



Time Out New York

Apartments

House call



Studio (and terrace), Long Island City

Philip Roche visited New York City 16 years ago on a vacation and decided to stay forever.

By Kathryn Wilson

New Zealander Philip Roche has a hypothesis on how to make big bucks in real estate: “Follow the young, the poor artists and the gay people.” Fittingly, Roche, president of the landscaping company Plant Specialists (it operates out of the building’s courtyard), has watched his neighbors change from drug addicts and hookers to an event company (the Foundry, run by the DuVals, who bought the block’s real estate for half a million dollars in

the '80s), a wine warehouse (“There’s \$20 million worth of wine in the basement; if the world falls apart, I’m going downstairs and getting drunk.”), a bolero dance studio and a luxury boutique hotel (“They used to rent those rooms by the hour!”).

Roche had some time to get his 1,000-square-foot rental to his liking; he’s lived in the former ice cream factory since 1994. “My design style is minimalist with structure,” Roche says. A 1930s pool table is juxtaposed with an unfinished concrete wall, and an Ikea closet stands kitty-corner to a floral-patterned armchair. “There are two things I can’t get rid of: boyfriends and Victorian furniture,” he laughs. After three months of living with his partner, Doug, Roche caved and bought a Victorian wardrobe for him, and he inherited the chair—among other antiques—after his parents’ passing. If you look closely, you can spot a graffitied peace sign on the wall above the stairs from Doug’s 40th birthday party (the theme was '70s porn).



He shares the 3,000-square-foot rooftop terrace with Alison DuVal, the daughter of the building’s owners. It has a pergola and a ten-seat banquet table, and looks like the gardens of the High Line with wild grasses and various flowering plants. Something is always in bloom, providing the perfect background for Bobby Flay’s *Boy Meets Grill*. (Flay shoots there regularly and leaves behind a few Weber grills

for cookouts.) Not for TV is the smaller, 800-square-foot private garden. It’s not as grand as the first, but Roche decorated it in just one afternoon.



In the dining room, Roche has added the quirky touch of vintage candelabras, which his parents once used as coatracks. They now hold court on a dinner table that Roche commissioned for \$150 in Bali. He also nabbed two Buddhist or Hindu statues—he doesn't know which—from Indonesia, decorated with silver Mardi Gras beads. Roche's favorite piece is the apple-green leather chair with

brown suede buttons he bought from a Grange sample sale. When he needs a break from work, he'll come upstairs, lounge in that chair and watch his rolling flat-screen TV. Roche created the wheeled stand from planter boxes left over from a landscaping project, so he could watch television from his bed or the living room. Said television can also be viewed from the guest loft, accessible by a vintage library ladder. "New Zealanders and Aussies are eternal travelers. There's always someone here," he says. But if Roche is any testament, will they ever leave?



Why Long Island City?

"The apartment is great and has amazing views. Plus, it has a car park in the building," says Roche. "I can be at a client appointment on the Upper East Side from my desk in 20 minutes." Would he ever give it up and move? "I would possibly buy a small apartment in the city, but it would have to have an outdoor space."

His favorite restaurants

Aunt Rosie's Restaurant and Diner (4357 11th St between 44th Ave and 43rd Rd, 718-786-7759) "It's one of the few remaining traditional, old-fashioned NYC diners, and they have a great breakfast. Normally, I'll get eggs, a Greek omelette and home fries, or the grilled cheese with tomato and bacon. You know, the stuff that's really bad for you."

Manetta's Fine Foods (1076 Jackson Ave at 11th St, 718-786-6171) "An old LIC staple. Best spaghetti carbonara I've ever had!"

Jackson Avenue Steakhouse (1223 Jackson Ave between 48th Ave and 47th Rd; 718-784-1412, jacksonsteakhouse.com) "As good as any city steakhouse but much cheaper."

Five Star Punjabi (1315 43rd Ave at 13th, 718-784-7444) "It's been in the area for more than 20 years and is still inexpensive."

His favorite hangouts

Socrates Sculpture Park (32-01 Vernon Blvd at Broadway; 718-956-1819, socratessculpturepark.org) "I can take Snoop (his dog) off his leash. The views and art are just great."

Lounge 47 (4710 Vernon Blvd between 47th Rd and 47th Ave, 718-937-2044) “It’s a bit retro with a ’50s and ’60s interior. When I came to LIC there was nothing, and I walked down Vernon one day and found this.”

Noguchi Museum (9-01 33rd Rd at Vernon Blvd; 718-204-7088, noguchi.org) “We helped do the landscaping many years ago. The garden is a good spot to go to contemplate.”

