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One Size (Small) Fits All









The apartments were handled differently by their owners: top, glossy and modern; below, a rich maximalism. More Photos » By PENELOPE GREEN Published: February 20, 2013 | 7 180 Comments

The so-called micro-pad is now a buzz phrase and a cultural touchstone, thanks to Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. But when single-room living was being sketched out in the floor plans of Manhattan's first apartment buildings, particularly during the boom years of the 1920s, it was called the studio apartment.

His and Hers



and men on a budget who were flocking to the city, the romantic label was intended to evoke the glamour and Bohemianism of the artist's preferred mode of living. Studio was a "magic word," as Anatole Broyard apartment on Prince Street in the 1940s. Of course, it was invariably a dump — and its dumpiness

Designed for the eager young women

was in inverse relation to the glittering fantasies of its hopeful young inhabitants. Both of these factors were essential fixtures in the best Manhattan bildungsromans, like the essays of Ruth McKenney, who wrote briskly of the fungus that grew nightly on the bathroom ceiling in the damp space she rented with her sister, Eileen, on Gay Street in the 1930s. What has happened in the last decade has all but erased

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construct. Clever D.I.Y.'ers now trick out their studios in ways that would shock Mr. Broyard and Ms. McKenney, whose awful apartments had an upside, forcing them into the roiling life of the city outside their doors. (The only effort Ms. McKenney made at decorating her studio was confined to trimming the fungus at night with nail clippers. Mr. Broyard painted his walls

that grim (but necessary) literary and developmental

green, and hung burlap from the windows. "But I was still lonely," he wrote in "Kafka Was the Rage: A Greenwich Village Memoir." "It was a green loneliness now.") Perky and crafty, or sleek and stylish, the studio today is first and foremost an attractive haven, a calling card for one's inventiveness rather than a symbol of one's stoicism and

grit. It is also a decorating and design category all its own (see Apartment Therapy's annual Small Cool competitions). But it is still a launching pad, and not only for the very young. Indeed, less and less for the very young, given the high cost of real estate. Consider two studios, one on top of the

other, on East 57th Street, in a diminutive six-story building from 1925 that has housed its fair share of interesting New Yorkers, including Alison Steele, the smoky-toned Nightbird of WNEW radio. The building was originally designed with two studios on each floor, but now only three are left, the others having been absorbed into abutting apartments. In 5E, we meet James Lamond, 76, a gruffly charming decorator and proprietor of the Fabric Studio in Litchfield, Conn., and Noah, a gassy, 12-year-old standard poodle, both of

whom commute to the city on the odd weekend. Mr. Lamond once lived in a stately 8,000-square-foot 18th-century house that was stuffed, he said, "with many marvelous things." Now divorced, and living in an apartment

above his store in a 19th-century building in Connecticut, he has taken a maximalist's approach to his pied-à-terre. He bragged that there are at least 100 objects in the 270square-foot space, including 40 paintings, 2 bureaus, 5 side tables, 10 fabrics, 2 round folding tables he deploys for dinner parties of up to 8 people (though he has a china service here for 12) and Noah's velour dog bed. "With the sofa bed open, it can get tight," said Mr. Lamond, who used Velcro to affix the decoupage tray to the coffee table so he wouldn't knock it over when skirting it and

stepping over Noah to reach the bathroom at night. "There is only six inches without asking the dog to get up," he said. (The building doesn't have a weight restriction for dogs, as many do. Nonetheless, for his board package, Mr. Lamond posed Noah in front of a large bureau and took his photo while standing on a table, so the dog would look smaller.) Mr. Lamond found this apartment in 2010 by searching this newspaper's Real Estate section for the cheapest Manhattan studio, he said. Listed at \$225,000, it was part of Mrs.

Henry Luce III's estate, which included an enormous Sutton Place apartment around the

It had once been fitted out with library stacks, to store the overflow of Mrs. Luce's collection of books (there were 10,000 in the estate, said Rick Patrick, her executor). Later, it had been used as an office. When it was listed by Ellen Kapit, a Sotheby's broker, it had a wall of bookshelves, a "kitchen in a box," and a queen-size mattress on the floor, Ms. Kapit said. Before Mr. Lamond saw it, Ms. Kapit added, "we had one guy who was interested but wasn't sure about the space. We

let him stay overnight on the mattress. It made sense at the time." When Mr. Lamond saw the apartment, he offered \$162,500. He spent another \$70,000, he said,

> gutting the place to its brick walls and rebuilding it. The wallpaper is Ultrasuede; the ceiling is covered in handmade gold paper. Moldings are fat, layered and painted terra-cotta red. Mr. Lamond's storage choices are counterintuitive: The closet is now a foot deeper and the bathroom door half a foot slimmer, so he could flank the window with

> inches deep. "I can have a cocktail party for 20 or 30 people," he said proudly, opening the cabinets to show off his glasses and dishware.

bookshelves. And he designed the kitchen cabinets to be 30

"The only problem with having the cabinets this deep and flush with the counter is I keep hitting my head," he said. "Since I put the handles on, it's worse. For years, I lived in a huge house. But it's much more fun to be surrounded by the things you love, and you see them constantly. Not that I can add much more."

Although he is still working six days a week, Mr. Lamond said he plans to retire here someday. "I could live here without ever going back to my home, which has a lot of

wonderful things," he said. "I would have no problem saying goodbye." It was Mr. Lamond's cunning work that sold the identical studio below last year to Barbara Horowitz, 60, who is also a <u>decorator</u> (her company is BHS Designs), and who also once lived in a large and amply furnished house — hers was in Westchester. Bunny Williams, the decorator who memorialized her own farmhouse, chockablock with paisleyskirted tables, cachepots, obelisks, Regency chairs and gilded mirrors, in "An Affair With a House," was an inspiration, Ms. Horowitz said. Since her divorce eight years ago, she has

been paring down her belongings, editing and pruning in a series of moves. She now has a beach house on the North Fork of Long Island and wanted what she called "a hotel room" in the city, "a wreck in a great area." Apartment 4E was certainly a wreck (and mirrored, to boot). When Ms. Horowitz saw it, she gasped and told the broker, "I think I'm good, but I'm not this good."

Hang on, the broker said, and took her upstairs to Mr. Lamond's place. "I was blown away," Ms. Horowitz recalled, and bought her studio for \$180,000. "The maintenance is \$430," she added. "Who could resist?"

Like Mr. Lamond, she had to gut the apartment. But her rehab is markedly different from her upstairs neighbor's. Glamorous and minimal, it has eye-teasing contrasts, like a dark floor and light furniture, and highly reflective surfaces, including silver foil-backed grass cloth wallpaper and a shiny lacquer finish on the kitchen cabinets. "It gets the light bouncing off the walls," Ms. Horowitz said. "I like the way we negotiate a space when

contrasts are involved. You focus more on the contrasts, instead of, 'Yikes, this is really

small!" " The moldings are large, which adds architectural heft and is another eye-teaser, creating the illusion that the ceiling is higher. When the fabricators misread the dimensions of her kitchen, the built-ins came out seven

inches short. It could have been a disaster, Ms. Horowitz said. Instead, she designed a shoe closet, a nifty sliding cabinet she demonstrated prettily. She keeps her "city" clothes here,

and duplicates of her cosmetics.

recognize.

Outside the one window, a shiny black window box is filled with fake boxwood. All in, she said, she spent about \$60,000. "I love not being attached to so many things," she said. "All that stuff, all the collecting.

It's wonderful and lovely while you're nesting. This part of my life, I can say: 'I am unattached. I am free.' You take yourself with you, whether you are living in a big home in Westchester or a tiny studio."

That's a point of view youthful studio diarists like Mr. Broyard and Ms. McKenney would