

THE APPRAISAL

Gulliver Seeks Rental: The Newfound Fascination With Tiny Dwellings



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In [Luke Clark Tyler](#)’s last New York City apartment, his shoes had some unusual companions in the closet. The shoes sat, in neat pairs, on a rack, directly below his dishes and right next to the microwave. A few inches away, a hip-high refrigerator lived beneath his desk. And the apartment was so narrow that Mr. Tyler could sit on a sofa pushed against one wall with his feet propped up on the opposite wall.

A Tiny Home YouTube Playlist

The YouTube channel of Kirsten Dirksen, a co-founder of a sustainable living Web site called [faircompanies.com](#), features 80 video tours and features of small apartments.



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Robert Wright for The New York Times
An exhibit at the Museum of the City of New York on micro-apartments, called “Making Room,” includes a full-scale 325- square- foot model apartment.

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Robert Wright for The New York Times
A kitchen setup at the “Making Room” exhibit.

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This was because Mr. Tyler’s entire home was only 78 square feet. And while his “Midtown mansion,” as he called it, was a far cry from the lavish town homes and shimmering penthouses that have spawned a thousand lustful television shows, a [video tour](#) of Mr. Tyler’s little room posted on YouTube has been viewed nearly 1.7 million times over the past year and a half. A similar video, about a 90-square-foot apartment on the Upper West Side, has been viewed even more times.

“My sister e-mailed me one morning and said, ‘You’ve got two million hits,’ and by that night we had three million,” said Felice Cohen, the writer and professional organizer who lived there. Ms. Cohen’s [video](#) has now been watched on YouTube nearly 5.2 million times.

“Maybe we’re an inspiration for them,” Ms. Cohen said of those many viewers. “Or maybe they think we’re nuts.”

Few are keen to crumple themselves and their belongings into an itty-bitty room and call it home, yet the eagerness to explore these spaces seems to spread like a determined little wildfire. Videos go viral; news media coverage quickly crosses oceans; attendance is even up at a Manhattan museum currently offering an exhibition on micro-apartments. Perhaps this voracious interest is mere curiosity about how living so small can be comfortably done. Maybe it is just voyeurism. More often, it seems, it is something else: schadenfreude, the pleasure one takes in the misfortune of others. Because, finally, somebody has an apartment smaller than yours.

“Nice little jail cell there,” one YouTube commenter wrote beneath Ms. Cohen’s video.

“OMG,” wrote another. “And I was crying about my 600-square-foot place.”

Another said simply, “hahahahaha.”

Yes, most frequently, said Mr. Tyler — who was branded “el cheapo!” by one YouTube viewer — commenters bring the discussion back to their own arrangements.

“I have three bedrooms and a stable full of horses, or a palace in wherever it is I live, and it costs half as much,” Mr. Tyler offered as an example. He said on the video that he was paying \$800 a month for the room.

Both Mr. Tyler’s and Ms. Cohen’s apartments were shot by a woman named [Kirsten Dirksen](#), a co-founder of a sustainable living Web site called [faircompanies.com](#), for a series of videos on tiny homes. They inspired thousands of comments, dozens of articles and interviews, and even segments on “Good Morning America” and CNN.

Ms. Cohen’s video also got her evicted from her tiny apartment, which happened to be an illegal sublet.

Ms. Cohen sent the video to the woman she was subletting from, [Lara J. Kisielevska](#), who had held the lease on the apartment for more than 10 years. Ms. Kisielevska was surprised.

“Hello! You’re illegally subletting!” she recalled thinking. “What are you doing?”

Eventually, her landlord saw the video, too.

Both Ms. Cohen and Ms. Kisielevska, who owns a graphic design firm, have happily moved on to larger apartments nearby. Mr. Tyler has also left his teensy home, which was in a single-room-occupancy building, and decamped to the West Coast.

“I have my own bathroom,” Mr. Tyler said of his current living arrangement. “Which is really nice, I’ve got to say.”

Lilliputian apartments are not only a popular thing to explore online. An exhibition at the [Museum of the City of New York](#), called “[Making Room](#),” brought a 30 percent bump in attendance during its opening week in January, and the museum has maintained an 11 percent increase in foot traffic during the show’s run, compared with the same period last year.

In addition to small models, educational videos and some information on the city’s own foray into tiny dwellings — at the end of the year, the city hopes to break ground [on 55 micro-apartments](#), measuring from 250 to 370 square feet, on East 27th Street — the exhibition includes a full-scale 325-square-foot model apartment.

It has a Murphy bed, an L-shaped kitchen, perhaps the world’s smallest dishwasher, and a number of labels that say, “Do Not Touch.”

The exhibition also includes a bright pink sofa, on which a man in a faded gray baseball cap sat himself down last week, and quickly fell asleep.

“Either we were really successful in creating a domestic environment, or we’ve created a really boring exhibition,” said Donald Albrecht, the museum’s curator of architecture and design.

Living in a small space can have many economic and environmental advantages, and many of those who explore those spaces, whether in person or online, enthuse about what they offer and are eager to learn more.

Not everybody. For example, the many viewers of a blog called “[The Worst Room](#),” which collects terrible, cramped, and generally windowless apartment advertisements placed on Craigslist.

“I think there’s a lot to be said for utilizing a small space, but I literally saw somebody advertising a 5-foot by 7-foot closet,” said [Ryan Nethery](#), 25, a cinematographer and Kentucky native who started the blog during his own apartment search. “The post read, ‘my bedroom has two closets and I don’t need one of them. Looking to rent it out.’ ”

That ad, accompanied by a small picture that included a visible clothing rod, boasted a Union Square location and asked \$1,000 per month. Other posts include a \$600 crawl space in South Williamsburg and a gray, L-shape sofa, which appeared to be in the center of somebody’s living room, for \$700 per month.

In the less than three weeks since Mr. Nethery began his blog, he has been written about on [Yahoo](#), in [The Huffington Post](#) and in [New York magazine](#), and even on an [Australian news Web site](#). But all the attention has not been the only surprise resulting from the blog, Mr. Nethery said. Viewers have been e-mailing him to request links to some apartment ads because, they say, they think they might like to live there.

“The breakfast nook was pretty popular,” Mr. Nethery said. “It was a mattress in the kitchen, so it was like: refrigerator, sink, oven, mattress.”

“But it was \$300 a month,” he continued. “I think of lot of people can relate to wanting to pay a lot less than they do.”