

The Hunt

# The Dog and the Doorbell Test

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THERE was no question that Kim Karagosian's new home would be in a dog-friendly building.



Robert Caplin for The New York Times

Kim Karagosian, with Buttah, moved into her new home last fall.



Robert Caplin for The New York Times

A lovely one-bedroom on East 38th Street was picky about pets.



Robert Caplin for The New York Times

A one-bedroom on East 30th Street had a backyard, but a strange layout.



Robert Caplin for The New York Times

An apartment on East 80th Street had a tiny dorm-style refrigerator.

That was her priority, so if a listing didn't specify its pet policy, she always asked her agents to check. No need to "go and waste our time," she said.

It didn't occur to her that there could be varying degrees of dog-friendliness, or that four pounds of fur and affection could be such a sticking point. Her toy Maltese, Buttah, "is such a chill dog," she said. "He loves sleeping and watching TV."

Ms. Karagosian, 28, who is from Demarest, N.J., moved to the Upper East Side after graduating from Boston College. She shared a place, first with a childhood friend and then with a college friend. Last spring, her roommate got engaged and moved out.

Apartment prices were dropping, so it seemed like a good time to hunt for a spacious one-bedroom co-op to buy. Her price range was \$450,000 to the low \$500,000s.

She focused on the Upper East Side, a neighborhood she liked, and Murray Hill, near her office. She works in marketing for Setanta Sports, an international soccer and rugby television station.

“I went into the whole thing with a positive outlook,” Ms. Karagosian said, and was “rarin’ to find a place, no problem.” She said she was usually quick to decide on things, but in this search, “that really didn’t happen.”

She answered an advertisement for a one-bedroom apartment, with high ceilings and exposed brick, listed by Stephanie L. Davis and Matthew Drennan of Mark David Real Estate. She wouldn’t have responded if she had known it was a fifth-floor walk-up.

But the two agents had plenty of apartments to show her. All were one-bedrooms in nondoorman midrise co-op buildings. Ms. Karagosian preferred that to a studio in a doorman building, where “you are obligated to say hi, and sometimes you are not in the mood,” she said.

The apartments all seemed to have a small bedroom or a small kitchen. She could barely keep them straight. “Every single apartment in my price range looked the same,” she said.

One place on East 80th Street, listed at \$439,000, was clean and nicely staged, but had a tiny dorm-style refrigerator. “That’s just weird,” Ms. Karagosian said. A normal refrigerator could have been installed in a closet, but she wasn’t inclined to do renovations. (That apartment sold late last fall for \$385,000.)

“I was ready to buy,” she said, “but I didn’t want to pay for something I wasn’t in love with.”

In May, she was tempted by a one-bedroom on East 30th Street with a communal backyard, for \$469,000. It was bigger than most, but she wavered about the layout; the bathroom was near the kitchen.

At last she visited a sparkling one-bedroom on East 38th Street, with a new kitchen, many closets, and a lovely bathroom with a claw-foot tub. The sellers were a couple with a baby. “We were waiting for that emotional reaction, and when Kim walked in, it was like ‘wow,’ ” Mr. Drennan said.

The apartment, listed at \$525,000, was on the ground floor. Monthly maintenance was in the low \$900s. Ms. Karagosian’s offer, just below the asking price, was accepted.

The board interview loomed. She was told to bring the dog. “They wanted to see how big he is and if he barks a lot,” she said. “The apartment was advertised as dog-friendly, so there shouldn’t be a problem.”

There was. With Buttah on her lap, Ms. Karagosian was interviewed by three board members, who expressed concern that the dog would bark whenever someone entered or exited the

building. “The dog does bark sometimes,” she said, “but I never had complaints and he never barks excessively.”

The board members put Buttah to the test. They rang the apartment’s doorbell to see how he reacted. Sure enough, he barked.

“They were O.K. with a baby crying, and a baby cries more than my dog would bark,” Ms. Karagosian said. “I just don’t get it.”

She was approved by the board, but with the condition that if complaints were received about Buttah, she would send him for training. If complaints persisted, she was to get rid of him.

At the walk-through, the owners left Champagne in the refrigerator. Ms. Karagosian even planned to buy some of their furniture.

But she was unwilling to live in fear of every bark. “I was so annoyed by the whole situation,” she said. “I decided it was not the place for me.”

Ms. Karagosian decided not to accept the board’s conditions, and recouped her deposit.

“We were told a dog was fine,” Ms. Davis said. “The ringing of the doorbell was what got me. Their take on it was that she was on the first floor and they didn’t want the dog yapping every time someone comes in the building. “Our view was: Why wasn’t this brought up months ago? Kim felt so unwelcome.” (The apartment sold about two months later for just over \$500,000.)

Ms. Karagosian briefly considered continuing to rent, but felt bad that her agents had expended so much effort for nothing.

She soon found an apartment in the East 90s, bigger than others that were similar. It was livable but unrenovated, and “I could see the potential in it,” she said. The price was \$449,000, with maintenance in the mid \$700s. Ms. Karagosian decided she didn’t mind doing renovations after all.

This board also wanted to meet the dog. “I was used to it by now,” she said. But this time, one of the board members cradled Buttah in her arms, which, Ms. Karagosian said, “is how it should be.”

She paid just under the asking price, and in the fall arrived with Buttah. “I redid my place with painting and decorating, and it makes me feel like I put my own Kim touch on it,” she said. “I found my inner decorating diva, if you will.” Now, she is in the midst of a kitchen and bathroom renovation, and is currently “living in dust, with dropcloths everywhere.”

This apartment doesn’t even have a doorbell, just a buzzer to let people in the front door. Buttah doesn’t bark when people walk by, though he does when someone rings the buzzer. “We knew that was going to happen,” Ms. Karagosian said, “but it is just for a couple of seconds.”