

# The New York Times

## He Wanted Some Outdoor Space in a New Manhattan Condo. Which of These Homes Would You Choose?

By JOYCE COHEN JULY 2, 2020

Feeling cramped in his co-op studio, a retiree shoots for his 'bucket-list apartment' in one of New York City's shiny new towers. Here's where he landed.



Joel Rubinfeld in his new Manhattan apartment. He sought a sunny, brand-new condominium with a view, and ideally some outdoor space, for under \$2 million. "I had some money saved and thought to myself, 'Let me get my bucket-list apartment,'" he said. Katherine Marks for The New York Times

Joel Rubinfeld worked for years as an elementary-school principal in Canarsie, Brooklyn, where he grew up. About 20 years ago, seeking a pied-à-terre in Manhattan, he bought a studio in a co-op building on East 57th Street.

"I fell in love with the area," he said. "I had my favorite bagel shop and my favorite Italian restaurant. The subways were right there."

When the studio started to feel cramped, he upsized to a one-bedroom condominium in a recently converted Yorkville high-rise, Wellington Tower.

"When you are a retiree, you kind of get shpilkes," said Mr. Rubinfeld, 68, who retired 10 years ago and now works part-time instructing teachers of special-needs students. "You get ants in your pants, and you look for things to do. I was always interested in Manhattan real estate and was always looking at StreetEasy."

About three years ago, he noticed that similar one-bedroom units in his building were “very hot.”

“I had some money saved and thought to myself, ‘Let me get my bucket-list apartment,’” he said.

That meant a sunny, brand-new condominium with a view, and ideally some outdoor space, for under \$2 million. So he contacted Alexander Boriskin, an agent at Douglas Elliman, who had just sold a one-bedroom in his building.

“Joel wanted to stay in the Midtown-ish area,” Mr. Boriskin said. “There weren’t many great options with outdoor space.”

There were plenty of amenities in the shiny, new condominiums that Mr. Rubinfeld was interested in, but he had never used them in his own building — not even the pool. “It’s like when you buy a new TV or a new car,” he said. “It has all the bells and whistles, and you ooh and ahh, and then you never use them.”

The only extra he really cared about was some kind of common room, where he could hold gatherings and birthday parties (when those sorts of things still happened).

“I do have friends and family who thought I was crazy, because the Wellington was beautiful,” Mr. Rubinfeld said. “But I was ready to move on.”

Among his options:

No. 1

## Madison Avenue One-Bedroom



Katherine Marks for The New York Times

A corner one-bedroom just east of the Empire State Building was nearly 900 square feet, with an extra half bathroom and an open-plan living area with wraparound windows. The price was \$1.8 million, with monthly charges of around \$1,950.

No. 2

## Third Avenue One-Bedroom



Katherine Marks for The New York Times

A one-bedroom in this Murray Hill building had a standard rectangular layout covering nearly 800 square feet, with floor-to-ceiling windows and heated flooring in the bathroom. The price was \$1.42 million, with monthly charges of a little over \$1,500.

No. 3

## 59th Street One-Bedroom



Katherine Marks for The New York Times

This corner one-bedroom was around 1,200 square feet, with an extra half bathroom, an open kitchen along one wall of the living area and a big balcony facing north. The price was \$1.975 million, with monthly charges of around \$3,500.

*Find out what happened next by answering these two questions:*

### Which Would You Choose?

Madison Avenue One-Bedroom

Third Avenue One-Bedroom

59th Street One-Bedroom

### Which Did He Choose?

Madison Avenue One-Bedroom

23%

Third Avenue One-Bedroom

12%

59th Street One-Bedroom

65% ✓



Mr. Rubinfeld on his new balcony on the East Side of Manhattan. It was the outdoor space that made the difference. "You know how in Manhattan they have little Juliet balconies?" he said. "These are put-out-your-lawn-chair terraces." Katherine Marks for The New York Times

HIS HOME:

## 59th Street One-Bedroom

In the apartment near the Empire State Building, the bedroom was relatively small. "I couldn't envision how I would place the furniture," Mr. Rubinfeld said.

He was about to buy the Murray Hill apartment, until he took a friend to see it: "My friend didn't understand why I wanted to move there. He said, 'You are trading a one-bedroom for a one-bedroom. What's your point?' That got me thinking."



Katherine Marks for The New York Times

So he changed his mind and took a break from the hunt. One day, while shopping at Bloomingdale's, Mr. Rubinfeld saw a 35-story tower rising diagonally across the street. "I thought to myself, 'Wow, I could never afford to live there,'" he said.

Still, he told Mr. Boriskin he was interested, and the two visited while the building was under construction. "The drywall was not yet up," Mr. Boriskin said. "Parts of the kitchen were scattered in boxes. But it was a big one-bedroom, and it was so different from all the apartments we went to look at."



Katherine Marks for The New York Times

It was the outdoor space that made the difference. “You know how in Manhattan they have little Juliet balconies?” Mr. Rubinfeld said. “These are put-out-your-lawn-chair terraces. We teach kids the difference between needs and wants. I didn’t need the outdoor space, but I certainly wanted it.”

Mr. Rubinfeld knew and loved the neighborhood. “The area was very different from where I was living in Yorkville, which was families with baby carriages,” he said. His bagel place, Hot Jumbo Bagel, remains, although his Italian restaurant has closed.



Katherine Marks for The New York Times

Mr. Rubinfeld sold the Yorkville apartment for \$855,000 and bought his new home, on one of the lower floors, for \$1.825 million.

“I never told my friend I was buying this apartment,” he said. “I didn’t want him to talk me out of it.”

He arrived last winter. “I thought, ‘Wow, I am in this great neighborhood, I can walk around and go shopping’ — and then Covid hit,” he said.

So far, he has been living in a largely empty building, teaching remotely and awaiting the arrival of neighbors.

In the morning, he heads to his terrace “to check the weather and see what the day feels like,” he said. “I am able to be outdoors without being around a lot of people. It’s very weird, but my friends all tell me I am in the safest place I could be: I am in a building all by myself. The doorman brings up my mail. I am the only person they have to take care of.”