

Finding Home

Working with Rena Spangler

BY ELLEN DONKER



This special house offers a tranquil view of South Mountain Reservation as well as a stunning panorama of New York City.

Jeff Travia and Isaac Tay had never owned a home before. They were city dwellers who had spent the past 10 years renting in Manhattan. Recently, they decided that it was time for a larger home where they could enjoy simple pleasures like grilling, relaxing in their own outdoor space and hiking.

“We love the city, but we really wanted some open space,” Travia says. “So it was either going to be find a place in the city with a little more space in a backyard or do the whole weekend home thing.” The couple chose the latter and began scouting communities that offered an easy commute to their jobs in midtown – places like Brooklyn as well as towns along the train routes of Westchester County, Connecticut and New Jersey.

Eventually, they decided that Maplewood and South Orange offered the value they were looking for. Tay says, “I think in my heart I knew that this is a pretty cozy town....It really seemed tight-knit.” They toured many homes trying to get a sense of what they liked, but it was a place on Crestwood Drive in Maplewood that enchanted them. It backed up to the South Mountain Reservation and provided wonderful views and proximity to hiking.

Since the market was extremely competitive, the house sold immediately. Tay’s job was about to change so the timing wasn’t right for them anyway. But once he settled into his new position, he and Travia started their search in earnest. Although they hadn’t met Rena Spangler, they had kept her contact information as she had been the listing realtor from the Crestwood house. Tay says, “I told Jeff let’s just get that realtor...because she would know exactly what we want.”

With no “reservation houses” on the market, Tay says, “[Rena] actually knocked on a few doors of the neighbors asking residents if they were interested

in moving. I thought that was pretty special to go the extra mile and actually create a situation.” She also showed them many homes. Tay liked her approach. “She’s candid...she wasn’t trying to sell us and she would give helpful advice, so I valued that.”

After a time, a home came on the market that Spangler knew they’d love – a newly renovated 1955 split level that not only offered tranquil views of the reservation but a stunning panorama of New York City. Tay and Travia were sold. Spangler advised them on submitting a strong bid and the couple won the house. They credit Spangler for guiding them through the home-buying process and providing trusted resources that she’s honed over her long career. Just two months later, they were in the house.

The couple hasn’t needed to make any interior changes. “I think it appealed to us because we were first time homeowners and we wouldn’t know the first thing about major repairs,”



L-R: Jeff Travia and Isaac Tay are thrilled to be in a home that gives them easy access to the city and the outdoor space they were craving.



Rena Spangler helped Jeff Travia and Isaac Tay find a home that would be an easy transition from their city life.

Travia says. “So I think it seemed like an easier transition from a city life into homeownership.” Their only project involved moving a wall in the backyard to accommodate a table and grill as well as terracing an undeveloped hillside and adding an upper patio. Once again, Spangler provided a recommendation for a landscaper.

Having been settled in for about a year and a half, Travia still seems surprised by the beauty of the view. “You can see everything from Outerbridge Crossing up to the Time Warner Center. You can see the Statue of Liberty if you have binoculars. It’s magnificent. So to be able to sit in your backyard among fireflies, backing up to a 2,300-acre nature preserve and watching planes land at Newark Airport, with the backdrop of the Verrazano Bridge, is something that we haven’t seen elsewhere.”

Tay notes how well the home fits their lifestyle. “I think Rena probably knew before we did that we were looking for a more modern layout.” He adds, “People love visiting us and I love cooking for them so we entertain quite a bit and it’s easy. I think we lucked out.”