Happy Together

Co-living startups promise to wait for the cable guy and replace the toilet paper. Illustration by Harry Campbell

Cole Kennedy moved to New York a year ago. He was twenty-three and had recently graduated from the University of Missouri with a degree in English. He applied for copywriting jobs all over, and assumed that he'd end up in the Midwest. "Moving to New York seemed cool, but it was, like, a thing that happens to other people," he told me. Then his lottery ticket arrived: a paid internship at Foursquare, the search-and-discovery app, which is based in Manhattan.

First stop: Craigslist, for a place to live. Kennedy was unfamiliar with the city's neighborhoods, but he'd seen HBO's "Girls," and, he said, "I pretty much knew I was going to be in Brooklyn." He checked out one-bedroom apartments in Williamsburg, where the average monthly rent is around three thousand dollars. Nope. He eventually landed in Bedford-Stuyvesant, where a guy named Patrick was subletting a room in his

two-bedroom apartment for a thousand and fifty dollars a month.

The annals of Craigslist are filled with roommate horror stories: the scammer, the party animal, the creep. But Patrick turned out to be an easygoing twenty-nine-year-old photographer from South Carolina. Kennedy liked him immediately, even though the two-bedroom apartment turned out to be a one-room loft. Patrick slept upstairs. Kennedy's room was a former closet. Still, he was excited. His job was great. He was in New York.

But what to do when work ended? He loved Jane Jacobs's evocations of Greenwich Village, with its friendly shop owners and its "ballet" of the city streets. But, he said, "I'd end up going to a bar and just sitting there, talking to a bartender and staring at Twitter." A thought surfaced: I'm surrounded by people and things to do, and yet I'm so fucking bored and lonely.

All of this seemed very far away on a Sunday night this winter, in the basement of a renovated four-story brownstone in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn. The building, Kennedy's new home, is run by the co-living startup Common, which offers what it calls "flexible, community-driven housing." Co-living has also been billed as "dorms for grown-ups," a description that Common resists. But the company has set out to restore a certain subset of young, urban professionals to the paradise they lost when they left college campuses—a furnished place to live, unlimited coffee and toilet paper, a sense of belonging.

Common has three locations in Brooklyn: the brownstone in Crown Heights, on Pacific Street—which, when it opened, received more than a thousand applications for eighteen rooms—a second, smaller brownstone in the neighborhood, and a fifty-one-bedroom complex in Williamsburg, which opens this week. Instead of signing a lease, residents sign up for a "membership." On average, they pay eighteen hundred dollars a month for a furnished bedroom and common areas. The company solves what it calls "the tragedy of the commons"—waiting for the cable guy and hiring housecleaners. There's a chat room on Slack, where members can plan activities, and a "house leader," who functions a bit like a college R.A.

Kennedy, who is now a copywriter for the startup Handy, found Common through a BuzzFeed article. Initially, he was put off by the price tag. A room at Common doesn't just cost more than a room in a shared Brooklyn apartment (average price: twelve hundred dollars); it costs more than some studio apartments on Manhattan's Upper East Side,

which Gary Malin, the president of the real-estate broker Citi Habitats, told me can be obtained for "fifteen hundred dollars and up."

But Kennedy did a little math. "Eighteen hundred—if you want to pay that little for a studio or one-bedroom, you're going to get a really junky place," he said. With a discount for promising to stay at Common for at least a year, he now pays a little less than fifteen hundred dollars a month.

Co-living businesses are still in the startup phase. Some people are incredulous. Under an article about the phenomenon on Curbed, a commenter wrote, "Why the fuck would anyone want that?" But Common, which is based in midtown and has twenty employees, recently raised more than seven million dollars from investors, including Maveron, a venture-capital firm started by Dan Levitan and Howard Schultz, the chairman of Starbucks. Jason Stoffer, a partner at Maveron, anticipates that companies like Common will transform residential housing by creating a brand that is "emotionally and culturally resonant with millennials" who aren't served by some aspects of apartment living. (Instead of landlord-ese, Common uses startup argot, advertising its "core values." In his application, Kennedy wrote that he most appreciated the value "Be Present.") Stoffer brought up AirBnb, the vacation-rental business valued at twenty-five billion dollars: "People sleeping on couches in someone else's apartment for thirty dollars a night felt absolutely crazy ten years ago! But now it's normal."

Common encourages its members to organize group activities. "I thought they were going to force me to do these events I don't want to do," Kennedy said. "Like, let's sit in a drum circle and do basket weaving." But the events turned out to be things like movie nights and bowling. He decided to organize a book club.

The night of its first meeting, the brownstone's basement was clean and warm. At the back of the room was a screening area, where four members lounged on modern couches and adult-size beanbags. Kennedy, who has chin-length, sandy-colored hair, was wearing jeans and a flannel shirt. Most of his housemates were in their twenties, recent transplants to New York. Kennedy's selection was "The Art of Fielding," by Chad Harbach, and he led the discussion. He mentioned the fictional baseball manual at the center of the plot: "Did any of you guys look to see if 'The Art of Fielding' is real?"

Another Common member, Jeremy Schrage, spoke up. At forty-four, Schrage was the oldest member of the group. He makes a living "flipping apps and advising startups," and

had recently moved from California. “I actually put it into Google and read the Wikipedia,” Schrage said.

There was a pause. Kennedy asked, “What else, guys?”

Annelie Chavez, the brownstone’s twenty-seven-year-old house leader, grew up in a large extended Filipino family in California. “After being in New York for, like, a year and a half and not really having that many overlapping circles of friends, it made me a little homesick for the connections that the four or five main characters have with each other,” she said.

Kennedy agreed. “New York is the loneliest city in the world,” he said. “You basically go to work, work ridiculous hours, and come home.”

Schrage offered a theory: ”It’s where the headquarters of all these corporations are, and people are coming here and they want to kick ass. During the day, everybody just has horse blinders on. They’re getting on the 6 train and going to work and stepping over some bum and not thinking about it.” He sighed. “It’s kind of crazy,” he said. “I don’t want to lose that California part of me. That compassion or empathy.”

Kennedy looked at his phone. It was getting late. “What book should we read next?”

Matt, another housemate, asked, “Have you guys read ‘The Poisonwood Bible’?”

I first met Kennedy in December, after most of Common’s members had moved in. The company threw a holiday party in the brownstone on Pacific Street. A flat-screen by the door showed which floors were serving which ethnic cuisine, all catered by nearby restaurants. In the basement, where people were drinking wine from plastic cups, Kennedy dispensed advice about restaurants in the area. (After his time at Foursquare, he considers himself the house’s “concierge.”)

At the Pacific Street brownstone, the smallest social unit is the floor. Each floor includes four single bedrooms off a long hallway, with a shared living room and kitchen, and a door that can be unlocked with an iPhone app. The first floor is male, the second floor is female, and the third and fourth floors are mixed. Kennedy lived on the third floor, along with Leon Thorne, a twenty-year-old who had taken time off from Brandeis to attend a coding course at Fullstack Academy. He told me that he was happy about his choice: ”Everyone here I can have a conversation with! In college, there were a lot of very unengaged people who were just there because they needed to go to college and get a

job."

Kennedy confessed, "Yesterday, I sat on the couch and literally watched Netflix for twelve hours."

Chavez is a kind of "co-" professional. During the day, she is a community manager at Industry City. Before moving into the Common brownstone, she lived in a house run by a now defunct co-living company called Campus, which she also worked for. "I get to learn a lot about sharing," she said. "Organizational behaviors and communities are interesting to me." In college, at U.C.L.A., she studied cultural anthropology.

Brad Hargreaves, Common's founder and C.E.O., was at the party. An affable, nerdy twenty-nine-year-old with a scruffy beard, Hargreaves grew up in rural Arkansas before going to Yale, where he ran intercollegiate computer-game tournaments called GoCrossCampus. After graduation, he moved to New York, with plans to turn the gaming tournaments into a business. On Craigslist, he found a roommate in the financial district: a real-estate broker with a taste for marijuana and, consequently, bacon.

When Hargreaves's gaming company didn't pan out, he and a few techie friends started a co-working space—a coffee-shop alternative for freelancers and nomadic tech entrepreneurs—which in 2011 became a programming school called General Assembly. General Assembly now has twenty-five thousand students taking classes in everything from data science to stress management. Its fifteen campuses are mostly in major cities—New York, San Francisco, Washington, D.C. Students often move to a city to take classes, and, Hargreaves said, they "would usually end up in really sketchy roommate situations." He had an alternate vision: "roommate communities."

Instead of leasing properties and then subletting them, Common acts as a property-management company. Real-estate developers hire the firm to operate a building in exchange for a percentage of the income. "We look at our audience as people who make between forty and a hundred thousand dollars a year," Hargreaves said. "There's a certain set of neighborhoods that fit that price point really well."

Inevitably, the company has been caught up in larger tussles over gentrification. In Crown Heights, traditionally a West Indian enclave, vegan cheese shops, wood-fired pizza ovens, bourbon-spiked milkshakes, and fluke seviche are springing up alongside restaurants serving jerk chicken. Hargreaves told me, "It's a friendly neighborhood. People say hi to

you on the street. It's convenient to mass transit. There are some really cool bars. And we were able to find a wholly vacant multifamily building. We don't want to evict people."

Some locals are wary. Ayanna Prescod, a twenty-eight-year-old blogger whose family has lived in the area since the nineteen-fifties, said that many friends have been forced out by rising rents. She added, "I'm a young professional, and I'm definitely not spending eighteen hundred dollars on a room." She worried that an influx of transient young people would erode the community. "It started with AirBnb," she said. "When I grew up, you knew who your neighbors were, you actually looked out for each other. Now we say hi in passing to be courteous. But you see someone going into a house, and it's, like, What? Who is this person?"

The contemporary phenomenon of co-living began in San Francisco, with "hacker mansions," rambling Victorians that programmers furnished with bunk beds and turned into startup factories. In 2014, Campus, founded by a twenty-three-year-old named Tom Currier, attempted to formalize the process. It leased homes in San Francisco and began selling memberships. When you joined Campus, you weren't just joining a house; you were choosing a life style. You could bounce among the company's various locations. Houses were equipped with hot tubs, and members had access to vacation houses in Tahoe and Napa. (Hargreaves, too, has network ambitions: he hopes that members will eventually be able to move around Common locations, spending a week in Los Angeles, a week in Brooklyn.) By last year, Campus had rented thirty-four properties, including several brownstones in New York, when, like many startups whose dreams are bigger than their wallets, it ran out of money and folded.

Other companies have not been deterred. They range from Pure House, which is based in Williamsburg and advertises "an intentional way of living for those committed to transforming their lives" (and has hosted a group story-telling session called Collective Sex), to WeLive, a spinoff of WeWork, a co-working company that was recently valued at sixteen billion dollars. WeWork describes itself as a "physical social network," and most co-living companies see themselves as participating in the sharing economy, with their buildings a blend of residential hotel and Facebook group. WeLive's first residential space, at 110 Wall Street, features small apartments and shared common areas, which include yoga studios and screening rooms. Eventually, the space will house four hundred and fifty people on twenty floors. In a leaked pitch document from 2014, WeWork projected that co-living would account for twenty-one per cent of its revenue—$605.9 million—by 2018.

Hargreaves took me on a tour of Common's brownstone, pointing out the laundry room, the back-yard patio, and the bike rack by the stairs. "Bike racks were the No. 1 thing people requested on our surveys," he said. He referred to the home's décor as its "user experience." It channels a familiar Brooklyn aesthetic: hardwood floors, exposed brick walls, midcentury-modern furnishings from stores like West Elm. Sophie Wilkinson, the company's design director, told me that a member once described it as "someone awesome's parents' house, without any of the parents." In a living room, the design staff had stuffed a bookshelf with quirky tchotchkes: a bronze armadillo, plants in geometric planters.

Common members share bathrooms with one other person. The kitchen-living room on each floor is shared by four people. (A cleaner comes once a week.) Hargreaves said that the arrangement was meant to create a family atmosphere: "If you give people an opportunity to eat dinner alone in their bedroom, they'll do it."

We looked into a bedroom on the first floor, and I felt a pang of envy. It was spare but chicly furnished—a double bed with a fabric-covered headboard, a Scandinavian-style nightstand, and a small Aztec rug. Hargreaves noted that the mattress and the fluffy white bedding were from the of-the-moment companies Casper and Parachute. "We try to work with other startups whenever we can," he said.

In the kitchen-living room, three men of the first floor—including Jeremy Schrage, the forty-four-year-old app-flipper—were drinking beer and eating nouveau-Caribbean food from a nearby restaurant called Glady's. Schrage predicted that co-living would soon become normal: "Twenty or thirty years from now, we'll look back and be, like, how did we ever question it?"

His suitemate, Mike Walsh, said, "I'm from Madison, Wisconsin, and you hear about co-op living all the time there. How is this any different?"

Another suitemate, Danny Pirajan, twenty-seven, had hair shaved on one side and wore Elvis Costelloesque glasses. He had spent the past few years working at design-related jobs in Chicago and Miami and was trying to decide on a permanent location. "I'm city shopping," he told me.

Walsh said that he had moved to New York to study user-experience design at General Assembly. Before that, he lived in Colorado for ten years, working as a professional

mascot for the Colorado Rapids, a major-league soccer team, and for the Denver Broncos.

Schrage raised his eyebrows: "You were the Bronco?"

"I was just a backup," Walsh said. "I didn't do *all* the games."

"Can you do your horse sound?" Schrage asked, making a little whinny. "Tell everyone about being a mascot," he continued. "What do people not know?"

Walsh sighed. "Wow," he said. "Well, it's a lot of fun. People assume that. You get beat up. At the end of the day, you're exhausted physically."

Schrage did a lightning round of app-development research. "Is there a market for Uber ice delivery for mascots—yes or no?"

Walsh considered. A Common member stuck his head in the door to announce a delivery from Elsie's: "Care for a doughnut? Fourth floor!"

People live in group homes for many reasons, and in many circumstances—think of retirement homes, rehab centers, and communes and kibbutzes. But co-living isn't just about a living situation. It's about a specific stage in the modern bourgeois life cycle: the period that sociologists call "extended adolescence." This phase of experimentation and transition is generally associated with people in their twenties, but its boundaries are fluid. It has appeared in endless TV incarnations, where it's mocked and worshipped in equal measure: "The Real World," "Melrose Place," "Friends," and "Girls." The comedian Aziz Ansari has described it as the "dicking around and having brunch stage."

Paul Groth, a professor of urban geography at the University of California, Berkeley, told me, "In the nineteenth century, the single person was sort of a social problem. What do

you do with a single person?" In cities, the solution was the boarding house, often run by a matron, who served meals family style and might scold you if you got home too late. In 1842, one resident, Walt Whitman, declared that Americans, or at least New Yorkers, were "a boarding people": "Married men and single men, old women and pretty girls, mariners and masons, cobblers, colonels, and counter-jumpers, tailors and teachers; lieutenants, loafers, *ladies*, lackbrains, and lawyers; printers and parsons . . . all 'go out to board.' "

As a new, mobile workforce flooded into cities, demanding more freedom, boarding houses were largely replaced by cheap hotels designed for long-term stays. Groth said, "As late as 1930, maybe one housing unit in ten was some variation of a residential hotel." The Barbizon, a women's-only establishment at Lexington Avenue and Sixty-third Street, opened in 1927, when large numbers of women were beginning to work outside the home. To its guests, the Barbizon offered closet-size rooms and lavish shared facilities: a beauty parlor, a swimming pool, a sun deck, Turkish baths, a coffee shop, squash and badminton courts, a solarium, and a roof garden. To their parents, it offered the assurance of respectability: chaperones roamed the hallways, and men were not allowed above the first floor. Sylvia Plath, a resident in the nineteen-fifties, featured the Barbizon in "The Bell Jar," where it appears as the Amazon, a hotel for rich young women who "were all going to posh secretarial schools."

By the nineteen-sixties, hotel life had given way to the new dream: a place of one's own. In the sitcom "That Girl," which premièred in 1966, Marlo Thomas played an aspiring actress, Ann Marie, who moves to New York to try to make it while working a series of odd jobs: waitress, department-store elf. In the show's second episode, a friendly doorman helps her move into her own apartment. Standing on the threshold, she announces, "I'm my own occupant!" Like Ann Marie, young women seized one-bedrooms near First and Second Avenues, which became known for singles bars and "stew zoos"—buildings packed with female flight attendants. The inaugural issue of *Cosmopolitan* called the neighborhood "The Girl Ghetto": "Thousands upon thousands of single girls flock to the upper East Side, cramming themselves into small apartments, subsisting on an apple and a quart of diet soda a day, waiting for a telephone to ring and having a mad, wonderful time."

In "Going Solo," from 2012, the sociologist Eric Klinenberg describes how these trends persisted, leading to our current state of affairs: a third of households in New York consist of one person. Klinenberg told me that, based on his surveys, "most people who can

afford it want and feel great pride in getting a place of their own."

These days, however, the most popular cities—notably New York and San Francisco—are mired in a housing crisis, the result of fifty years of underbuilding combined with the desire of wide-eyed youngsters to move to them. A modern Ann Marie would have a hard time finding her own place in Manhattan, where the average studio apartment goes for between two thousand and three thousand dollars. Instead, she would probably spend a few weeks couch surfing, perusing Craigslist postings inviting her to "Share My Apartment" and rent a "Great Room for a Girl."

The proposed solutions to the housing crisis are endless: more zoning (so that luxury apartments don't take over the city); less zoning (so that developers are encouraged to build more); micro-apartments (a tower of three-hundred-square-foot units is currently being leased in Kips Bay). Adam Neumann, the co-founder and C.E.O. of WeWork, told me, "The future is more expensive and less room! That's just a fact." Co-living is about rejiggering our expectations.

In marketing to its first members, Hargreaves said, Common hoped to include people from different age groups and professions. "We didn't want it to just be housing for the tech industry." Many applicants have come from overseas, because foreigners have a hard time renting from New York landlords, who usually require credit and background checks. (Common uses other methods, like bank accounts or paycheck stubs, to evaluate tenants.) And yet tech workers predominate.

Chavez, the house leader, had a theory about co-living, borrowed from a music lesson she learned in high-school band. "You need balance, patterns, and timing," she said. Balance: "There needs to be a balance between the company defining what the community is and taking suggestions from the group." Patterns: "Things need to be consistent." Timing: "Three months—it's still pretty chaotic. At six months, you start seeing what people are drawn to."

In January, I attended a cheese-themed Sunday "potluck dinner" at the brownstone on Pacific Street. The offerings included mozzarella sticks and cheese-stuffed peppers. In February came an event called a Pecha Kucha, co-organized by Mike Walsh, in which each person presented a slide show with twenty pictures. The prompt was "Describe something you love." Everyone crowded around a projector in the basement, and Chavez gave a talk on pancakes. "It's my passion," she said. "I'm the one setting the fire alarm off

making pancakes on the second floor, in case you haven't noticed."

The floors had different personalities, which were, to a large degree, shaped by the amount of turnover they experienced. The fourth floor was the most transient. The third floor, which included Kennedy and Thorne, the college student, was more of a party floor. (Thorne was becoming a kind of house pet. "We all make fun of him for being young," a member told me.)

The second floor, whose residents were all women, was known for its domestic rituals. "People are always cooking and making tea," Chavez said. On Monday nights, the women watched "The Bachelor" together. Lauren, a thirty-one-year-old lawyer, had left a one-bedroom apartment on the Upper East Side. (Rent: twenty-four hundred dollars.) "I wanted to know what it would be like to have people be there when I get home," she told me.

The gender ratio at Common tilts male. Lauren offered a few theories about why women might be reluctant to move in: concerns about safety in Crown Heights (which she hadn't found to be a problem), and the fact that they tend to move in groups. "I think often with girls it's hard to do things on their own."

On the first floor, Schrage and Pirajan, the city-shopping designer, liked to go out to bars. Walsh, the former mascot, was more business-oriented. "We go to startup events together, like tech stuff," Schrage told me. The fourth suitemate, Steven She, was a thirty-one-year-old software engineer from Toronto. Schrage said, "He got a girlfriend after, like, a month." She met his girlfriend on the dating app Coffee Meets Bagel. He liked living in Common, he told me. But, he said, "having *any* roommates makes it a little more difficult with a girlfriend, which is why I ended up spending more time at her place."

"I think the neighborhood's not the best thing to tell women," Schrage said, claiming that some potential dates had dropped him on Tinder, assuming that he couldn't afford a more expensive area.

Pirajan said, "I explain that I share an apartment with three other guys and a building with eighteen people. They always ask the same question: 'Do you have your own bathroom?' " He'd noticed that the single people often reacted badly, and that the people who seem really interested are engaged or living with someone as a couple. "They're, like, 'Oh, this is like living in a dorm with your friends!' They always ask me to invite them if I

throw a party."

Not long ago, I stopped by the headquarters of WeWork to talk to Adam Neumann about WeLive. There seemed to be a hint of curiosity and rivalry between members of the two buildings. "A couple of us went and checked out WeLive," Lauren told me. "From what I saw, it seems like that's way more of a 24-7 party atmosphere." A WeWork employee lived briefly at Common, and Hargreaves told me, half joking, "We think he was a spy."

WeWork started as a co-working company, leasing office space and converting it into a trendy zone for startups and itinerant laptop workers, complete with arcade games and beer on tap. It is now used by organizations ranging from General Electric to Lululemon. The company has an app, which its more than fifty thousand members can use to network; it hosts events like "mixology labs" and offers accounting services. WeWork has raised more than a billion dollars from Fidelity and other investment banks, part of which it plans to use to branch out into co-living. Within three years, WeLive expects to have 10.3 million square feet of real estate, housing thirty-four thousand people.

Neumann is a tall Israeli with flowing black hair and a strong accent. His T-shirt read, "Do What You Love." As a teen-ager, in Israel, he spent several years living on a kibbutz. "The joy I felt living on a kibbutz!" he said. "My parents were divorced, it was a tough time in my life. The fulfillment I felt being part of a community was so real, gave me so much strength to deal with my own personal challenges, that it's always been ingrained in me that being together is better than being alone." At nineteen, he moved to New York to study entrepreneurship at Baruch College. He lived in the financial district with an older sister, who was a model. Neumann recalled, "I said to my sister, 'Something really weird has happened. Every time I take the elevator with other people no one says hello to me.' " He went on, "I said to her, 'Let's play a game.' " The game was to knock on the door of every apartment in the building and try to wrangle an invitation for coffee. After they met everyone, he said, "the building changed." It became a community. "I saw how excited everyone was getting about it, and I was, like, 'Wow! This is what I should do here.' It was called Concept Living."

Neumann imagined the New York City apartment building as a kind of urban colony. His plan was rejected by judges in a business-school competition, but, with the success of WeWork, he's bringing it back, with some tweaks. In WeLive buildings, the apartments come in different configurations. You can rent a suite with up to four bedrooms, for ten thousand dollars a month, or a one-bedroom apartment, for less than four thousand

dollars.

Unlike those at Common, WeLive apartments have their own bathrooms and kitchens. The shared amenities on each floor are a bonus: they include a terrace with multiple hot tubs, a "chef's kitchen," and a copious supply of beer on tap. For the tightest spaces, WeLive is designing eight types of "nooks"—podlike enclosures, with a bed, air-conditioning, and a sound system—that allow you to get away from your roommate. The idea is to provide everyone with both privacy and a "social layer"—"If they want to, they can be alone, but if they don't want to they will never be alone in their life!" Neumann said.

The first WeLive building, at 110 Wall Street, only recently opened to the public, and some residents are WeWork employees. The hallways are painted in bright greens and purples and furnished with thrift-store-style furniture. Decorations include framed album covers—Taylor Swift, the Postal Service—and posters with jokey slogans created by the company's design staff: "Home Is Where Your Pants Are Off," "Home Is Where Pizza Gets Delivered," "Home Is Where the WiFi Is." It feels like stepping into Urban Outfitters' Instagram feed.

I visited the studio apartment of a twenty-five-year-old WeWork employee named Kley. The four-hundred-and-fifty-square-foot space contained a kitchenette, a couch, and a bathroom, and two beds, tucked into nooks. A flat-screen TV played "Morning Joe." Kley, who wore a white polo shirt and red pants, told me that he's from Greenville, South Carolina. "I'd always loved the hustle and ambition of the city," he said. He'd come North with a thousand dollars in cash—"I thought that was a lot"—and wound up in Bed-Stuy, living in a hostel. He then moved into a series of informal barracks in the West Village, packed with young men toiling in the lower levels of finance and P.R.

The WeLive room had come "eighty-five per cent" furnished, which he appreciated. "Frankly, no one under the age of thirty has the capital to drop ten grand and get everything from West Elm that actually makes your home look beautiful," he said. "It's easy to make it your own with a few little touches." He'd added a shelf of books ("The Power Broker"), Mason jars filled with pasta on the kitchenette shelves ("to show that I cook"), and some flags above the bed in his nook.

He showed me the building's communal spaces, which included a "whiskey lounge" (an empty bar area), a laundry room-arcade with a Ping-Pong table, and a "flex" space, where a yoga class was running through poses. In one corner was a feature called the Corner

Store: shelves of products, like laundry detergent and Listerine, that members could pay for using the WeLive app. Dance music was being piped in through hidden speakers. Kley took out his phone and changed it to "I'm in a Hurry," by Alabama.

The contrast between Common and WeWork reminded me of the difference between Brooklyn and Manhattan. Common was domestic, with hints of pseudo-bohemianism. WeWork was slicker, with shades of Wall Street. (I sensed a culture clash when Kennedy, from Common, described spending a Friday night at WeWork: "It was total 'bro.' Like, dudes in tank tops drinking beer.")

In the communal kitchen, where platters of yogurt parfaits and breakfast burritos had been set out, members were streaming in after the yoga class. One of them didn't seem to fit the demo: Joe Leggio, WeWork's chief information officer. Leggio, who is fifty and married, with two kids, lives in Long Island. He was renting a WeLive studio as a Manhattan crash pad, for late nights at the office. "It's been fun," he said. "You don't have to do anything. You just bring your clothes."

Co-living skeptics doubt its long-term appeal. "It's like a shiny penny," Malin, the president of Citi Habitats, said. "The excitement's going to wear off." After six months in Common, Kennedy told me, the novelty had faded: "Now it's just, like, this is where I live. This is my home." (The founders of both Common and WeLive told me that, ultimately, they hope to build co-living facilities that are designed for people with families: instead of whiskey bars, the shared zones will include playrooms.) Kennedy was, however, wondering how Common's culture would change with the opening of the Williamsburg building. "There's no way that you can be friends with all the people in every house," he said. "I wonder what will happen. Will the community start shrinking into individual houses? Will there be networks? Boroughs?"

The Williamsburg property has a different aesthetic from the Crown Heights brownstone, according to Wilkinson, Common's design director. "It's much more minimalist," she said. "It has more of an industrial, exposed-cement vibe." Hargreaves noted that it also incorporates "learnings" from the first venture: rooms for couples, with a private bathroom, entrances and exits designed so that you don't have to chitchat with roommates when you don't want to, fewer tchotchkes. "People wanted to do more of their own decoration," he said. It will not include the most requested feature: a hot tub. Common's Crown Heights members had first dibs on the rooms, and many are relocating, including Chavez, who wants to try out a new neighborhood, and She, who wants to be

closer to his girlfriend.

Jeremy Schrage is moving to WeLive, on Wall Street. "It was about wanting to be in Manhattan," he told me, sounding a bit guilty. "That was the main thing. And getting my own place." He'd signed up for a studio "plus," which goes for about three thousand dollars a month. He said that he felt "apprehensive" about the move. "I have really strong relationships in Common."

Late one night, after the Pecha Kucha presentation, I followed Schrage and his suitemates back to their first-floor common room. Pirajan changed into plaid pajama pants and flip-flops. Walsh sank into an armchair, and Schrage curled up on the couch. (Steven She was at his girlfriend's apartment.)

Schrage said, "We had a night where it was the three of us and Steven and Lauren were here. We were laughing hysterically."

"We were screaming and chanting until 1 a.m.," Pirajan said. "We didn't even drink!"

I brought up the television version of their lives: "Friends" and "The Real World."

"I don't think this is anything like that," Schrage said. "People want you to tell them there's crazy orgies going on!"

Walsh said, "We come home from work and watch 'Broad City' and TED videos."

Schrage added, "Lying on Fatboy beanbags."

So, nothing like "The Real World"?

"No," Schrage said. "This is just real life." ♦