



THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

THE MEATBALL SHOP'S DAN HOLZMAN ON THE 6,000-SQUARE-FOOT PARTY PAD THAT GOT AWAY

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PropertyShark

For chef Dan Holzman, the apartment that got away was a 6,000-square-foot Williamsburg raw space

Native New Yorker Dan Holzman, the co-owner and chef of [the Meatball Shop](#), a restaurant chain with five city locations, grew up on the Upper East Side and began his cooking career at age 15 at [Le Bernardin](#).

At 18, while still living with his mother, he bought a motorcycle and knew she would either "kill him or be heartbroken," so he decided it was time to leave the nest.

It was the late '90s, and his best friend, Kon, was sharing an industrial loft on Manhattan Avenue and Maujer Street in Williamsburg with a few friends. Their mutual buddy, Moose, had found it two months before as a raw, vacant space, and it cost \$2,000 a month to rent. While they were adding walls and rooms to the space, Holzman crashed on Kon's bedroom floor for \$250 a month, since the other bedrooms were taken.

"There were two bedrooms upstairs and two downstairs in our 6,000-square-foot duplex," he says. "We had a living room the size of a basketball court which also had a stage. What we split up into four bedrooms could easily be made into 12."



Dan Holzman

After two months of sleeping on Kon's floor, Holzman figured he could pay \$400 to rent a small lofted area above the stage, though it wasn't even tall enough to stand up in.

Still, he had a blast living with friends and throwing wild parties.

"We had a large couch, a large TV and best of all a \$30,000 stereo system," he explains. "Two large dogs—I'm not sure if they were Rottweilers or Stafford terriers ... trolled the place until one, named Elvis, went nuts."

But the place was not without its drawbacks.

Holzman was perturbed he was paying the same amount as the others who had real bedrooms. When out-of-town guests visited, he'd meet them at the subway station because they were worried about how dangerous the area was.

Since they were "the only ones in the area with cable, the [biker gang on the block] would come over to watch Oz."

"Here we were in this polarized neighborhood filled with a mix of Italian Mafioso and immigrant Puerto Ricans... and then there was us: five young party guys," Holzman says.

After about seven months of the party lifestyle, Holzman decided to move west and onto a job at a restaurant called Napa in Las Vegas' Rio Hotel. He later moved to California and spent the next 15 years away from New York City.

When he returned five years ago, the chef, restaurateur and [cookbook author](#) observed first-hand how the area had changed, and he eagerly tried to find an apartment in that area.

"I knew that side of Williamsburg had gotten really gentrified because a friend had bought an apartment there," he says. "But I was hanging out with a girl at the time who asked me to visit her at her place in Bushwick and I recalled being scared of going there. When I lived in that loft there was a dividing line; Bushwick Avenue was a line you didn't cross."

Prices have gone up substantially, and he realized that while he thought it was crazy to pay \$2,000 for a five-way share in a bad area, they indeed had a bargain.

"I recently heard a friend looking at a studio in that same building for \$1,600 and talking about what a deal it was! If only I had stayed!"

Now 35, Holzman lives alone on Union Avenue and Grand Street in a railroad one-bedroom, where he's been living since 2009. While he can now stand up in his room completely, he does not pay \$400.