

## The Road to More Room

*New York Family* - 11/15/2007

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There probably isn't a family in Manhattan that wouldn't like more space-for their kids, their pets, their stuff and just to breathe – but one of the caveats of living in this city is that we're forced to become experts at "living small." Well, some of us, that is. As more families than ever are staying put in New York-some with two, three and even four children-parents are becoming increasingly savvy at carving out more room for their broods.

Many factors come into play in deciding the best way to do this, including how much extra space you need, how much money you're able to spend and what neighborhoods or buildings appeal to you. Which of these factors are musts and which are flexible varies from family to family, but no matter what your needs, there are three common roads to getting there, and in this story we'll explore families who traveled each: the family of renovators who converted two apartments into one; the family who moved into one of the city's new luxury buildings; and the family that thought out of the box and left their Upper West Side comfort zone and headed north. One thing is for sure-for each of them, the road to more room turned out to be a dream come true.

Families who may only need a little extra space often choose to turn a large bedroom into two smaller bedrooms or section off an area of the apartment to create a small nursery. But more families, whether inspired by HGTV or their expanding offspring, seem to be taking a more invasive approach: "breaking through" to another apartment in their building.

"It's common wisdom to, if you can, buy the apartment next to you, above you, whatever the building will allow for you to combine," says **Deanna Kory**, senior vice president with **The Corcoran Group**. Combining apartments usually is "the most economically viable source for a family to achieve more space," explains **Kory**. Even with the additional cost of architects and contractors, families that choose to break through potentially can double their square footage at a fraction of the cost of buying a completed apartment of the same size.

Cheri and Michael Friedman, an Upper West Side business executive and lawyer, respectively, who have two boys, ages 6 and 13, decided that combination was the best method for their family. Having lived in a building they loved at 77th Street and Riverside Drive for 14 years, the Friedmans had no interest in leaving. But when they looked at their neighbor's apartment in the hopes of combining, they found that the layout made it impossible, and they were forced to search elsewhere.

"We looked everywhere," says Michael. "We wanted to stay in a pre-war because we like the feeling of Upper West Side classic living." With this in mind, the Friedmans looked at 91st Street and Riverside Drive and found "two apartments, a two-bedroom and a one-

bedroom, neither of which were in particularly good shape," according to Michael. "And we did a complete gut renovation and restructured everything." The result is a nearly 3,000-square-foot loft-like space where every bedroom has a bathroom and there is even room for an impromptu hockey game when the boys have friends over.

"The reason we bought these two apartments," explains Cheri, "is the combo worked. It's a nice space, and it's a nice combination because of the flow of the apartment."

One drawback to renovation is the question of where you will live while your apartment is under construction. The Friedmans got lucky and were able to rent their old apartment from the buyers until their new place was complete, but some families choose to stay in the apartment being renovated.

"I have clients now that have a four-bedroom apartment and have been living in a one-bedroom section while they renovate," says Jacky Teplitzky, an executive vice president at Prudential Douglas Elliman. "They joke that it brought their family closer because everybody had to share such a small space."

But sometimes the lack of space or the dust and noise become too intrusive and the family decides to vacate. "I know another family that decided to move out," says Teplitzky. "They even rented for a year because one of the other problems is that when you rent short-term and you need it furnished it's unbelievably expensive."

With all the potential hassle that comes with renovating—"It was a lot of work and a lot of aggravation" agrees Michael—many families opt for the ready-made luxury of new residential developments breaking ground throughout the city. Buildings like Shares of New York and Avonova on the Upper West Side, The Visionaire in Battery Park City, and The Brompton on the Upper East Side, cater specifically to families by offering spacious apartments with open layouts and kid-friendly building amenities, like movie screening rooms, children's play centers and pools to boot.

Lisa Lippman, a senior vice president at Brown Harris Stevens and a mother of three in search of more space, decided with her husband to purchase a brand-new five-bedroom in the Ariel, a new building on the Upper West Side.

"I wasn't dead set on buying a new development," explains Lippman. "I've only owned pre-war apartments, and I've actually always been sort of a pre-war person. But at our price point with our square footage needs, buying prewar meant that we would have to buy something that needed work, maybe in a neighborhood that was not quite as ideal to us." And with an 80-hour work week and three children, renovation seemed like too much trouble.

Location was a key factor in Lippman's decision-making process, and the new luxury building she had been hearing about through work was going up in just the right spot, at 99th Street and Broadway.

"I got excited about the Ariel because of the location," says Lippman. "My kids," a 10-year-old and a 13-year-old from a previous marriage, "go to school on 89th and 91st Streets, and my ex-husband lives at 106th Street. Then I have a 2-year-old with my new

husband. So I needed to be someplace that was walking distance from school and walking distance from my ex-husband."

In addition to a great location and a brand-new space requiring no renovation, Lippman's crew also benefited from the building's kid-friendly features—the Ariel boasts a billiards room and a theater, among other things. These features come with no extra hassle, albeit sometimes at a higher cost.

"The cons [of new developments]," says Teplitzky, "are that the price points of these buildings are [high], and you're buying most likely from a floor plan." Despite these drawbacks, Lippman feels she made the right decision. "This was a good option for us," she says, "because we were able to find an apartment where everybody could get his or her own bedroom. And the building's going to have a playroom, which is good for my little guy, and an outdoor basketball court, which is good for my big guys, and a pool and a gym, which are good for everybody."

### **The Intrepids**

In a city as varied as New York, renovating or staking out a spot in one of Manhattan's new high-rises are hardly your only options. It may take a bit of searching, some thinking outside the box and a bit of flexibility, but there are plenty of other housing scenarios to be discovered.

"Often people are focused on one type of space," says **Kory**, "When they open their search up to another, there's a momentary feeling of excitement because of the possibilities that exist.

Teplitzky says she's seen families buy out an entire floor of a building and add on several apartments below them to make a large loft, or swap apartments with an elderly parent who no longer needs space.

For some families, townhouses turn out to be the best option. Although they lack services, such as a doorman and a super, townhouses offer greater privacy and outdoor space. "It's a great form of ownership in Manhattan," says Lippman. But she adds that "they were a decent deal until recently ... people have caught on, and they're expensive now."

But perhaps the biggest trend among Manhattan families thinking outside the box is to simply look beyond the neighborhoods they've always lived in. Indeed, luxury family-friendly buildings aren't going up just in Manhattan, but in other parts of New York, too – from Harlem to Brooklyn. Buildings like Riverstone Condominium in Riverdale, The Kalahari in Harlem, and One Hanson Place in Brooklyn are offering up spacious, family-friendly apartments in neighborhoods where space tends to come at lower price points than Manhattan.

Justine DeCostanza is one New Yorker, born and raised on the Upper West Side, who never thought she'd leave the neighborhood until one day she was moving her family to 181<sup>st</sup> Street.

“I hadn’t even really looked in [Hudson Heights] before because I didn’t want to go up that far originally,” says DeCostanza. “One of the brokers I’d been working with said, ‘Why don’t you look in Hudson Heights?’ and I was like, ‘No, no ... I might as well be out in the country.’”

Yet after almost a year of searching to no avail and several near-purchases, DeCostanza was getting “fed up.”

“In a lot of these [pre-war] apartments you have to do renovation,” says Teplitzky, which meant that DeCostanza, who with a 2-year-old daughter and another child on the way “was looking for pre-war charm but something completely renovated and clean,” had limited options.

Exhausted by her search and convinced by her broker, DeCostanza decided to take a look in her future neighborhood. “When I walked into this place,” says DeCostanza of the co-op she now lives in, “I immediately was like, ‘This is great, this is it.’”

DeCostanza’s instincts seem to have been right. Although she is still adjusting to the change, she is happy with her choice. “There are lots of children here; lots of families ... there’s a sense of community, people are really friendly, and you do feel safe and that’s a huge thing.”

Of course, DeCostanza admits that her commute to work, which previously was just across the street, and the lack of organic groceries nearby are conveniences she has given up in the move. But acquiring more space in an already packed city requires some compromises.

### **Final Words of Advice**

“You’re always making a sacrifice in New York on one level,” says Michael Friedman, adding rather ominously that “there are no deals and secrets anymore.” Yet families on the hunt for space should not be disheartened, only prepared.

“Look, look, look as much as you can at as many things as you can,” advises DeCostanza. “Don’t just jump into the first thing because you need it.” Teplitzky and Lippman both add that it is crucial for buyers to educate themselves and seek advisement before they rush into a purchase they may regret. **Kory** counsels clients to be patient, have an expectation that this may take awhile and be open to compromise.

“It’s gonna be more aggravating than you’re planning. It’s gonna take longer. It’s gonna cost more,” offers Michael, “but it will probably still be worth it in the end.”

For now, it’s safe to say that many New York families still think city living is worth the trouble.