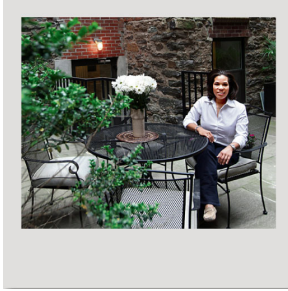


The New York Times

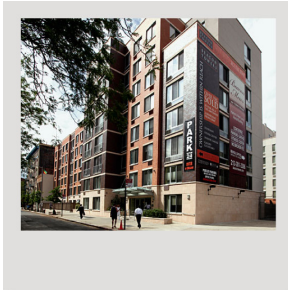
Online June 9, 2011 - By Joyce Cohen

THE HUNT

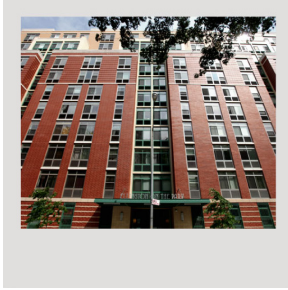
The Wowing of a Practical Person



Maryann Riordan often eats outside, and shes busy gardening in pots.



Beacon Towers on West 138th Street got the ax because it was a co-op



At Bradhurst Avenue and 148th, Ellington on the Park was far from work.



A handsome building on Lenox Avenue had a large duplex with a patio.

AFTER her graduation from dental school a decade ago, Maryann Riordan had two major goals: the first was to buy a dental practice; the second to buy an apartment.

Dr. Riordan, 35, grew up in Hasbrouck Heights, N.J., one of 11 children (and the middle girl of three), and received a B.S. in biology from Rutgers. Inspired by the braces that straightened her teeth, and encouraged by her high school chemistry teacher, she went to the school of dentistry at Temple University in Philadelphia. After she graduated, she settled in Harlem.

She loved her new neighborhood, especially “the sense of community where everybody knows your name on your block,” she said. “That was the feeling I got coming to Harlem.”

She became an associate in the practice of Dr. R. Chester Redhead, “planting my professional roots in Harlem,” she said. About two years ago, she bought the practice.

For years, Dr. Riordan had been checking out real estate listings, but “the reality was, I wasn’t able to buy until my accountant told me,” she said. Last summer, she received the go-ahead.

At the time, Dr. Riordan was living in a one-bedroom in the Savoy Park complex between Fifth Avenue and Malcolm X Boulevard from 139th to 142nd Street. Her place was just five blocks north of her practice, Harlem Dental Associates ([harlemdentalasso-](http://harlemdentalassociates.com)

ciates.com), which is in another large complex, Riverton Square. She enjoyed walking home for lunch. And she liked being so easily accessible in case of an after-hours dental emergency. Her rent was about \$1,800 a month.

Dr. Riordan’s priority for a new home was that it be within walking distance of her practice (which would also put her close to her parking place in the Riverton’s lot). She required a washer-dryer in the unit and some kind of outdoor space. Her budget was \$400,000 to \$450,000.

She sometimes discussed real estate with one of her patients, Danni Tyson, an agent in the Harlem office of Halstead Property. Ms. Tyson was eager to help with the hunt. “I told her we would look until she opened the door and said, ‘Wow!’” Ms. Tyson said. “That is what I always tell clients.”

Dr. Riordan didn’t really understand the talk about being wowed. Any place that hit all of her bullet points would be fine. “I am such a practical person,” she said. “I am also very much a planner and very technical.”

She was concerned about timing, and hoped to be able to move when her lease expired last fall.

Sure enough, many of Harlem’s new buildings had the features she wanted, and seemed perfectly acceptable. Some of the one-bedrooms at Beacon Towers on 138th Street were duplexes with outdoor terraces. But the building was a co-op, and she didn’t want to be subjected to board restrictions.

The New York Times

Online June 9, 2011 - By Joyce Cohen

THE HUNT The Wowing of a Practical Person *continued*

Ellington on the Park, on Bradhurst Avenue and West 148th Street, was a condop, or a co-op operating under condominium rules. It was quite suitable, but just far enough from work to give Dr. Riordan pause. Walking, she would need a change of shoes. Or she would be tempted to drive.

Late last summer, she came across an ad for the Savoy West on Lenox Avenue at 138th Street, a five-story prewar building that had been renovated as a condominium four years ago. Unlike the area's new high-rises, it blended in with the streetscape. "What a nice building," she thought. And the prices were also within reach.

"On my lunch hour, because it was that close, I ran over there," she said. A one-bedroom was already in contract; another, larger, was too pricey. A third one-bedroom was rented to a tenant, but she was able to return a week later to see that one, a duplex of more than 1,000 square feet, with a spiral staircase and a large patio.

For the first time, "I got what Danni was talking about," she recalled. "I was, like, give me the paperwork. This has everything I want and more."

At \$450,000, the place was at the top of her price range. Common charge and taxes were around \$1,000 a month. She negotiated the price to \$425,000 and signed the contract on a Friday afternoon. That Saturday morning, she had a new patient whose address was ... the Savoy West! "It was crazy," Dr. Riordan said. The patient told her she would love the building.

But the apartment was appraised for only \$390,000. "My lawyer said, 'We will walk away,' and I was, like, 'I don't want to walk away. I love the place!'" she said. She was able to renegotiate the price down to \$390,000.

The mortgage process dragged on. Fortunately, her landlord let her remain as a renter on a month-to-month basis. And then her financing fell through.

"I got so emotionally attached," she said. "The apartment was already mine in my head."

She spent a sad winter day attending open houses. "I didn't fall in love with anything," she said.

And then, within days, her financing was approved after all.

"When I gave up on it, it came back," she said.

Dr. Riordan closed this spring, six months after she had originally planned.

Now that she has moved in, she is thrilled to have more space than ever. "I am able to have a mature dining room," she said. She transformed a corner of the downstairs room into a closet. Her shopping habits have changed. "I was always the girl online shopping for clothes and accessories," she said. Now, "I am consumed by home stuff."

She can sometimes hear the No. 3 train rumbling underground, which doesn't bother her. She is, however, disappointed by the laundry situation. "This lovely washer-dryer that I so desired is one of those combination units," she said. Between wash, rinse, spin and dry, doing a load takes three to four hours. "It is hardly practical," she said.

Her online research uncovered terrible reviews of the all-in-one model. And some of her patients who have the same combination washer-dryer complain that it burns their clothes. To speed up the chore, she often pays \$1.25 to dry a load in the basement laundry room.

Dr. Riordan loves her outdoor patio, where she often dines now that the weather is warm. She has begun to garden, adding flowers in containers.

She is even closer to her office than before — just three blocks away. "And now I find myself being late for work," she said. "The closer you get, you say, 'Oh, I have time.'"

E-mail: thehunt@nytimes.com

A version of this article appeared in print on June 12, 2011, on page RE6 of the New York edition with the headline: The Wowing of a Practical Person.

Photographs By Chang W. Lee/The New York Times