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## Florida by Subway

BY CONSTANCE ROSENBLUM

KATHERINE WAI CHAN and Jimmy Louie, who started dating as college students in Ohio in the late 1990s, began their life together in distinctly unprepossessing quarters.

In January 2003, Ms. Chan moved into Mr. Louie's bachelor pad, a one-bedroom apartment in a single-family house in Little Neck, Queens. Its awkward shape reminded Mr. Louie of those oddly configured electoral districts drawn to accommodate a particular political constituency.

"What's the word, gerrymandered?" Mr. Louie wondered aloud the other day as he searched for the right way to describe the setting for that chapter of his life.

At the time, both members of the couple had steady jobs. Mr. Louie worked as an administrator at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy; Ms. Chan was trained in museum administration and was working at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum while attending the Bank Street College of Education.

And like many young couples starting out, they dreamed of living in their own home once they were married.

One summer weekend in 2004, when Mr. Louie's wife-to-be was on a cruise in Alaska with her parents, he discovered through a newspaper ad what seemed like the perfect place, a pastel town house near the boardwalk in Rockaway, Queens.

Well, perfect-ish. At that point, the house existed largely in the mind of the developer of Arverne by the Sea, a community of 2,300 two-family homes and condominiums rising in stages on the Rockaway Peninsula.

That summer weekend, Mr. Louie visited the development with his parents. The Sands, the first of six planned neighborhoods, was already under construction, and he was blown away by what he saw.

"I thought, wow, it's like Florida," he said of the expanse of houses just steps from the water. "It was definitely unique for New York City."

On the drawing board was the second planned neighborhood, called Palmers Landing, a collection of 121 two-family houses in tan, gray or lemon yellow with white trim and bright green front doors. Although ground had not yet been broken, Mr. Louie and his future wife eagerly returned two months later to do the paperwork to buy a \$525,000 three-story house containing three bedrooms and a rental apartment.

The moment was thrilling and slightly terrifying.

"My head was spinning a little bit," Mr. Louie admitted. Ms. Louie added, "He did look a little pale."

The developers promised that the house would be ready for occupancy by fall 2005, safely in advance of their wedding the following January. But the wedding came and went, the pile of wedding gifts in their apartment reached the ceiling, and the house by the sea remained a lovely but elusive dream.

Not until March 2007 was the house ready to welcome them. By that July Ms. Louie, now 32, was pregnant with the



KIRSTEN LUCE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

**FORECAST: SANDCASTLES** Andrew Louie and his parents, Jimmy and Katherine, live in Rockaway, Queens.

couple's son, Andrew, who is 21 months old.

Although many design elements were standard-issue, the couple requested various changes to make the place their own, among them recessed lighting in the living room and a wood floor rather than carpeting in the kitchen. They also painted, an undertaking that was not without drama, particularly when it came to the living room, where what they hoped would be a rich Merlot started off as an anemic-looking pink.

"It took us five coats to get the shade we wanted," Ms. Louie admitted. "Believe me, it was a learning experience."

Her husband, 33, described the experience another way: "Never again will we go so dark."

For the nursery, which was painted before the baby was born, the choice was turquoise.

"I figured the blue had enough green so it would work for either sex," Ms. Louie explained. The walls complement the soft blues in the flowered patchwork quilt on the daybed, a quilt she had when she was a teenager.

Along with family hand-me-downs, furnishings include a bedroom set from West Elm (\$2,300), a blue and white print comforter from Crate & Barrel (bought with gift cards from the wedding) and, in the living room, a chocolaty leather sofa and loveseat from Raymour & Flanigan (\$2,100). And the spaces are arranged to ensure that everyone has his or her patch of turf.

Along one wall of the living room march a 50-inch television ("That's for me," Mr. Louie said), the baby's playpen, and a metal crate for Achilles, the family beagle. The kitchen is Ms. Louie's preserve, home to an array of appliances including a rice steamer (both the Louies are Chinese-American, and Chinese dishes like ma-pao tofu are among Ms. Louie's specialties), an ice cream maker and a crème brûlée set.

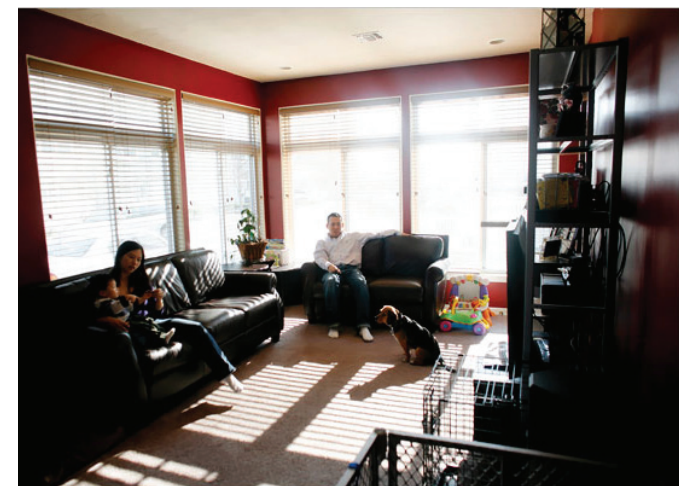
The storage space is so generous that the couple can stock up on items like diapers by the hundreds, a considerable benefit in a neighborhood in which shopping generally involves hopping into a car. And like so many New Yorkers who are enamored of even the tiniest scrap of outside space, the Louies feel lucky to have both a fenced-in back yard — nice for both baby and dog — and a third-floor deck.

The deck, which faces the ocean and is furnished with redwood chairs from Wal-Mart Online and a charcoal grill ("I'm old school," Mr. Louie explained),

is their favorite part of the house, except on the days a caller using a loudspeaker announces the winning numbers of the outdoor bingo games at the high-rise across the street.

Much as the Louies relish their role as first-time owners, there are a few things they wish they could change about the neighborhood. They miss having interesting restaurants nearby, and the closest subway is a 10-minute walk.

For someone like Mr. Louie, who works in Manhattan near



**WATER VIEWS** Jimmy and Katherine Louie live with Andrew in a new two-family newar the boardwalk. Outdoor spaces include a deck and a backyard.

the Time Warner Center, the commute can be punishing. "It's 90 minutes door to door to my office," he said. "And that's if nothing goes wrong."

They'll be glad when a new Stop & Shop opens its doors three blocks away.

But the Louies like being among other young families in a suburblike setting. As Ms. Louie, who comes from Cincinnati, pointed out: "I'm from Ohio. I'm a suburban girl."

And as the parents of a small child, the Louies are grateful to live in a tranquil corner of the city.

"I'm a member of the block watch," Mr. Louie said. "But it's a pretty quiet neighborhood. So mostly it's just a bunch of guys getting together, drinking beer and eating doughnuts and talking sports."

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