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Home & Garden

A Restless Couple at Rest



Ruby Washington/The New York Times

NEW ROOTS Kathryn Lynch and Peter Moore may have settled down in this TriBeCa loft with her art and his books.

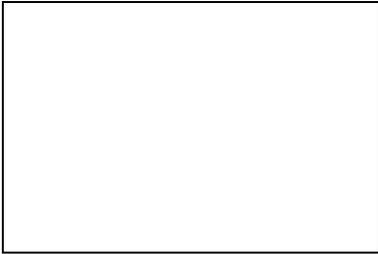
By PENELOPE GREEN

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PETER MOORE'S first real estate venture lasted only 48 hours. He was 19, in the middle of a year off from Columbia, and living with his family in their town house on East 84th Street when he signed a lease on a 5,000-square-foot loft on Lispenard Street, borrowing the deposit money for the \$800-a-month space from his parents.



Michael Weschler for The New York Times **TOGETHER** Mr. Moore's 1890s warehouse is now a family compound.



Michael Weschler for The New York Times. Mr. Moore bought the B&B Italia sectional.



Ruby Washington/The New York Times. A staircase goes to the roof.

As soon as it dawned on him that he would have to come up with \$800 every month, Mr. Moore, now 49 and a seasoned architect and New York City developer, hurried back to the landlord, somewhat teary-eyed, he said, to beg for his deposit back. He did not attempt to move again until he was 34. (It was a big town house.)

Since then, he and his wife, Kathryn Lynch, a painter, have moved 12 or 13 times. Neither one is quite sure of the number, although Mr. Moore will describe its proportions as epic. As Mr. Moore has bought, developed and sold more than 30 or so properties to date, mostly in TriBeCa, the couple have lived temporarily in some of them, moving

from one nearly finished unit to the next, sometimes from floor to floor in the same building.

They have moved because it has seemed financially prudent to live in the newly purchased house. And there is always the carrot, Ms. Lynch said, of ever more space. They have also moved because neither Ms. Lynch nor Mr. Moore has much of an attachment to what Ms. Lynch described as “the object,” meaning furniture, televisions, stereos, gadgets and other impedimenta, and because they share a restless nature. Each of them embraces the clarifying action of relocation.

“When you move a lot,” said Ms. Lynch, who is 46, “you don’t get old, because the dust never settles.”

“When you move a lot,” Mr. Moore said, “you become. ...”

Ms. Lynch broke in, “A movement!” Mr. Moore grinned. “When you move a lot,” he continued, “you realize quickly how you are burdened by your past, and so you become a ruthless editor.”

He described a defining event five years ago, when the moving van was packed to its roof with their belongings, and he realized that there was nothing he wanted to keep except an old tie of his father’s that was sticking out of a bureau drawer. He reached in and grabbed it, and told the moving men to keep the rest.

“It was a great cathartic moment,” he said. But three years ago Ms. Lynch and Mr. Moore moved into the top floor of an 1890s brick warehouse on Washington Street with their two children, Graham, now 9, and Elizabeth, 7, and have not moved since.

“Our semipermanent home,” Mr. Moore said, sounding not altogether committed to the permanent part.

Mr. Moore bought his first TriBeCa property, an 1880s block-through warehouse, for \$800,000 in 1992. He bought this building for \$4.5 million in 2005. It had suffered a few less-than-lovely renovations over the years, the signs of which were still extant on a recent morning: a black granite kitchen island they dislike, gold faucets, louvered doors in a bedroom.

He has built rooms for the children and walls for his books — thousands of them, including rows and rows of Penguin Classics, their pages toast-colored and crumbly, books being the only possessions worth carting around, Mr. Moore said, besides a good pair of shoes and his wife’s paintings.

There are plans for more renovations, but they remain undone. When you move with your family, Mr. Moore said, “your schemes to improve a space become less and less likely. ”

(Mr. Moore is also focused on other projects: the old Area nightclub building on Hudson Street near Hubert Street, which he is converting to condominiums, and a new hotel on the Bowery, clad in an Op Art scrim and named the Riley, for the artist Bridget Riley, going up across the street from the New Museum.)

Mr. Moore bought all the furniture here after they moved in — all beige, as Ms. Lynch pointed out. “It’s the only color he likes.” But she bought the two staghorn ferns mounted on a wall above two of a bewildering number of stereo speakers that are set into the loft’s walls.

“Peter says yes to everything when he’s doing a deal,” said Ms. Lynch, explaining that a friend of his, a guy in the audio-visual business, invested in one of her husband’s properties and offered to set them up with a music and theater system. “We’ve never used it; we can’t figure out how,” she said. And, sighing, she pulled down a pristine movie screen from a point high on a wall. The investor came a few times to try to teach them, but, in the end, Mr. Moore said, it was kinder just to put him off. “It’s a computerized, complex, fully integrated computer gestalt,” Mr. Moore said vaguely. “That’s not where Kathryn and I excel.”

Ms. Lynch and Mr. Moore met in the mid-’80s when he was still living at home. They began dating in the 1990s, when she had studio space near his office in TriBeCa. “I thought we were just hanging out, but it turns out we were dating,” she said. They moved into one of his properties, on Laight Street, sometime in 1996. They married two years later.

On Washington Street (a street they have lived on twice), the loft below theirs is more completely stamped by Mr. Moore’s aesthetic because he renovated it for his mother, Nonnie Moore. When she retired as the fashion director of GQ after many decades at Condé Nast to focus on the expressionist paintings she had made throughout her magazine career, she moved into one of her son’s buildings, on Vestry Street.

When the family moved here, they brought her with them, and it is this felicitous arrangement that has anchored the family for so long. “In a big city like New York,” Mr. Moore said, “we have found a way to have an extended family experience.” (There are four units in the building: besides the Moore-Lynch “compound,” one floor belongs to an investor of Mr. Moore’s and a rent-controlled tenant lives on another.)

In his mother’s loft, his “peculiarities,” as he put it, are in evidence, like wheat-colored upholstery on the little furniture that is there, light switches at the height of pants pockets instead of chest-high. “My father always put switches at 24 inches, too,” Mr. Moore said. “It’s so you don’t have to see them.”

His father, Tom, was an architect, interior designer and sculptor who had worked at McKim, Mead & White. He died in 1989.

Like loft-livers of old, before the Wall Street set took over TriBeCa and altered its interior ecology with accouterments like leather-walled screening rooms, six-figure kitchens and wine “cellars,” Ms. Moore, like her family upstairs, has very little in her loft besides her paintings, which have loosened up in recent years. Painting, particularly expressionist painting, is a physical act. With the help of a painting teacher who tackles one side of a canvas while Ms. Moore paints the other, she has overcome her diminishing arm strength by mixing lots of water in the acrylic paint. The results are ethereal, cloudlike and rainbow-colored.

By contrast, her daughter-in-law paints richly monochromatic landscapes, mostly urban ones, mostly of the view seen from wherever her studio happens to be at the time. (She has an exhibition through June 28 at the Sears Peyton Gallery in Chelsea; searspeyton.com.)

“If we didn’t move so much,” Ms. Lynch said, “I’d have nothing to paint.”

Ms. Lynch paints in Mr. Moore’s buildings, on whatever floor is empty, sharing space with the construction workers, who use a corner to have their lunch and smoke their cigarettes. (It’s an amicable arrangement, only once disturbed by an asbestos removal company worker who removed a canvas from its stretcher and tried to make away with it. Ms. Lynch intercepted him downstairs. “Oh,” he said, flummoxed. “The place didn’t look, uh, private.”)

But the construction crew is always supportive, she said, providing kindly criticism and help when she moves, which is, of course, often. Still, moving a studio is harder even than moving with young children, Ms. Lynch said. And she reckons she has moved her studio more times than she has moved her family.

“It takes a while to warm a studio up,” she explained. Setting up a home is easy. All she needs to do that, Ms. Lynch said, “is the four of us.”