City. From Long Island City you could get into the city fast, it's nice and it's out of the city but there's not much over there. Not much in the way of restaurants and bars, you'd have to go over to Queens and Astoria. Living out there was more expensive than living in the Upper East Side. It's nicer because it's newer out there, newer buildings. But you have access to things here. Lovely parks here, the ferry is here, you've got the MET, and you've got parks on the Harlem side as well if you wanted to go there. Over there there's nothing, you have to go to Queens.

At the same time, when you're in a building like this... do you see that pipe on the wall in the living room? That's the heating in the apartment. So there's one there, one in the bathroom, and one in each of the bedrooms. It's a one pipe system. When the heat's on, everyone's heat is on in the building at the exact same time. There's no turning it off per room, there's no turning it off at all. If I'm lying in bed I'm right beside the pipe and it's boiling hot, it's very uncomfortable, especially coming into spring time when they keep the heat on. Compared to

the new buildings in Long Island City, you can have control of the AC and you can turn it on in each room. The difference in money wouldn't bother me that much, I just need to be here sometimes. A lot of these older apartments need a lot of maintenance as well and the maintenance guys here are terrible. There's an issue we're having in the bathroom, very simple to fix because a part just needs to be replaced. I could do it myself, I used to be a plumber, but you're not allowed to touch it once the maintenance guys have been notified and they're not coming to fix it. We've got some issues with the windows and the doors. In New York you've got some great places and some are not so much. This apartment is not bad at all.

How many people other than you are in this apartment on a regular basis? A semi-regular basis? Where do they stay?

[Sean] My girlfriend stays over, she sleeps in the bed with me. If a guy was out drinking with me he might come back to stay maybe and stay on the couch. I never have anyone come over to stay over. That couch is the most uncomfortable to be on, especially on one side of the couch there's a spring or something coming out of it. That's part of the reason my girlfriend didn't want to move in here, it's dark and not the most... I don't know. But for lads it's ideal, they don't really care. I guess when you're paying money you'd like something with a bit of comfort.

If I knew I was staying here I would have chucked all of this furniture out but I knew I was leaving so I didn't bother doing anything about it. All of this furniture wouldn't even be mine to throw out, it belongs to the previous lad who lived here. When I leave at the end it's not my responsibility to get rid of this stuff, that's on the lad who left - he's coming back and forth at the moment. The guy who's moving in here works at the sister bar of the one I work at, he's going to take over all the furniture. He might put it out in the street and if they take it they take it and if they don't they don't. The only thing is, you have to wrap it if you want to put it out. That's why the previous guys left the bed there, he didn't have any wrap to wrap it with. You can't just throw it outside, I don't know why. The mattresses only maybe. There was a TV here as well which he sold before he left. Everything else was just here when I got here. I have a bed in my room which I might just leave for the next guy. That's the beauty of just having been here for a year, I don't have a lot to bring with me. The rooms aren't that big at all, once you put the bed in there it takes up most of the space. It's got a closet also, which is fine. Hopefully when we get something in September we can get a two bedroom so we can have one bedroom for storage.

Do you spend much of your week at home?

[Sean] No, I don't spend much time at home. Unless I'm watching a bit of TV, there's no reason to be in here. Unfortunately, as soon as you leave the house here you're spending money. Unless you're going to the park or going for a run, anything else you want to do - you're spending money. So for my first day off, usually a Monday, I try to spend some time here: cook a bit of food for myself, and don't talk to anyone for the day - I usually don't want to talk to anyone after 3 days at the bar - but I might meet someone in the evening. The second day I might go to the gym, I've got a gym I go to down on 61st street. I work 4 days a week, I get three days off. I'm usually working the weekends so I don't get to see much of the events, like pride was on last weekend. I'll be on most weekends Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and I'll close most nights. That'll be until either 4 o'clock or even 6 o'clock in the morning. I can stop serving at 4 a.m. but if you want to give me cash I'll let you sit at the bar for a while. If you do that for other people in the industry they might do the same for you some nights. 4 o'clock minimum, and then if a good friend comes in you might sit down with them for a while and have a drink at the end of your shift. I'll usually finish around 2 o'clock mid week. My girlfriend works in the morning from 9 a.m. to 6 or 7 p.m., so if we work the same days we might not see each other at all, so we just want to move in together to see each other as much as possible. I might usually get up at 4 in the afternoon and go to sleep around 6 or 7 in the morning when she's getting up for work. It definitely has its cons, my diet for example, when I come home at 6 a.m. I'm not exactly going to go and cook a meal so I'll eat out. That could be avoided too if I were better at planning meals. There's no kitchen at the bar so I'm always eating pub grub as well, it's never cheap. I'm not cooking at home as much as I should be, I just don't have the time, but the kitchen has enough space for me and I like cooking in there.

What does your typical work week look like?

[Sean] So, I was plumbing for 12 years. I was in San Francisco working for this guy who was brilliant, the money was great, we did these great projects in Silicon Valley in these great houses. It was really enjoyable work. COVID happened and my sister was 'high-risk' so I went home and I started up my own company then. I was very, very busy, and work was brilliant but I hated it because I didn't want to be in Ireland, I wanted to be in America. I came back and got offered a bar job and I thought "Ok, I'll do this for a while and take a career break". I felt like because of COVID I missed a few years of being in my 20's and I was in no rush to go back to plumbing because I've got all the time in the world to be doing that. So I'm working in the bar 4 days a week and I'm working in plumbing 2 days a week. So my schedule has just recently changed. I was working in the bar Friday, Saturday, Sunday,

Monday, and then working Wednesday and Thursday as a plumber. Now, I'm working at the bar Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday so I can only work at the plumbing job one day a week, on Tuesday. I told the bar that I still wanted to work 2 days a week at the plumbing job so we're in the process of working that out. I want to keep the plumbing thing going and it's a nice way to make some extra money. If I'm off for 3 days on my own I tend to go off and meet my friends for drinks so it keeps me away from doing that as well.

What are your thoughts about the affordability and cost of living in New York?

[Sean] We're looking to move in September and it is one of the worst times of the year to go looking for a new apartment because students are coming back into the city. A lot of other leases will be up around the same time as well. Some people say renting has gotten better, other people are saying there's going to be another big jump in price coming in September when all the new leases are signed. When I was here at the start they re-did the lease at \$2400 per month, it was a COVID thing. They sent back a new lease at \$3000 per month and we just ignored them. So then we just said we would move out. So we ignored them for 3 months and after 3 months they came back with a revised lease which only went up to \$2600. One of the other residents, an older woman who has been here for the past 25 years had the same thing happen to her and she just got upset and left. And another guy had the same thing happen but did what we did and ignored them. They're just trying their hand. I've heard some places having 60 or 80% jumps in rent prices after COVID. I was speaking to some realtors in the bar who were saying September is going to have a big spike again. We're going to start looking in the middle of July. I got a couple of phone numbers from people who come into the bar, so I guess we'll see what happens.

New York is one of the only states with a broker's fee as well, which means you have to pay the broker 15% of the annual rent as well. You have to pay the security deposit upfront, pay the last month's rent, and some other fees.

For other things, it's not too bad once you know where to go. One of the most unique things that's affordable here is Trader Joe's, and there's one close by, 59th and 1st - about a 20 minute walk or you can take a bus. I could do a week's shopping for about \$100. That'll be things like chicken, yoghurts, protein bars, porridge, granola, juices, milk... all that kind of stuff. If you go somewhere else to do your shopping, like Martin Williams around the corner, it is criminal how much stuff costs there. Chicken could be twice the price and things like cereals might be 4 or 5 times the price as Trader Joe's. The cost of one bag of shopping at a supermarket like that would get you 3 bags of food from Trader Joe's. Then if I were going to restaurants

and stuff, it's all so expensive. The cheapest eats I found was a place called 'Skirt Steak' and once you add tax and tip in it was nearly \$100 for two people, and that's the cheapest eats I ever had. If you're going out for drinks, people will just jump on happy hours. Even then you'll still be paying \$14 a cocktail, \$7-9 for beers, there's nowhere that's really cheap around here. The beauty of being a bartender who knows other bartenders that's how you usually get drinks for cheap. There are dive bars over in Queens and Brooklyn that are cheap, but not on the Upper East Side, there's none of that here. There is some free stuff, the MET is \$1 for residents, there's a few nice parks around too. The ferry has a really nice view and brings you over to places, I bring my friends sometimes - it's only \$1 more than the subway, \$3.75.

There's a lot of families around here, I don't know how affordable that would be though. I'm not sure if they're renting here, I don't know anyone living like that. All the young families I know live up in the Bronx. A lot of the families living here are white Americans. There are a lot of people who live up here and work in finance that work in midtown. There are a lot of them who come to my bar, a couple of them who live in this building for sure. A lot of people in the area have good jobs and make good money I'd say. For us, we could stay here long term, but I don;t think we'd want to to be honest - too much city. I see kids down the streets here walking to school and smoking joints or vaping, it's a much different way to grow up. It would be for me or for my girlfriend, thinking about family life. Not that we need a house out in the countryside but this wouldn't be for me. I thought I would stay in Toronto after I got my permanent resident status, but stuff just happens, so we'll see what happens. I could eat my words in a couple years. Who knows, I might still be here.

Do you have any hobbies?

[Sean] I play hurling, we play at ??? Island, it's about a 10 minute cycle from here. I did a good bit of that last year, but it was easier to do because I was still plumbing full time. All the games are on the weekends and of course now I'm working Friday through to Sunday. So instead I'm going to start playing soccer in July. I've always played sports so it's always nice to do something to keep fit. I was trying to look for a boxing gym for training but it's so ridiculously expensive. It was \$3500 for about 25 training sessions, that was on the Lower East Side. For the soccer club the membership is only \$60, I bring my shoes and myself and I go there. It's easy, it's good for fitness, it's enjoyable, and it's close.

Do you have enough storage space?

[Sean] You can see in the bedroom the limited storage space. I've got my plumbing tool box, shoes, my girlfriend's shoes, a bunch of laundry, and my girlfriend's bag of things. You can only imagine if she tried to move all her things in here too. This is why you need the second bedroom, for all the stuff. She probably has about three times as much stuff as I do as well. She has all her own furniture as well. I don't see any apartment having enough room for all the stuff we have now between us, we'll see.

Do you have access to any private outdoor space?

[Sean] I don't have any outdoor space. The apartments downstairs have private courtyards, I'd love to have one of them. They're very nice, but they're only for the ground floor apartments. You could potentially go out onto the fire escape here if you wanted, but I wouldn't take a chance on that.

Do you have any issues with regards to privacy?

[Sean] Privacy is brilliant here. It's so quiet here, you never hear any traffic here, and if I turn off the AC unit in the window there's no noise at all. Only on a couple occasions would I hear the conversations of the guys that live in the apartment downstairs if they're sitting outside in their courtyard, but they're not loud. We don't have any trouble with the neighbours here. We never really bump into any of the neighbours. There's this one guy Derek and his girlfriend who I'd see from time to time but everyone else sort of keeps to themselves. Even with me and the other guy who lived here, it was fine. He was quiet as a mouse and kept to himself. We didn't see each other much since he was working during the day and I was working at night.

Do you have enough space? Do you feel like you're lacking any specific types of spaces? Is there anything you wish you had?

[Sean] No. Not at all. I wish there was some separation between the kitchen and the living room. Anytime my girlfriend is over we can't really hang out in the common areas, we hang out in the bedroom if the other housemate is here. I don't want to come in at 6 in the evening and go straight to the bedroom, I'd like to hang out in the common areas but there's just no separation. I like the idea of open concept space, but I just want a bigger area with more light if it's going to be like that. There's not really much space in the bedroom. The

couch is a small couch, there's not space for much more. The entrance space is too narrow, but if we had the space you could do something with it. Maybe you could add a little table and a bowl for keys or something like that. I keep my shoes in the room at the moment. It's enough space, it'll do. The other guy would keep a bike in here too. I came from a big family at home so tight space isn't bad for me, I don't mind it. But for my girlfriend, it's definitely too small. We are also considering family coming over. We'll definitely be looking for something bigger than this, but I don't see that happening too easily.

I do my laundry at the laundromat across the street. The machines aren't great, they don't really wash things properly and sometimes I have to take my clothes to a dry cleaner to get stains out. We have a list of things that we want for the new apartment. An elevator being one of them and a washer plus even a dryer would be lovely. Central heating would be on the list too. If we couldn't get a place with an elevator we'd be looking at a low level walk up. A rooftop or outdoor space would be nice, but that's just a hope. More storage space is a big one.

Where are you getting the furniture from for the new apartment?

[Sean] We're lucky that my girlfriend has a lot of furniture herself so she'll bring some of that over but we'll have to get some furniture ourselves. I have a friend that'll be leaving New York to move home around Christmas time and he wants to sell his furniture. He has a really nice corner couch, a nice table for the TV, he's got some sound equipment as well. Because he's got some nice stuff he looked after it pretty well so we might just hold out to buy that around Christmas, it'll be at a cheaper rate than buying it new as well. Also, IKEA I suppose would be a good option. I wouldn't be buying any furniture from these stores on the Upper East Side, I couldn't even imagine how much they would be. A lot of people use Facebook Marketplace here because a lot of the well-to-do people here just throw out the nicest stuff, but a lot of that stuff's not going to match your own so you won't always get what you want.

Do you entertain a lot? What do you do when you have people over?

[Sean] Never here but I'd say it'll be different at the new place, I'm assuming it'll be nicer. I might have someone come over for a drink after work but that's all. It would get too stuffy here. Don't want to have people here too late at night either because it'll piss someone off in the building.

Where in the apartment do you spend the most time?

[Sean] In my room. I have a TV there. The bed is a lot more comfortable than the couch.

Do any spaces change to accommodate different activities? Are some objects not fixed to accommodate this? Do you move furniture around a lot?

[Sean] Everything just stays where it is. It's been there since I moved in. If it was up to me all of this would be gone though.

How do your habits change with the seasons?

[Sean] Not much to be honest, we had a very mild winter this year.

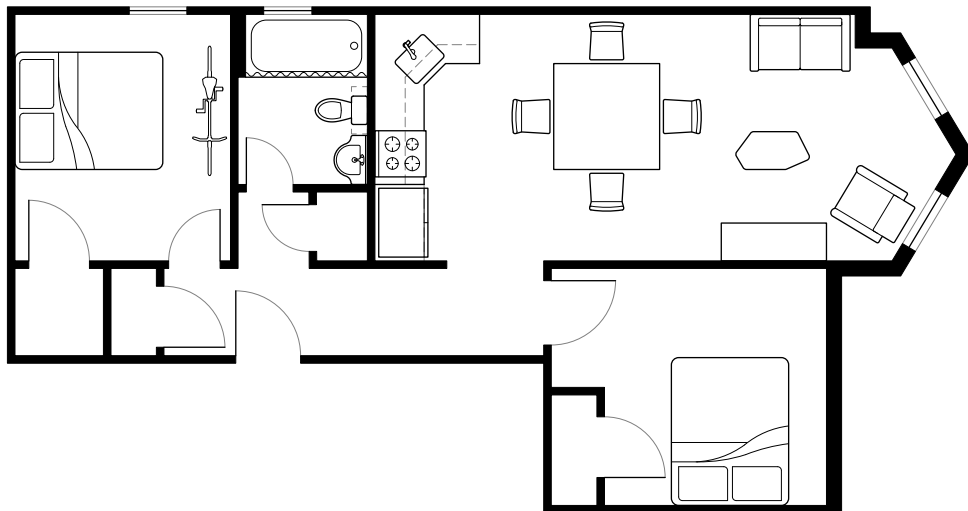
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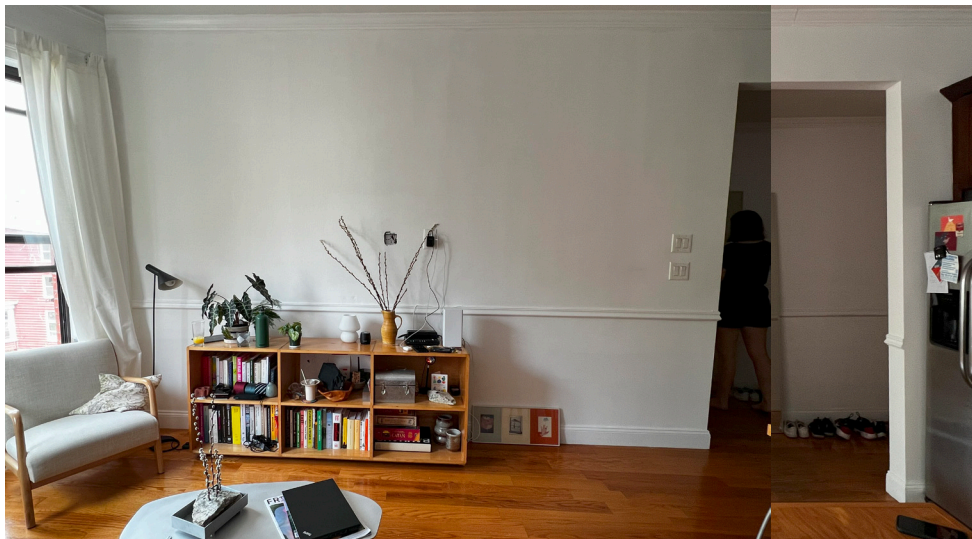
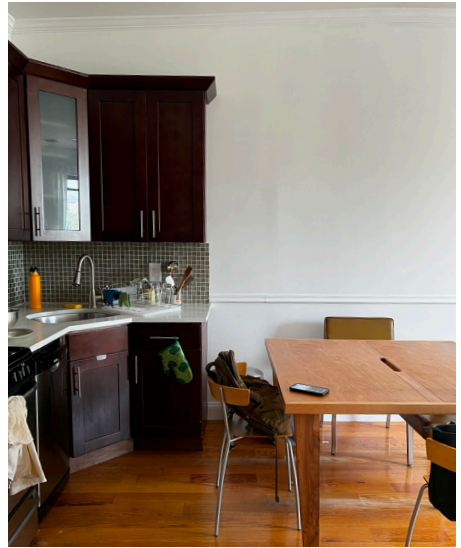
Zoe Transcript

of Occupants: 2
Relationship: Friends
Neighbourhood: Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn
Bed/Bath: 2 bed, 1 bath
Size: 57.5 m²
Rent-to-Income: 45%

Zoe
Age: 28
Gender: F
Occupation: Architectural Graduate

Liga
Age: 28
Gender: F
Occupation: Architectural Graduate







Can you tell me a bit about your home?

[Zoe] Liga and I spent a long time looking for an apartment. We looked for three months, and our key things that we wanted were: light in the living room - which is harder to come by than you would think, and bedrooms with windows, which, again, is harder to come by than you would think. I guess we saw this place, and it's pretty spacious. We like that it's up on the third floor so that you get even more light. The rooms are pretty spacious compared to things we've seen. We both wanted to have queen sized beds. We love the character, it's an older building, I think it's from early 1910 or something. We were looking for an old building with character. Crown moulding and these windows are basically what sold the place. This place also has a central air! We haven't turned it on yet but we will soon, I'm sure. This building actually is really good with natural ventilation and the thermal mass of the brick walls, that really helps, and also stealing heat from other apartments. They cool the hallways with air conditioning - it definitely feels like it's well conditioned.

How long have you lived in this apartment?

[Zoe] Just since March, four months.

Where did you live before?

[Zoe] We were in sublets. We were in two different sublets, and Liga was in another sublet before that. So three moves for her, which was a lot. She came in November. I came in January, mid-January.

How long do you intend to stay?

[Zoe] For this apartment, we'd like to be here for a little while. This is our first apartment that we both have been picking out furniture and, you know, it's all our own stuff. It's a big ordeal to find furniture and furnish an apartment. So it would be nice if we didn't have to move for a while, but with partners and that kind of stuff - we'll see. But I think one of us will be in this apartment for a while. Yeah, we'll just figure out which one of us.

Where are you getting the furniture from?

[Zoe] It's all Facebook marketplace. Literally everything - except our friend made this table. She was visiting for an art show. Then Liga's parents came a month ago and brought a bunch of books

and bigger things that needed a car. We just came here with some stuff in our suitcases and they brought our bikes which you'll see in our rooms. We want to get hooks for them but we haven't done that yet. It costs so much to furnish an apartment, and we want to like what we're buying, so we're not exactly going so quickly to furnish it.

We want to get a shoe rack for the entrance. It's nice that we have that space, it gives a little separation. It would be nice to have a little table by the door.

Do you have enough storage space?

[Zoe] No. We have two closets in the hallway which is a big deal. Some apartments don't have any closets except in the bedrooms or whatever, some don't even have them in the bedrooms. We both have closets in our bedrooms, and I have big storage bins under my bed. We haven't filled up our kitchen cabinets yet. It feels like we have quite a bit of kitchen storage. The kitchen doesn't feel very big, though. There's not a lot of surface space but our table is higher than a traditional dining table so we use that. The table was \$20 - and we carried it in the subway. We've carried almost all of our furniture across the city. The bookshelf has wheels on the bottom and we were with Liga's brother and sister and we just took turns carrying it and pushing it for a few kilometres. We carried the couch, we got an uber for the chair. We brought the table from sunset park, it's really far. It was from this fashion designer who was getting rid of all her stuff, she was closing down her office and moving or something. They had those tables custom made, and were selling like ten of them for \$20 each because they just wanted them to be gone - but it's solid wood! I'm the only one who works from home. I'll work at the dining table, but it's only 2 days a month. I usually use those days to work from home when I go visit family and friends. I only work from home here when I'm sick.

Do you have any hobbies? How do they take up space in the apartment?

[Zoe] Just the bikes and yoga mats. I've got some sewing stuff, we have some tennis rackets, tennis balls. I feel like that's it. We keep it in various closets. Storage is a real issue. I feel like I need to buy one more piece of furniture, and then hopefully I'll be a bit better but it's a real struggle to fit all of our stuff, and we didn't come with that much stuff. I can't imagine anyone who would be moving to the city from a suburban house or something - with all of the furniture and things, you could not fit it into a New York apartment. It's been four months since we moved in, we will definitely keep accumulating

things. I feel like living in this small space really makes you want to be more of a minimalist. I don't like the problem I'm having right now with all of my stuff. In my room it's so overwhelming.

I would sew at the dining table, it's a new thing. We haven't played any games yet but we'll do that at the dining table or on the coffee table.

How many people other than you are in this apartment on a regular basis? A semi-regular basis? Where do they stay?

[Zoe] Yeah, we have people who stay over. Well, Pete's here now. Pete's friend was here. We've already had eight people stay over. We have an air mattress that goes in the living room, or if they're close friends or family they stay with us in our rooms. One night we had Liga's brother and girlfriend on the air mattress, Liga's sister and husband in her room, and Liga was staying in my bed with me. It was really cramped in here. Do you know how much a hotel room costs?

Do any spaces change to accommodate different activities? Are some objects not fixed to accommodate this? Do you move furniture around a lot?

[Zoe] We move the coffee table to put the air mattress here when we have people staying over. We haven't even had a dinner party yet, but we want to. When we first moved in here, we had a big house party, but we didn't have any furniture yet. We had this couch and that table - so that's why we had the party then, it was pretty empty. If we had a house party again we'd definitely move this table, and I think that's it. The plants would probably just stay, I told Liga no more plants - they take up too much space, and it'll look a little crazy I think. Her brother is really into plants and has so many plants, and we don't need that in our apartment. I have two plants, the rest are Liga's. I mean I love plants, but I just kill them. I'm more of a nature girl, but I would always have a few in my apartment.

Are there any specific reasons why you decided to move to this neighbourhood?

[Zoe] This neighbourhood is a mix of the 'hip and happening' in New York. I feel like families live here and it's pretty diverse. It doesn't feel like Williamsburg or something, which feels like a bunch of white hipsters. There's a little more going on, a little more diversity. It's a lot more chill too than living in Manhattan or living in some of the more popular neighbourhoods in Brooklyn, it's a little bit more relaxed. This street is actually a pretty busy street, but if you walk that way, it's got some really nice brownstone streets with beautiful trees,

old trees. Yeah, it's really nice and has good cafes and restaurants and bars - and they're not super expensive either. Williamsburg bars and restaurants are a lot more expensive. I love this neighbourhood. This building has a lot of young people, I'd say people our age. So when we did have our first party, no one complained. Yeah, we sent them little notes before it with their phone number. I don't know what it is about this building that attracts young people, but it did.

Do you have any issues with regards to privacy?

[Zoe] In the house? No, and once we got curtains it was fine. The annoying thing, actually, is that my window is looking onto the apartment building that's under construction, and they have their stairwell windows looking right into mine. It's frosted but they leave the light on all night, so there's light coming in which is not the best. They should probably get some darker curtains or more opaque curtains, but that's not a privacy issue it's just a light problem.

Do you have enough space?

[Zoe] I mean, it's not really spacious, but for New York it's fine. I just wanted a big enough bed. I still have to get some more furniture, like storage furniture but I'm pretty happy with my room.

Do you feel like you're lacking any specific types of spaces? Is there anything you wish you had?

[Zoe] Besides more storage or furniture storage? Oh, we don't have a washer and dryer. We have a hook-up for a washing machine, but we haven't got one because you have to remove it if you move. Moving things up these stairs is challenging. There's no elevator, that's another thing that a lot of people look for that we don't have. We need to get some art, toaster, we went without wifi for a very long time... but I'm assuming you mean as part of the apartment.

Do you have access to any private outdoor space?

[Zoe] No! That is something that would be really nice. Yeah, a balcony or a roof we could access. There's definitely a roof on this building but you're not allowed up there. That's something that I really miss, actually, an outdoor space. Or if we were on a more quiet street, I think that we would sit on the front steps more. I see a lot of people doing that but this street isn't the nicest for hanging out

Would you sacrifice some interior space for a private outdoor space?

[Zoe] I feel like we couldn't deal with less interior space. I mean, I'm sure we could, but I've lived in New York two times before this for co-op, I lived in three different apartments and in all three of them I felt really suffocated by the end, just because they were small or the quarters were too close with no privacy. My friend and I were in these weird makeshift bunk-bedroom things, and you can hear everything. We also shared an apartment where I was staying in the living room/kitchen and she was in the bedroom. All those sorts of short-term student things you do. I feel much more at peace in this place. We have our own space and good privacy from each other, and nice natural light.

Where in the apartment do you spend the most time?

[Zoe] I think sitting at the table or on the couch. I don't spend so much time in my room and I think that's mostly because I don't have natural light in there. Also when Liga's home we're hanging out.

Do you spend much of your week at home?

[Zoe] I feel like I do, especially compared to my student self. I'm much more likely to come home after work. I mean, I work late. Whenever I work past 7:00, I would come straight home

How do your habits change with the seasons?

[Zoe] It doesn't change so much, except that we spend a lot more time outside once the winter is over. We like to go to the park and hang out, or hang out with friends in various places.

Can you walk me through what a regular day might look like?

[Zoe] On a weekday, I wake up... late. At around 8:00, I jump in the shower, and then I don't even have breakfast here because I feel like I need to wake up before I eat breakfast, and I drink coffee at work. So I just go in on the subway or on my bike, and get to work, change if I went on my bike. It's already so hot and I get so sweaty. I'll have my coffee at work, work, and then have my breakfast at work, too. I like to make overnight oats. After work? I mean, it depends on the day. Either I'll go to dinner or drinks with friends. If there's an event on, you know, sometimes we go to an art opening, or a concert

or whatever. That's more rare. On a normal night, I'd say, I come home and make dinner and go for a walk with Liga and then go to bed and start it all over again. On the weekend I feel like there's no schedule. No routine with a weekend. Usually I'll go out on Friday night and have a chill Saturday, and go for coffee. Always. We don't have things to make coffee though sometimes we'll make tea here, but we like going out for coffee. Usually there's some sort of activity - park hang, museums, hang with friends, I don't know, it depends.

Are there any communal spaces or amenities in the neighbourhood that you use?

[Zoe] Yes, we use the laundromat down the street. I love the people that run it, they're so nice. It feels like we live in a little community because they know us now. But it is expensive. We should get a laundry machine, probably. Other than that, we have our coffee shops we go to. For exercise I either bike, run, or do workouts at home in the living room, but I'm assuming now that it's getting a lot hotter I might start going to a gym. I haven't figured that out yet. There's a yoga studio nearby that I'm thinking about joining.

What are your thoughts about the affordability and cost of living in New York?

[Zoe] It's really expensive. I spend almost half of my income on rent, almost. Not actually half.

[Pete] Even in the shops, it's striking to me that if you go to the bodega or supermarket everything is expensive.

[Zoe] The cost of living is really high.

[Pete] In the UK you go to the supermarket and you buy food so that you can save money and you cook for yourself. It feels like I spend just as much money when I try to cook for myself here as I do and I eat out.

[Zoe] No, I think you can cook for yourself and save money.

[Pete] Possibly, but it seems like you need to spend a lot of money.

[Zoe] When Liga and I first moved here, we went to a couple nice dinners and then thought "Oh, man, yeah, I cannot afford to do this". So we've gotten a lot better at getting groceries and meal-prepping for lunches and stuff.

[Pete] So where I'm from in my village, there aren't many options for going out and eating food, so you cook for yourself all the time. Whereas here it's like "Oh my God. Let's go there, let's go there!"

[Zoe] It's definitely part of the culture to eat and drink out. That's what you do with your friends. So, that is really expensive. You have to watch your spending. But yeah, the rent is also really expensive. I feel like if rent was a bit less, I would feel more like I could go out more. Luckily, all of my friends and I are making the same amount of money and we all want to be a bit more frugal. In terms of this apartment, it was striking the balance between being close enough to work and like getting the amount of space and the quality of the space that we want. So I feel like this is kind of the furthest from where I would want to be. Liga's closer so she can walk to work in like half an hour. It takes me between 25 and 40 minutes on the train. It's a nice bike ride though, the bike ride is like half an hour. There are a lot of bike lanes and straightforward routes. It could be better though. Our office gives us a free city bike membership, which is really helpful if I'm downtown and I want to get from point A to point B or if I want to bike home and I didn't bike into work. It's super easy to use, but it's really annoying to bring those bulky bikes up the bridges. The bridges aren't so steep but it's a long hill. You can get e-bikes now though too, but I'm biking to and from work to get a workout in too. In New York, now it's starting to get so warm and so I don't want a bike to work and be sweaty, even with the shower at the office.

[Pete] There's one thing that London is a little bit better about is protecting the bike lanes, having a separate kerb to stop the traffic from coming into your space. In New York they just have a painted line. The city bikes are very convenient and it's a nice way to get around, especially when you compare it to the subway where you are in a space which is loud and moving around all over the place, in crowds and things. Here, and in London. It's much nicer being out exercising, out in the open. Get some vitamin D and sunshine. But then, if I'm wearing my suit and going to a meeting, I can't just hop on a bike and get sweaty.

[Zoe] For safety too, if I'm alone at night I'll take an Uber - which is expensive. But usually I'm with Liga so we take the subway.