

Full of Character for a Lot Less Rent in Bayonne, NJ



Two years ago, Matt Jackson returned to New York for work. After 14 years in Dallas, he was unprepared for the high rents, small spaces and quick turnaround. "Apartments turn over within hours," he said. So he landed on Roosevelt Island, because a place there was available, affordable and large enough to fit his furniture. His one-bedroom at the Octagon, at the north end of the island, rented for around \$2,500 a month. Mr. Jackson, who grew up in Westchester, had an uneventful first year there. He teaches American history at a school on the Upper East Side, and when he returned home from work, he generally ate dinner and Skyped or Facetimed with his fiancée, Angela Putman, who was working on her Ph.D. in communication at the University of New Mexico. When Ms. Putman, 39, joined Mr. Jackson, 46, last summer, they stuffed two lifetimes into the one bedroom. Some of it was memorabilia, "not stuff you display or use," Ms. Putman said. "It stays in bins." They soon upgraded to a \$3,550 two bedroom at the Octagon, with those bins lining a wall in the second bedroom. Once Ms. Putman arrived, Roosevelt Island began to seem out of the way. "Enjoying New York became something we wanted to do," Mr. Jackson said. The distance to the city was minimal as the crow flies over the East River, but she had a tedious commute to downtown, where she teaches at Borough of Manhattan Community College. When they stayed out late, they faced a tiresome trip home, because the Octagon was distant from both subway and tramway. They often emerged from the subway just in time to



miss the Red Bus. Their option was to wait 15 minutes for the next bus or to hoof it for 17 minutes to their home. "The Octagon is gorgeous, and if we could have picked up that place and been closer to the subway, we would have stayed," Ms. Putman said. "We were so tired of the Red Bus." When the lease expired, they decided they would move to a more convenient and less costly place; they are saving for their wedding. The couple wanted a two-bedroom, preferably with a washerdryer. Ms. Putman started the hunt months early. "There are so many variables, and I felt really overwhelmed," she said. "Knowledge helps me to feel less anxious, so I searched and read." The hunt proved frustrating. Agents often gave vague information: One time, the couple realized they were being taken to a place in Stuyvesant Town only when it loomed before them. The complex's two-bedrooms, in the mid to high \$3,000s, were too expensive. Manhattan seemed impossible. They determined that they were not going to find a two bedroom there for a price "that starts with a 2," Ms. Putman said. But once they expanded the hunt to New Jersey, where they had friends, "my eyes popped out of my head," she said.

"I couldn't believe there were two-bedrooms that started with a 1." They spent a day in Hoboken, impressed by its charm and walkability. With its great waterfront location, 333 River Street caught their attention. But the monthly rent for a two-bedroom was in the high \$3,000s. "There was no reason to pay that much money and leave New York," Mr. Jackson said. "We could stay in Manhattan for that." Some of the other rental buildings they considered had terrible online reviews. Meanwhile, in the Journal Square area of Jersey City, they encountered a two-bedroom for rent in Brunswick Towers, converted to condominiums in the mid-1980s from the Brunswick Laundry plant. The monthly rent was on target, \$2,500, and they applied for it. They were secretly relieved to discover they were second in line: Jersey City had not stacked up well against Hoboken. "You don't have the cute restaurants with all the little patios," Ms. Putman said. "It definitely looked industrialish." Trulia sent them email alerts about places of interest. One was for the SilkLofts in Bayonne, N.J. Ms. Putman liked the photos. But where was Bayonne? She had never heard of it. The building, once a Maidenform factory, had

just been converted into 85 loftlike rental units, retaining much of the original wood and brick. The building captivated them. They spent hours looking around, and in July took a 1,200 square foot two bedroom for \$2,500 a month plus \$15 a month each in amenity fees. They now have a second bathroom, a washerdryer and so much closet space that those memorabilia filled bins no longer line a wall. Their view includes the Bayonne Bridge to Staten Island in one direction and the City of Bayonne's wind turbine in the other. Ms. Putman's commute is briefer than it was, via Hudson Bergen Light Rail and then the PATH train across the Hudson River. Mr. Jackson continues from there by subway, and plans to experiment with his options once the school year starts. They both love Bayonne. "It is nothing like Manhattan at all," Ms. Putman said. "It is really cute, insanely quiet and everyone is so nice and knows each other." For groceries, they walk to the ShopRite, and for everything else, there is the Bayonne Crossing shopping center. "Bayonne has that little bit of suburbia that I was missing," Ms. Putman said. "We've become the people who say, 'We are going into the city.'"

Reprinted from The New York Times, 8/21/2014