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# The New York Times

Late Edition

New York: Today, becoming cloudy, cool, showers late. High 69. Tonight, light rain. Low 54. Tomorrow, drizzle, then brightening. High 63. Yesterday, High 74, low 54. Details are on page 42.

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Real Estate Offerings

## The New York Times Real Estate

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Section 9

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Habitats/130 West 78th Street

### A Couple's New Home Already Houses Memories

They saw it, got engaged and married there, then bought it.

By TRACIE ROZHON

THEY met at Club Getaway. They became engaged on the stoop of the house they dreamed of buying. They got married in the front parlor of the house — four months before they bought it.

"You see, there was my best friend, and her guy was Marc's best friend growing up," said Dr. Iris Vardy Strauss, a very athletic orthodontist. "At one point, I'd actually been on the Getaway staff — you know, it's that 'weekend camp for adults' up in Connecticut — teaching mountain climbing and rollerblading. But one weekend, Memorial Day weekend last year, I was there as just a guest."

"We met on a Friday," said Marc Strauss, a very athletic wholesale food distributor. "I followed her to the tennis courts on Saturday. We'd actually met once before — I remember thinking she was a very sweet girl."

"They say you're in the presence of the right people all the time," said Dr. Vardy Strauss, a petite 32-year-old woman with very long blonde hair. "You just have to find the right time."

"Gee, that's really good — I've never heard that before," said Mr. Strauss, 33, sitting up to his new bride and patting her arm.

"So they met at the singles camp, and by the second day, Mr. Strauss said, he was in love."

"We spent all day playing sports," he said. "We found we were big athletes. Now we rollerblade all over Manhattan; we wear mirrors on our wrists."

One day when they were rollerblading around, almost 20 blocks from where Dr. Vardy Strauss had her office, at Central Park West and 97th Street, they shot past West 78th Street and stopped. They saw the tree-lined block between Amsterdam and Columbus, right near the American Museum of Natural History. They saw P.S. 87, one of the best public schools in the city. And most important, they saw the house at 130 West 78th Street — the one with the For Sale sign on it.

"So I memorized the telephone number, and then we called, and finally, we bopped over to the real estate office," said Dr. Vardy Strauss. "I'm an orthodontist and you want the best place. You want to be on



West 78th Street because of the school, the tree-lined block; most homes here are individually owned, just like a suburban block."

"It's not because of Iris's orthodontics business that we like the school so much," Mr. Strauss added. "It's because we want to have children, and it'd be tremendous to come in and see Mommy after school."

When she found out the asking price of the house — \$975,000 — Dr. Vardy Strauss said, she winced.

That night, she said to Mr. Strauss — she'd now known him two weeks — "Can I tell you my dream? I'd like to have that house and have my practice on the ground floor."

"And he said, 'Then my dream is to buy it for you,'" she continued, beaming.

After that, things heated up even more. Although he was living in Englewood, N.J., and working in the Bronx, Mr. Strauss bought a full year's membership at the Equinox Health Club, at 77th Street and Amsterdam, right near the 78th Street house. "I'm a gym rat and I knew I'd be spending a lot of time around here," he said.

They finally made an appointment to see the inside of the house on Oct. 20. They had an accepted offer for \$850,000 on Nov. 2. Two days later, on the stoop, he asked her to marry him.

"Iris's practice has grown to the point



Photographs by Carol Mathias for The New York Times

Marc and Dr. Iris Vardy Strauss in their West 78th Street brownstone. The couple became engaged on its stoop, above.

where she needed more space," he said, sounding like a business manager. "She only has one chair where she was, and she's going to have four chairs."

The couple were very tough negotiators, according to Dexter Guerrieri, who owns Vandenberg Real Estate, the company with the listing on the four-story brownstone.

"Typically, people who want to buy a house have the engineers in, maybe the architects — these people had the florists come in, the caterers. Here they were at the contract signing. They'd agreed on the price, and then they spent hours hammering out the agreement to be married in the front parlor" before the sale was completed.

"The lawyers kept saying: 'What's the big deal — it's just a minor point,'" Mr. Strauss said. "But we had to let him know it was not a minor point to us."

In the end, the problem came down to insurance. The couple wanted more than 100 people in the house for the New Year's Day wedding, and wanted use of the house for rehearsals for several days before.

"We ended up with their buying insurance for the year — it was about a third the price of buying insurance for one day," said Mr. Guerrieri.

It was good they went ahead and got married. Because the building's certificate of occupancy had vanished from the Department of Buildings' files, the actual closing did not take place until four months later, on May 1.

In the meantime, the couple went on rollerblading up and down the streets around the house, meeting, they say, the most interesting people. They met the man destined to become their architect, who was working on his own house on the same block, and they promptly invited him to the wedding.

Then it turned out that an old friend of Dr. Vardy Strauss's, an artist known professionally as Linus, had done the mural on the front of P.S. 87 — and he promised to do another mural on the ceiling of her clinic.

"I mean, there's such good energy here," she said.

Now that they've bought the house, they're going to start fixing it up, and Dr. Vardy Strauss is adamant: Whoever is chosen as contractor, they will start next week — and be out in a month.

Following her plans, the whole ground floor is to be an orthodontics office, with a video camera and a buzzer out front. "For the kids' safety," she said. The apartment the real estate agents called the "owners' duplex" takes up the first floor and half of the second. They will rent that out now "because we need to pay the mortgage," she said. The second-floor studio will be rented out, and there are currently two rent-stabilized tenants living in studios on the fourth floor.

That leaves the two studios on the third floor for the Strausses, who will combine the two to make a spacious one-bedroom apartment with a small but scenic deck off their bedroom in the back.

The house is perfect, they say. "Once we got engaged on the stoop and married in the parlor, we knew we'd have to live it," he said.

"Besides," she said, with a shake of her very long hair, "if we hadn't bought it, there'd be no story." ■