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A Pied-à-Terre for a Vermont Couple

By JOYCE COHEN

DESPITE her husband's reluctance to buy a Manhattan apartment, Lauren Olitski Poster insisted.

When she began the hunt for a pied-à-terre in January 2009, a number of listings appeared in her price range, \$200,000 or less.

"This was our window to get back into the city as a homeowner," she told her husband, Bradley Poster. "It was now or never."

Mr. Poster didn't think they could afford a place.

"He's right — we can't afford it," she said. Nevertheless, she thought they ought to secure a city foothold while apartment prices were low. And of the two, she's the optimistic one. "I just have a lot more confidence we will be fine," she said.

The couple, now in their early 50s, live in a four-story timber-frame house in Marlboro, Vt. Ms. Olitski Poster's father was the abstract artist Jules Olitski, and he had a studio there. The Posters moved to Vermont two decades ago to work as his assistants; today they manage his estate.

Both natives of Long Island, they were waiting tables in the city when they met. His father was her father's dentist, and she had heard about the dentist's son, an actor.

Ms. Olitski Poster, a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, and Mr. Poster, a graduate of the University of Arizona, married in 1981, moved to a rental in Boerum Hill, Brooklyn, and later bought a two-family attached row house in Park Slope. After a few years, with two small children and the job offer from Jules Olitski, they sold the house — a move Mr. Poster still regrets — and headed north.

They frequently travel to New York, where Ms. Olitski Poster, a painter herself, is represented by the Sideshow Gallery in Williamsburg. Until her father's death three years ago, the couple stayed with him and his third wife at their place in the East Village. More recently, they booked a room in a hotel. But Ms. Olitski Poster was unhappy with the arrangement. "I am a homebody," she said. "I like my own things around me."

When she sent e-mail messages to three real estate agents advertising

Manhattan apartments in her price range, only one replied. **Off she went with Kathryn Swift, a vice president of Barak Realty, who showed her two places in a lovely prewar co-op building with a roof deck on West 113th Street. Mr. Poster waited in the car.**

One place was a renovated studio with a shower only, and "I am a fanatic for a bath," Ms. Olitski Poster said.

The other was a 250-square-foot corner unit on a high floor, listed at \$220,000, with a monthly maintenance of less than \$500. The place had remained untouched for decades, "which I liked, because I felt I could get it for a lot less money," Ms. Olitski Poster said.

She offered \$190,000. The seller countered with \$210,000. "I chickened out," she said.

She toyed with the idea of getting a two-bedroom place and sharing it with their daughter, Ariel, 25, a Barnard College graduate now working in film production and living in Windsor Terrace. But Ariel wanted to stay in Brooklyn.

“Brooklyn is expensive,” Ms. Olitski Poster said. Besides, a Brooklyn location would lengthen the drive from Vermont. They also ruled out neighborhoods in far northern Manhattan and the Bronx as being too distant from their Midtown and downtown destinations.

The Posters visited some Tudor City apartments, charming but minuscule. Mr. Poster, who occasionally emerged from the car, liked the co-op complex. “It has that ‘Rosemary’s Baby’ kind of feel to it,” he said, alluding to its “monolithic” aspect. But he couldn’t fathom spending an amount in the low \$200,000s for one room with a Pullman kitchen.

At that point, Ms. Olitski Poster said, “he didn’t want me to buy anything, and was in the mode of saying no to everything.”

At the Whitby on West 45th Street, a former hotel in the theater district, a tiny studio co-op was for sale for \$206,000, with a maintenance in the mid-\$300s.

When they visited, the floors were being refinished, so they couldn’t actually set foot inside. No matter. “We could see the whole apartment just from opening the door,” Ms. Swift said.

The studio was centrally located. But “there were certain neighborhoods I thought would be fine until I got there,”

Ms. Olitski Poster said. This was one of them: “The theater district was too crowded, noisy and transient, and just not for me.”

She realized then that a studio wasn’t large enough. The Posters’ son, Harry, 22, a student in the directing program at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, would no doubt be crashing at their pied-à-terre.

“We needed a door that would shut, so if somebody wanted to be in another room they had a place to go,” Ms. Olitski Poster said.

For that, they realized they would have to go north of 125th Street, despite their original concern about living too far away from Midtown.

This past winter, the Posters found themselves checking out places in Washington Heights. Ms. Olitski Poster decided to revisit a co-op building there that she had liked. One unit was in such terrible shape that “it needed everything under the sun, including wiring,” she said. And she knew her husband would refuse to live through a big renovation — they had already done that in Vermont.

Another unit, a 500-square-foot one-bedroom featuring a “not-so-high-end renovation,” had a view of an unlovely courtyard. She assumed her husband would dislike the place as usual.

But he loved it. It had a quality that was “charming in a certain New Yorkish way,” he said. “It wasn’t pretentious. It was more of a regular apartment, nothing where somebody had put in fancy kitchen things. It was more our style.” And the courtyard reminded him of “Sweeney Todd,” one of his favorite musicals.

So in February, they bought the place for \$172,500. Maintenance is in the mid-\$600s. They have been busy cleaning, painting and hanging large abstract paintings by Ms. Olitski Poster that wouldn’t fit in their low-ceilinged Vermont house.

Just days after closing, Ariel married Nyasha Gutsa in the apartment. “There was so much happiness that day,” Ms. Olitski Poster said. “The apartment is joyful.”

Mr. Poster is now glad about the purchase. “It is a bit of a struggle in terms of finances,” he said, “but if I let go of that, it was a very nice move. I think Lauren was right and I was wrong, which tends to be the case.”

It is just one of many times he has benefited from her resolve. “I never wanted to get married, have kids, move to Vermont or live on a dirt road that nobody wants to drive down,” he said. “I am grateful — my wife makes these decisions and I can grumble.”