

The perfect apartment is out there

BY JANE HERMAN

You're a student in need of housing, but where to begin the search? There's an apartment out there that's perfect for you – but how do you find it?

Whether you are just starting out in school and need housing close to campus, or are finished school and looking for your first apartment as a "grown up," knowing what you're looking for can definitely simplify the process. Start by getting a small notebook in which to write down addresses, phone numbers, listings and websites.

1. Establish a budget

Before embarking on your search, establish a price range you can realistically afford. Financial experts generally recommend that your rent be no more than 25-30 per cent of your gross monthly income. Don't forget that you will have to put down a first-and-last-month's rent deposit with your application (security deposits are not allowed by law in Ontario).

2. Location

Define the area in which you want to live. At the outset, you may have more than one neighbourhood in mind, which is fine. As you progress through your search, various criteria will help you narrow down your options. Do you need to be close to public transportation or major highways? Do you like the ambience or character of a particular neighbourhood? How close do you want to be from particular school? What you can get in your price range will also have an impact on your decision.

3. Clarify your vision

Would you prefer to live in a highrise building – one that is six or more storeys, is likely situated on a main street, has one or more elevators, underground parking, on-premises laundry facility and superintendent, and sometimes, on-premises recreation facilities and/or other amenities? Or would you prefer a quieter, lowrise building, with fewer residents and amenities, that may be located on a quiet side street? Perhaps you envision yourself living in something that has the feel of a private house, such as a duplex or fourplex, that you can enter directly from the street. Or maybe you're just starting out, and like the simplicity and efficiency of a bachelor – or fantasize about living in an unconventional, spacious loft that's a bit out of the way. Knowing what you're looking for will help you to narrow down the options significantly as you wade through the "Apartments for Rent" ads.

4. Make a list of desirable/essential features and other details to note and carry it with you on your search, such as:

- # of bedrooms
- # of bathrooms
- Air conditioning or window sleeves where one can be added
- Balcony
- Cable
- Children (if applicable)
- Closets and storage (are they adequate for your requirements)
- Dishwasher
- Handicapped access
- Laundry facility
- Level of cleanliness (lobby, halls and common areas)
- Parking
- Pets
- Pool
- Smoking permitted
- Storage
- Superintendent

5. Search thoroughly

Use a variety of resources including Renters Guide (in print and at homeTRADER.ca) along with the Internet to ensure you consider all listings in your price range and preferred neighbourhood. Use the Internet to compare the location, features, prices and availability of different listings before you go to see the apartment in person. Walking around your neighbourhood of choice can often yield additional options, since not every apartment for rent is advertised in print or even on the Internet; many buildings just post "vacancy" signs in front of the building. You may discover a beautiful old gem of a building tucked away near a park or ravine. Sometimes, if you have your heart set on a particular building, and there is no "vacancy" sign outside, it may be worth trying to contact the superintendent as you could leave your name on a waiting list, or they may have an apartment coming up for rent just at the time you want to move in.

Finding the perfect apartment takes time and patience, but if you do your homework carefully you'll surely succeed!



Jane Herman is a communications consultant who has worked in the rental property industry. Her company, Jane Herman Communications (janeherman.ca) provides communications solutions for a diverse range of clients. Jane has written about food, fashion, apartment living and personal finance for several Toronto publications.