

# The New York Times

**REAL ESTATE**

## A Warm and Cozy Feeling in Ossining, N.Y.

### The Hunt

By JOYCE COHEN MARCH 16, 2017



**THE BUYERS** Grace O'Shaughnessy and Omar Lopez made the move to Ossining from Harlem.  
Gregg Vigliotti for The New York Times

Grace O'Shaughnessy is from [Dutchess County](#). Omar Lopez grew up in Bushwick.

The two met at the College of Saint Rose in Albany when she was a freshman and he was a senior. They dated long distance while he earned a master's degree in education at Harvard; they settled in New York while she worked toward her master's degree at Columbia University's School of Social Work.

For four years, the couple — who married two and a half years ago — rented a one-bedroom in a [Harlem](#) brownstone, where the monthly rent was in the \$1,600s.

For most of that time, they discussed buying a bigger place. “Ultimately, we do want to have kids and also be able to host people who can help us, who can babysit and stay over,” Mr. Lopez said. “When you have limited space, it limits your options.”

But they couldn’t afford a bigger place in Harlem. They considered going deep into [Brooklyn](#) or [Queens](#), but that would mean lengthy work commutes to midtown. They figured they might as well try the suburbs.



**OSSINING** A condo was well-situated and required no yard maintenance but came with unwanted amenities, like a pool.  
Gregg Vigliotti for The New York Times

“Over the years, I have become much more of an outdoorsy person,” said Mr. Lopez, 30, a recruiter at the Relay Graduate School of Education. “In the city, it is such a production to be in nature, so I always appreciated visiting my in-laws in the [Hudson Valley](#).” Ms. O’Shaughnessy, 28, manages a training program and works as a therapist at Community Healthcare Network.

Unfamiliar with towns within commuting distance of Manhattan, she contacted [Suburban Jungle](#), a service that consults with home buyers to find suitable suburbs.

“I didn’t necessarily need to be in a place that looks like Harlem, but I also don’t want to have the experience of every place I go I am the racial minority,” Mr. Lopez said. “I was also thinking in terms of my future kids.”

Their budget was up to \$350,000. They considered heading farther north for a bigger house or to [Connecticut](#) for lower taxes, but Suburban Jungle suggested Ossining in

Westchester County, and referred them to Hillary Landau, a licensed salesperson at Houlihan Lawrence.

The first house they saw, on a leafy residential block, was about a mile from the train station — walkable if need be.



**OSSINING** A house had a dated interior and an enormous yard, which would have required an exhausting amount of work.  
Gregg Vigliotti for The New York Times

It included three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a finished attic, an unfinished basement, a classic front porch and a patch of green. The driveway wasn't usable for parking; the next-door neighbors had an easement to allow for access to their parking spot in back.

The couple checked out some condos, too. "I was open to a condo because we are not millionaires," Mr. Lopez said. Years of watching "Rehab Addict" on HGTV taught them that they "don't have the skills and money to do that."

Kemeys Cove, a 1974 complex where a two-bedroom was \$329,000, was well-located but dated. The two were unhappy about paying for amenities they knew they wouldn't use, like a pool.

Another single-family house, well below budget, looked "rural and cool" in the photos, Ms. O'Shaughnessy said, but the layout felt far too open, with wood paneling everywhere. Highway 9A ran behind the house. The rural yard was overwhelming.

"I thought, we are going to be spending our whole lives taking care of the lawn and the trees, and updating this '70s house," she said. "We wanted something manageable." That property later sold for \$242,000.





**OSSINING** A charming house with three bedrooms and a classic front porch was the first they saw — and the best.  
Gregg Vigiotti for The New York Times

Other houses were perfectly adequate but uninspiring. So it was back to the initial three-bedroom. In their price range, they knew they were unlikely to find anything better. “They had a warm and cozy feeling from it,” Ms. Landau said. “Some of the ones that are spacious and airy felt very cold to them.”

In the meantime, the sellers added a driveway that consumed what used to be grass. “I guess it’s better than parking on the street,” Ms. O’Shaughnessy said.

The couple arrived last month, paying \$321,000. Annual taxes are around \$11,000. They bought a used car. Ms. O’Shaughnessy drives it to the station while Mr. Lopez, an early riser, takes a fold-up bike.

“I grew up in a house with creaky floors, and the pipes would clank, but there’s something that feels solid and well-built about this house,” Ms. O’Shaughnessy said. Some of the rooms have unappealing wallpaper; the master bedroom closet, oddly, doubles as a door to the adjacent bedroom. “We felt, we can deal with this,” she said.

Mr. Lopez was surprised to find that friends and family consider homeownership to be such a signal of life progress.

“It is a sign of what a lot of people have called ‘great adulting,’” he said. “I’ve been caught off guard by that. For me it feels like a matter of course. Buying houses, having babies, getting jobs — people have been doing this for a long time.”