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THE HUNT

Room for One and Occasionally More

By: Joyce Cohen

Mr. Singh, who is known as Sab, had been living in Chelsea in a one-bedroom rental and working in the field of market research.

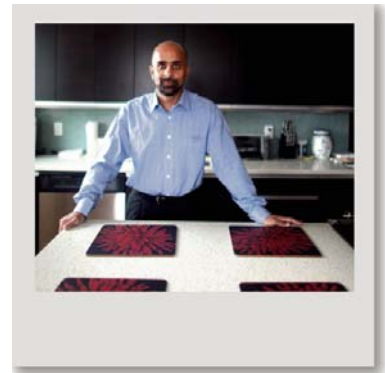
A year ago, he was hired as an assistant professor of sports management at Farmingdale State College in Long Island. He wanted to buy a place, and had a choice between moving near his new workplace and remaining in the city, which would mean assuming a train commute of about an hour.

His elder brother, Dr. Charnjit Singh, a gastroenterologist who lives with wife and daughters on Long Island, suggested he move there. But Mr. Singh, 41, quickly rejected that idea. Years ago, after his graduation from Georgetown University, while working in Hartford as a management consultant, he had rented a room in East Granby, Conn. "Living in a small town is not a good idea when you are 23 years old," he said. "I was bored out of my mind."

He made the same mistake after finishing law and business schools at Emory University, and lived with his brother in Long Island. He wasn't going to do that again.

"As a single person," he said, "I wanted to be close to the city." But he decided that, instead of buying a small place just for himself, he should search for a larger home where friends and members of his close-knit family could stay on occasion.

Before the start of the 2010 fall semester, Mr. Singh relinquished his rental and began alternating between the homes of his parents and his brother. From either location, he had a half-hour drive to work. He saved toward his down payment, expecting that his new place would cost as much as \$600,000.



With two bedrooms, Sarbjit Singh is able to accommodate guests.



Stairs were a strike against a place on State Street in Brooklyn.

Beyond that, Mr. Singh had two criteria: location and accessibility. For him, the apartment had to be within walking distance of a Long Island Rail Road terminal. For his elderly relatives and friends, some of whom walk with canes, the apartment had to be easy to maneuver around.

All he could afford in his old neighborhood, Chelsea, were one-bedrooms. Options within walking distance of Penn Station were limited. But friends had started moving to Brooklyn, so it seemed reasonable to follow them there, as long as he was near Atlantic Avenue Terminal. Because of the lengthy train ride to work, “I really didn’t want to introduce the subway into this whole thing,” he said. “There are delays, and I wanted to maintain control over my time.”

Listings for Brooklyn buildings sometimes declared them to be within 10 minutes of the terminal, and he checked. For some places, it was true — if you ran as fast as you could.

He began hunting in earnest last winter, aided by Tim Stanard, a senior vice president at the Corcoran Group’s Park Slope office, who was referred by a friend of his brother’s.

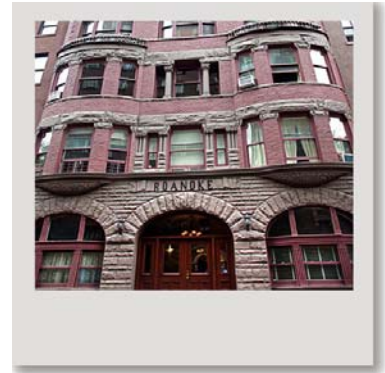
Options near Atlantic Terminal were limited. Mr. Singh looked at a few apartments at a condominium on State Street near Flatbush Avenue. A gleaming two-bedroom there, with more than 1,000 square feet of space, was listed at \$659,000, with charges just under \$1,000 a month.

Though the apartment was on the ground level, there was a flight of stairs just to reach the entrance. The stairs were enough to make Mr. Singh say no.

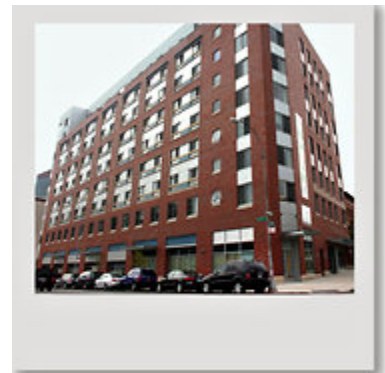
(That apartment remains on the market.)

He fell for a lovely place with a large bay window in the Roanoke on South Oxford Street in the Fort Greene Historic District. The Romanesque Revival building, now a condominium, was designed by the Brooklyn architect Montrose W. Morris in the 1890s.

The one-bedroom duplex had around 1,000 square feet of space. Mr. Singh could keep the bedroom downstairs, or move it upstairs. Though the floors were connected by a spiral staircase,



The Roanoke on South Oxford Street had a duplex that came close.



Atlantic Terrace on South Oxford Avenue had a co-op that passed muster.

both were also accessible via the building's elevator. The listing price was \$549,000, with monthly charges of almost \$800.

In the end, though, he decided the layout was impractical. "If I were the only one who was going to be in that apartment, it would have been O.K.," he said. And it seemed more like a starter home than a permanent one. Had he lived there, "I would have felt I was 31, as opposed to 41," he said. (The place later sold for \$516,000.)

The newly built Atlantic Terrace, a 10-story co-op also on South Oxford Street, had both affordable and market-rate units. Mr. Singh liked a two-bedroom two-bath with around 1,070 square feet of space.

The apartment is across the street from Barclays Center, the arena that is to be the centerpiece of the huge Atlantic Yards development and the home of the recently renamed Brooklyn Nets once the team moves from New Jersey. The location "is problematic for some buyers," Mr. Stanard said. "But Sab is into sports and thought it was so cool architecturally. He had been following the whole process and was kind of into it."

Mr. Singh, with help from his brother and his parents, paid \$565,000 for the apartment, and closed last summer. Maintenance is a bit over \$1,100 a month.

He knows that Atlantic Yards is controversial — criticized for its scale, among other things. "I think of the arena as a case study every time I look outside my window," he said. "I am surprised they are not changing the name of the Nets. I would completely rebrand the team."

He is becoming used to his commute, which requires a change at Jamaica. The walk to Atlantic Terminal takes only minutes, but he often leaves time to stop for coffee. He has met fellow faculty members on the 5:14 back from Farmingdale.

Mr. Singh has outfitted his place with his old furniture and hand-me-downs. Outside is South Oxford Park, which functions as a backyard. "It's a nice bonus," he said.

His nieces enjoy playing there when they visit, and his elderly friends and relatives find his apartment quite accessible. "I am at the end of the hallway," he said, "so I prepped them for that."

Most of all, his new place feels like a real home, because he is able to offer hospitality to others. "The best thing about the apartment is when I am not even there," he said. He was away one recent weekend, and his brother and sister-in-law stayed overnight. "Boy, that's exactly why we got this place," Mr. Singh said.