



BRICK UNDERGROUND

Why we moved to NYC from the Midwest: For job opportunities and to enjoy city life

Kelly Kreth, 5.20.22



Caroline Brooks and Mike Grom moved around the Midwest a few times prior to the pandemic, when Caroline's job ended. They like living in cities, so when a new job in New York City beckoned, they decided to take a leap. NYC is a lot more expensive than they are used to, but they're very happy with their Fort Greene luxury building and their neighborhood. Here is Caroline's story.

In the span of one year, we got engaged, relocated from Chicago to Michigan, purchased our first home, and got married. I wouldn't recommend doing all of that in one year.

Our place in East Lansing, where we lived with our black lab, Tucker, was a Cape Cod-style starter home with three bedrooms and a nice backyard. It was less than a mile from Michigan State University, where I worked in public relations.

We loved the character that comes with an older house, but with older houses (ours was built in the 1920s) comes old-house problems. It got very cold in the winter and the layout wasn't efficient for modern living. We used the formal dining room three times, there was only one full bath (and one half-bath), and the bedrooms were small and the closet spaces tiny.

East Lansing is a quiet, family-friendly neighborhood—a quintessential Midwestern college town and quite different from what we were used to in Chicago. We both attended Michigan State and loved being near our alma mater but missed being in a city.

Then Mike got a job offer for a Detroit-based energy company in 2019 and we were excited by the idea of moving to a more urban and lively area. We put our place on the market on March 7th, 2020—days before the pandemic started. We didn't end up relocating until July 2020.

The city we moved to—Royal Oak—is a lively area about 15 minutes from downtown Detroit. The area had a post-World War II building boom and the houses, including the one we rented, were bungalow-style and very close together. They were intended for returning soldiers who went to work in Detroit's factories and were all built using a very similar blueprint. In recent decades, owners renovated them to make them more unique.

Our new house had been renovated to add an office space on the second floor, a large family room in the back of the house, and a two-car garage. It was newer than our East Lansing home, but we ran into the same issues: small rooms, small closets, and just one bathroom. Our rent was around \$2,000 a month, the same as our mortgage in East Lansing.

We liked being in a walkable area. Royal Oak is an eclectic town and our neighborhood was a short walk from downtown. By that point we had two dogs (we adopted our second one after moving) and walks happen multiple times a day. There was a good mix of younger families and older folks. The neighborhood scratched our itch for city life, but we weren't wedded to staying.

Because of the pandemic, we weren't able to do as much exploring as we would have liked. The downtown area is going through a renaissance—lots of startups have a presence there, the Apple Developer Academy opened its first U.S. location there, and there are lots of new residential developments. We will say that Detroit knows how to do pizza.

Eventually my job had run its course. We were interested in staying in Detroit, but job opportunities weren't plentiful. We began looking in Michigan but were also open to other states. We just wanted a city that offered culture, history, sports, and entertainment.

I received an offer from a leading tech company in NYC in November 2021; we planned to relocate in the spring of 2022. Once we knew where we were moving, Mike began his job search and received an offer in February.

When you rent or buy in Michigan there are longer lead-times, for example you can sign a lease for a place three months before moving in. NYC moves much faster—we learned that renters sign leases on the spot and get into bidding wars. There are lines out the door for newly listed places! Renting from a distance put us at a major disadvantage!

We began looking online in early February intending to come in early March to see places and sign an application.

Our need-to-have list included two or more bedrooms, close to a park/green space for the dogs, close to public transportation for work, and in-unit laundry, and AC. We wanted to keep our rent to \$5,500, but could go up if a place had all the things we desired.

We came across The Willoughby in Brooklyn on StreetEasy. While a high-rise wasn't on our wish list, it had features that were too good to overlook. The location was perfect, the amenities seemed extremely nice, and the views were stunning. We filled out an application and three hours later, an agent from the building reviewed it and wanted to connect. We were shocked—in a good way!

We ended up moving on March 26th—just in time to have a taste of spring and then another three weeks of winter.

The Willoughby is an amazing building and we feel very lucky to have found our unit. The rent for our 1,100-square-foot, two-bedroom, two-bath unit is \$6,300. It is more than we had hoped, but we got more amenities than we expected. We have 24-hour security, a roof deck with grills, workspaces/recreation areas, a gym, espresso in the lobby, and a staff that goes above and beyond. We pay an additional \$700 a month for our parking spot below the building and a storage unit.

The building is a block from Fort Greene Park, a five-minute walk from shopping at City Point and the DeKalb subway station, and 10 minutes from Atlantic Terminal and Barclays Center.

The move, however, did not go smoothly.

The plan was to pick up our stuff on a Friday morning in Detroit to move in on Saturday afternoon after a 24-hour drive. We got a call on Saturday afternoon that the movers had somehow ended up upstate and were lost. Thirty minutes later, we got a call that they had been in an accident. Thankfully no one was hurt.

About five hours later than expected, the movers showed up. They did not wear masks and didn't ask if we wanted them to. No big deal since we are vaccinated and boosted, but would

have been nice to have asked. (I am still waiting for the moving company to get back to me about some damage they did to my Peloton treadmill.)

Fort Greene has a communal feeling that we love. The park is such an important part of our lives. We see the same people (and dogs) doing laps in the evening. There are people enjoying birthday parties there on weekends, having lunch on the big hills, or playing basketball. Every Saturday and Sunday, our dogs go to off-leash hours to make some new friends.

We've struck up small talk with people in the neighborhood who give restaurant recommendations freely, tips for navigating the area, and things to look forward to. There's almost too much to try at once. We feel like kids let loose at an amusement park.

We have been going to Trader Joe's and Target in City Point and to Whole Foods. We loved the neighborhood spots Café Paulette, Miss Ada's, and Fancyfree.

The proximity to everything in this area is unbeatable. Now that it is getting warmer, I love seeing all the restaurants open their windows and the farmer's market every weekend.

Our building staff and managers are great at creating a sense of community too. We've been here just one month and the third building event just happened. The security team welcomes us home every day and knows our names and always ask how we are.

I have two siblings that live here and have visited a few times, and we are excited for friends and family from Chicago and Michigan to be among our first out-of-town visitors.

While we know that our rose-colored glasses are still on, but we love living in this area and are 1,000 percent glad we did it. We are excited for what the future holds and are eager to dive into all the recommendations we have received. Keep 'em coming.

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