

The New York Times

The East Village Scene for Two Theater Students

By Joyce Cohen

Nov 12, 2015

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/15/realestate/the-east-village-scene-for-two-theater-students.html?rref=collection%2Fcolumn%2Fthe-hunt&action=click&contentCollection=realestate®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=collection&r=0



THE RENTERS Roberto Morean and Kelly Plescia at the two-bedroom they share in the East Village. Credit Emon Hassan for The New York Times

As students at New York University studying musical theater, Roberto Morean and Kelly Plescia have been best friends since they met in class freshman year.

Last year, Ms. Plescia, who is from northern New Jersey, lived off campus with three roommates. For \$5,000 a month, the four roommates shared a three-bedroom rental in the East Village. Construction on the floor below meant that “every morning we could hear every word the workers were saying,” Ms. Plescia said. Only one of the bedrooms had a window.

“It was kind of odd,” she said. “You didn’t know what time of day it was.”

Mr. Morean, who is originally from Venezuela but grew up in Miami, lived in a dorm. For the 2015-16 academic year, he was planning to remain there.

Their plans changed when one of Ms. Plescia’s roommates went abroad, and her apartment-share dissolved. She and Mr. Morean decided to hunt together for a place to share off campus.

Both would be away from New York over the summer. Ms. Plescia would be studying in Florence, Italy; Mr. Morean would be going home to Miami. They decided to find a place before leaving for the summer, concerned that, if they waited, they would have to compete for apartments with other arriving students.

The friends, both 20, wanted a bright two-bedroom, preferably in the West Village, with laundry facilities in the building. Their budget started at \$3,000 a month.

Mr. Morean took charge. "I didn't really know what to do," he said. "Our schedules are pretty hectic, so finding time to see things was really hard." Three days a week, they were in class all day long; in addition, Mr. Morean sometimes acts in commercials.

After checking out an apartment-search website, nakedapartments.com, Mr. Morean contacted [Constantinos Katehis](#), a salesman at [Platinum Properties](#).

"I told them it was a tall order, but I was going to try my best to find them a diamond in the rough," Mr. Katehis said.

They had already realized they would have to raise their price.

The first place they saw was about as good as it gets. A two-bedroom in the target area, renting for \$3,350 a month, was close to campus, with bedrooms of equal size. It was nicely renovated, with high ceilings and plenty of closets, and the building even featured a digital doorman service for pickups and deliveries.

The roommates eagerly applied, paying \$600 in fees for credit checks — \$150 each for the two applicants, and \$150 each for their parent guarantors. They passed the credit check, but the apartment was rented to someone else, with no mention made of a refund.

"We are actors and we know how to take rejection," Mr. Morean said, "but we were angry we were taken advantage of. We turned in \$600 to find out we were good to go. There was no reason we shouldn't have gotten the apartment."

Mr. Katehis was just as angry. "I demanded my clients get their application fees back," he said, and they did.

Another well-located two-bedroom, a rental in a co-op building on Christopher Street, was \$3,395 a month. There was plenty of interest; another party had already applied. Mr. Katehis suspected someone who lived in the building had the inside track. They moved on.

For a Bleecker Street apartment where each bedroom had its own little balcony, the open house was so crowded that the roommates felt they didn't stand a chance. The rent there was \$3,400 a month.

On West Houston Street, a two-bedroom, also for \$3,400 a month, had a stacked washer-dryer and redone finishes.

"It was quite the walk-up," Mr. Morean said — on the sixth floor. Worse, one bedroom was tiny and dark.

"Each didn't want to put the other in the position of taking that bedroom," Mr. Katehis said.

He knew their money would go farther in the East Village, so they headed east and saw a two-bedroom in an elevator building near First Avenue. The place was a good size, with exposed brick walls that gave it a bit of character, and the building had laundry facilities in the basement. The rent was \$3,300 a month.

"We walked in and I knew it was the one," Mr. Morean said. "I was very nervous because there were a lot of people." Knowing others were interested, he thought it prudent to offer another \$50, for a monthly rent of \$3,350. The strategy worked.

"It wasn't in the initial neighborhood of their liking, but in every other way, this place was excellent," Mr. Katehis said.

Besides, they were weary of the hunt.

“I didn’t realize how stressful, annoying and difficult the whole process was,” Ms. Plescia said. They were relieved, too, that they wouldn’t have to worry all summer about having a home upon their return to New York.

They moved in, paying a broker fee of 15 percent of a year’s rent, or just over \$6,000. As soon as school started, so did construction on an adjacent roof.

“I think the apartment is haunted,” Mr. Morean said. Strange things have happened. Once, when he got out of the shower, he found that a sink faucet had turned itself on. Another time, his electric toothbrush activated itself.

Neither would mind a larger bedroom; Mr. Morean, the cook, would like more counter space.

But if he had to grade the apartment, he would give it a B-plus. Ms. Plescia, more forgiving, would give it a “solid A-minus.”