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## Sisters in Idiosyncrasy

By [NOAM COHEN](#)

EVE LEVINE, a 34-year-old real estate broker, recalls fondly the five years when she was, as she calls it, “low-cost bicoastal.” Her primary residence was in Brooklyn — first Williamsburg, then Bushwick and now Greenpoint — but she also had an apartment in the Fruitvale section of Oakland, Calif., that she visited for long stretches.

The apartment, actually a warehouse, was really big and inexpensive, she said. Friends paid the rent, but Ms. Levine said she could come back whenever she wanted, because they were friends.

In the fall of 2005, she severed ties to her West Coast warehouse.

“If you are trying to build something, whether a career or a bank account, you need to make a choice,” she said.

These days, she is a host of a gathering in Williamsburg called Home Buying for Hipsters, at which she explains the idea of Tenancy in Common, a form of ownership that enables people to combine their resources to buy a house jointly instead of just renting together. It is popular in the San Francisco Bay Area, she said, and she hopes to bring it to Brooklyn, where there is a similar pool of young people who have a history of sharing apartments through their 20’s.

“A lot of us are freelance,” said Ms. Levine, who in earlier life was a chef. “None of us work for a company for 30 years. We bounce from job to job.”

“Not to say that we are flaky,” she quickly added.

Between Brooklyn and [San Francisco](#), Ms. Levine said, there is “something sisterly.”

Much the way Hollywood people have shuttled between Los Angeles and Manhattan for decades, or academics commute on the Acela between Morningside Heights and Cambridge, Mass., there is a young, earnest population that is beating a path between artsy, gentrifying neighborhoods in Brooklyn and their counterparts in the Bay Area, especially East Oakland and the area south of Market Street in San Francisco, or SoMa.

Richard Florida, the author of “The Rise of the Creative Class,” which argues that urban renewal is sparked by high concentrations of high-tech workers, artists, gay men and lesbians, ranked San Francisco No. 1 on his “creativity index” and New York City No. 9. Although Mr. Florida did not break out data for Brooklyn, “anecdotally it has a large concentration of creative people who have moved from Manhattan and elsewhere,” he wrote in an e-mail message. “I am confident if such data existed, Brooklyn would do very well.”

He added that the populations drawn to both areas by alternative art and [music](#) scenes, and by a tolerance for diversity, were looking for a “messy urbanism, a clash of different styles that Brooklyn still retains, that the East Bay still retains.”

Other communities across the country also fit this bill, but what Brooklyn and the East Bay share is proximity to more cosmopolitan centers — Manhattan and San Francisco — where the “creative class,” many of whom are freelancers, can earn a living.

“You can make money in both cities,” Ms. Levine said. “Can you make money in Portland, Ore.? It’s a cool city, it’s got lots of hipsters, but can you make money?”

Roger Guenveur Smith, an actor who has been “flowing in and out” of the Bay Area and Brooklyn since the late 1980s, said the two areas are similar in the relationship that Brooklyn has to Manhattan, and Oakland and Berkeley have to San Francisco: one of interest and curiosity, but also independence.

Mr. Smith’s career includes the borough-defining Brooklyn movie “Do the Right Thing,” as well as a one-man show about Huey P. Newton, a founder of the Black Panther Party in Oakland. He describes the two places as the ultimate “idiosyncratic communities” in the United States.

[Dave Eggers](#), a writer and publisher, is another commuter on the Bay Area-Brooklyn shuttle. He relocated from the Bay Area a decade ago to create the McSweeney’s publishing empire in Brooklyn, then in 2002 moved McSweeney’s west and founded 826 Valencia, a children’s writing workshop, in the gritty Mission District of San Francisco. An offshoot, 826NYC, has taken root in Park Slope in Brooklyn.

The [Mark Morris Dance](#) Group is based at the [Brooklyn Academy of Music](#), but puts on more shows at Cal Performances at the University of California, Berkeley, its West Coast home since 2002.

IF there is an aesthetic credo to Brooklyn and the Bay Area, it is Do It Yourself, which connotes more than using an Allen wrench from Ikea. D.I.Y. can mean everything from wearing locally designed T-shirts to attending concerts staged in someone’s warehouse apartment, to riding a [bike](#) to work.

Several businesses that have opened in both Brooklyn and the Bay Area exemplify the aesthetic. One of them, Rare Device, a home furnishings and fashion store in Park Slope, sells felted throw pillows and “wildcrafted soap.”

Rena Tom, who opened the store after she followed her husband east from Oakland so he could study [architecture](#) at [Columbia University](#), said, “I asked where to move and they all said ‘Brooklyn, Park Slope.’ ” Eventually the couple relocated to San Francisco and she opened a second Rare Device on Market Street.

“We are cross-pollinating,” she said.

The Mollusk [Surf](#) Shop is also bicoastal. Its original outlet is in the Outer Sunset district of San Francisco, blocks from Ocean Beach. Last summer, a second Mollusk, selling hand-shaped surfboards, opened on Kent Avenue in Williamsburg.

Michael Macheimer, the manager in Brooklyn, said the San Francisco and Long Island surfing cultures had similarities. “In San Francisco, the weather is cloudy, cold, gray,” he said. “It’s the same here. Sure, we get

sunny days, but it is especially cloudy and gray in the winter, when we get our best waves.”

PEOPLE enjoy mapping connections between Brooklyn neighborhoods and those around the San Francisco Bay. Rob Reedy, who works for Chrome Bags in San Francisco, which makes accessories for bike messengers, said, “We live in SoMa, which is the Brooklyn of San Francisco.”

Meg Shiffler, who left Williamsburg two and half years ago to become the director of the gallery at the San Francisco Arts Commission, said, “East Bay to Brooklyn is the parallel.”

Cameron Marlow, a [Facebook](#) programmer in San Francisco, wrote in his blog about a friend who moved to New York and, after being shown apartments in Williamsburg, was surprised to find the neighborhood was not “cute.”

For the benefit of Bay Area readers, Mr. Marlow compared Williamsburg to the Mission District, an equally uncute neighborhood, with a large Hispanic population that has seen an influx of Mr. Florida’s “creative class.”

Even if it is easy to mock the uniformity of tastes in dress, music and haircuts of these newcomers, Mr. Florida, who is a business professor at Toronto University, is sympathetic. “I don’t want to blame the hipsters,” he said. “They are searching for places that are real and authentic. Many are isolated, many are alone. They were looking to avoid Generica. They were turned off by areas that had the same stores, Starbucks, etc.”

Danny Hoch, a Brooklynite, recently performed “Taking Over,” a one-man show about gentrification, at the Berkeley Rep Theater in California. “What I see as the reason for so many NYers having come to the Bay, and so many Bay folk moving to Bklyn (tens of thousands literally),” he wrote in an e-mail message, “is that each group has become accustomed to the alienation or perceived impossibility of staying where they are.”

Someone leaving Brooklyn for the Bay Area, he said, gets “a nicer climate, laid-back vibe, better produce, California’s nature close by, and a job scene where you feel more in demand as a NYer.”

The reverse, he said, is also true.

But Mr. Hoch predicted that the transience that allows people to hop between both places so fluidly would eventually lead them away.

“Although I think each side sees the other as an amazing place to live and spend time, neither sees it as a place to actually stay forever,” he wrote. “Both are nostalgic for home.”

“Each becomes the new ‘resident tourist,’ as I say in my play.”

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