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A New Perch on the Water

A couple pools their resources to find a rental with river views. See if you can guess which of these three homes they chose.



*Michael Gilmore and Karen Auster in their new apartment with their puppy, Mak. The couple was seeking a nice view, preferably of the water, in a quaint and lively neighborhood.
Katherine Marks for The New York Times*

Karen Auster has lived in Brooklyn for most of her life. Nearly four years ago, after a divorce, she moved from Boerum Hill to a Brooklyn Heights condominium. Two years later, she met Michael Gilmore, also divorced. He was renting in the financial district.

They became a couple, separated by the East River. If not for the AIG building blocking the way, “we would have been able to wave to each other from our bedrooms,” Mr. Gilmore said.

The pair, both in their 50s, would ride the New York Waterway ferry back and forth to see each other. Ms. Auster’s company, Auster Agency, is an experiential marketing firm based in Dumbo. Mr. Gilmore, a former bond trader and now an executive team trainer, works from home.

Last fall, with all of their respective children almost out of the house, and with their leases expiring at the same time, they decided to hunt for a home. “We wanted to start a new life together,” Ms. Auster said. “There was a great air of excitement and anticipation. It was like a do-over.”

They have four children between them, all in their 20s. The youngest, Ms. Auster’s son, will likely return home briefly after college. “After the kids graduate, there’s a grace period to get them on their feet,” she said.

For a rental with two bedrooms and two bathrooms, their price range started at around \$6,500 a month. Their combined rents amounted to around \$12,000, so they aimed for a sum well below that. The second bedroom would be for Ms. Auster’s son, and also for guests.

The couple wanted an impressive view, preferably of water, in a quaint and lively neighborhood somewhere in Lower Manhattan or near Downtown Brooklyn. The amenity they cared about most was a nice gym.

With plenty of supply on the market, they felt there was room for negotiating the rent.

Their choices included:

No. 2

The Clock Tower (Dumbo)



Katherine Marks for The New York Times

A friend of Ms. Auster's knew of a unit for rent in the 15-story tower, which was converted to a condominium around 20 years ago.

It was on a high floor, lofty and bright, with a large, open kitchen and a view of the Brooklyn Bridge, for \$7,900.

The second sleeping area — more of an office or den, with closets but no window — was near the entry, with the master suite at the other end, "so you can have guests and not really know they're there," Ms. Auster said.



The Clock Tower (Dumbo) CORE



*Ms. Auster, Mr. Gilmore and Mak in their kitchen at the Clock Tower on Main Street in Dumbo.
Katherine Marks for The New York Times*

Their Choice: The Clock Tower (Dumbo)

In the TriBeCa building, a three-bedroom was immediately available, but it was too big. A two-bedroom was coming available, but the timing was uncertain. Storing their furniture and finding a short-term rental seemed needlessly complicated.

They were about to sign for the Williamsburg apartment when they heard from the owner at the Clock Tower, who was now willing to lower the rent to \$7,300 — still nearly \$2,000 more than the Williamsburg unit.



*The couple got the view they wanted, of the Brooklyn Bridge and Lower Manhattan.
Katherine Marks for The New York Times*

“We weren’t sure whether we should let our wallets speak or whether we should let our hearts speak,” Mr. Gilmore said. They decided on the latter and arrived in the winter, synchronizing their moves on the same day.

“It is one of the best cityscape views anywhere in America — I would go so far as to say anywhere in the world,” Mr. Gilmore said. Traffic outside their windows, on the roads and the river, is always moving.

Dumbo is also more tourist-heavy than they bargained for. “But it doesn’t bother me because I get to go into my haven and see the crowds from my perch,” Ms. Auster said.

And the building’s gym, she said, is often empty, “like it’s a private gym.”



*The second sleeping area, with closets but no window, is near the front door, with the master suite at the other end, “so you can have guests and not really know they’re there,” Ms. Auster said.
Katherine Marks for The New York Times*

The two use treadmills in the early morning. “Michael reads books and I play with the television and screen the news,” Ms. Auster said. After that, her trip to work is a four-block walk, the main difficulty being the quaintly uneven pavement.

“I need different shoes for commuting now,” she said. “I bought a pair of sandals with cork heels because that does well on cobblestones.”

The couple recently got a puppy, Mak, who has a dog run and many acres of parkland right outside.

“I picture all of our kids around the island in the kitchen,” Ms. Auster said. “Every morning, as the blinds rise to reveal the sight of Lower Manhattan in all its sunlit splendor, we pinch ourselves.”