

Scorpio? Forget about the room

Damiano Beltrami (September 25, 2008)



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A week before leaving for New York I talked on the phone with a friend who lives in the City. When asked, I confessed that I hadn't started looking for a room yet. "Are you crazy or something?" she shouted. "It takes ages to get a decent place on Craigslist." Having realized that she was very sensible to the issue, I showed my commitment by not asking what Craigslist was. Honestly, though, my one week of Craigslist house-hunting turned out to be more exciting than a Simpsons episode, a



quattro-formaggi pizza or even a school trip to Prague.

Looking online for an apartment in New York is not merely a way to find a room with a bed (at least the frame), a window (not just painted on the wall) and hopefully a closet. Looking online for an apartment in New York is like bumming around in an eccentric country. Forget about Italian handwritten post-its with a vague indication of the location of the apartment, the price of the rent and the telephone number of a fake tenant stuck on overcrowded university bulletin boards. These American ads are professionally edited, never-ending diplomatic treaties. They are maniacally compiled documents with perfectly pedantic lists of all the laundromats in a 10 mile radius.

The most interesting parts of the ads are not the room descriptions, but rather descriptions of the tenants and their ideal candidates. Take Jenny Matthews, a 20-year-old girl who wants to rent a \$1,325 room in Greenwich Village. She is not happy with just any individual who can pay the rent without causing trouble. She is looking for nothing less than a saint. "You should be a drama-free, responsible, down to earth, clean and respectful person. Someone who loves to go out but keeps the party outside the house. Someone who isn't noisy but is around. Someone who is around but isn't a couch potato."

Too selective? You must be joking. Some advertisers' main concern is your astrological sign. It doesn't matter whether you smoke weed, throw wild parties or are allergic to bathroom cleaning. If your sign is Scorpio, Cancer or Pisces, you're screwed. No water sign roommates allowed.

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