

10R RENTALS

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Trading spaces

Sublets and shares offer sweet freedom

By KATHERINE DYKSTRA

RACHEL SONTAG has lived in four different apartments since she moved to New York 14 months ago. (If math isn't your thing, that's an average of 3 1/2 months per place.) "I do it for the freedom," the 28-year-old graduate student explains. "I don't have to deal with furnishings or decorating, and I can take off and travel whenever I want to." Sontag is one of a growing number of mostly young, unattached New Yorkers, who prefer to sublet or share space.

Sometimes the serial movers are just trying to stretch a buck. Rick Toscano, a 29-year-old actor, has moved in and out of four apartments over the course of a year. "I put all my stuff in storage except for a bag of clothes, my butterfly chair

Try these

Newyork.craigslist.org: Despite some wack jobs, the site offers the cheapest listings on the Net. They're free.

Nyhabitat.com: They charge half a month's rent for a share between one and six months, but they've personally scouted out each place.

Roommates.com: Basic membership is free, but you're charged to read responses.

Sublet.com: Not just sublets; you can find shares, too. —K.D.



"I DO IT FOR THE FREEDOM": Grad student (and serial subletter) Rachel Sontag in her latest digs. PHOT: OTTAWA

and an air mattress, and went from one temporary situation to another in an attempt to save money," Toscano says. "The thing is you have to remember you

can end up homeless without a moment's notice." Toscano should know about packing up quickly: "Once, plans changed at the last minute, and I had to go,"

he explains. So how do you find the next place? "Pray," says Toscano. "Pray and use Craigslist."

Newyork.craigslist.org and other Web sites that specialize in matching up roommates, such as nyhabitat.com and roommates.com, are where any search should begin. But after that, it all comes down to good judgment.

"Cleanliness and privacy are the two biggest things when moving in with someone you don't know," Toscano says. "Ask about overnight guests, food-sharing, cleaning responsibilities, parties."

"It's difficult to find a person who is really kind and really easygoing, even though everyone thinks that they are," says Sontag, whose search started in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, last January. (When asked about why she left, she mumbles something about dirty boys.)

From there, she moved into a place in Alphabet City, which she landed when she met one of the leasees at a wedding. It took her only one month to flee that "windowless makeshift room." "The walls didn't even go up to the ceiling," Sontag says. "I could hear my roommates brushing their teeth."

The longest Sontag has stayed at the same New York address is eight months, when she lived in a three-bedroom in Chinatown with two guys. Then she realized she'd be a lot happier living with one roommate instead of two.

Which is why she moved in with her current roommate, in the Meatpacking District, where she's lived for the past two months.

"I was just looking for someone who gets the



"I FOUND PEOPLE": Markowitz in her pad. VICTORIA WIL

If I didn't like a roommate, "I could kick the person out."

—Riki Markowitz, who's had 6 roomies in 2 yrs.

proverbial 'it,' and I found her, so I'm going to stay," Sontag says.

You can also try out different situations without moving at all — if you've got a lease.

"When my roommate moved out, I couldn't afford to live alone, so I put the lease in my name and found people for the other two rooms," says Riki Markowitz, a 33-year-old researcher, who has seen six roommates

come and go over the last two years. "I had complete control, so that if I met someone that I wanted to move in or didn't like a roommate, I could kick the person out."

And she has. Twice. "The first one made it easy by confronting me," Markowitz says. "The second was a big stinky, messy guy. I just told him that he had to move out and that it wasn't personal, but it was."

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