

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.



Gus Elliott and Jessica Feingold traded Denver for their ideal location—California's Orange County. Now they are moving again, this time to Florida. Michal Czerwonka for WSJ

## Meet the Homeowners Who Have Had Enough of Their Covid Relocation Dreams

**The pandemic inspired people across the country to seek more space or a dream destination. It didn't always work out.**

Gus Elliott and Jessica Feingold traded Denver for their ideal location—California's Orange County. Now they are moving again, this time to Florida. Michal Czerwonka for WSJ

Five years ago this month, Rebecca Goldberg Brodsky and her husband, Mitchell Brodsky, were working from home in a roughly 750-square-foot Brooklyn apartment with a baby, a toddler, and thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic, no child care.

By September 2020, they—along with people all over the country—had decided to leave their home in search of more space. They sold their two-bedroom Bay Ridge co-op for \$450,000 and moved to an expansive three-floor townhouse with a playroom in Princeton, N.J., a college town they liked for its restaurants and medical facilities.



Mitchell Brodsky and Rebecca Goldberg Brodsky with their children, Allen and Jane, outside their Carroll Gardens condo. PHOTO: LANNA APISUKH FOR WSJ

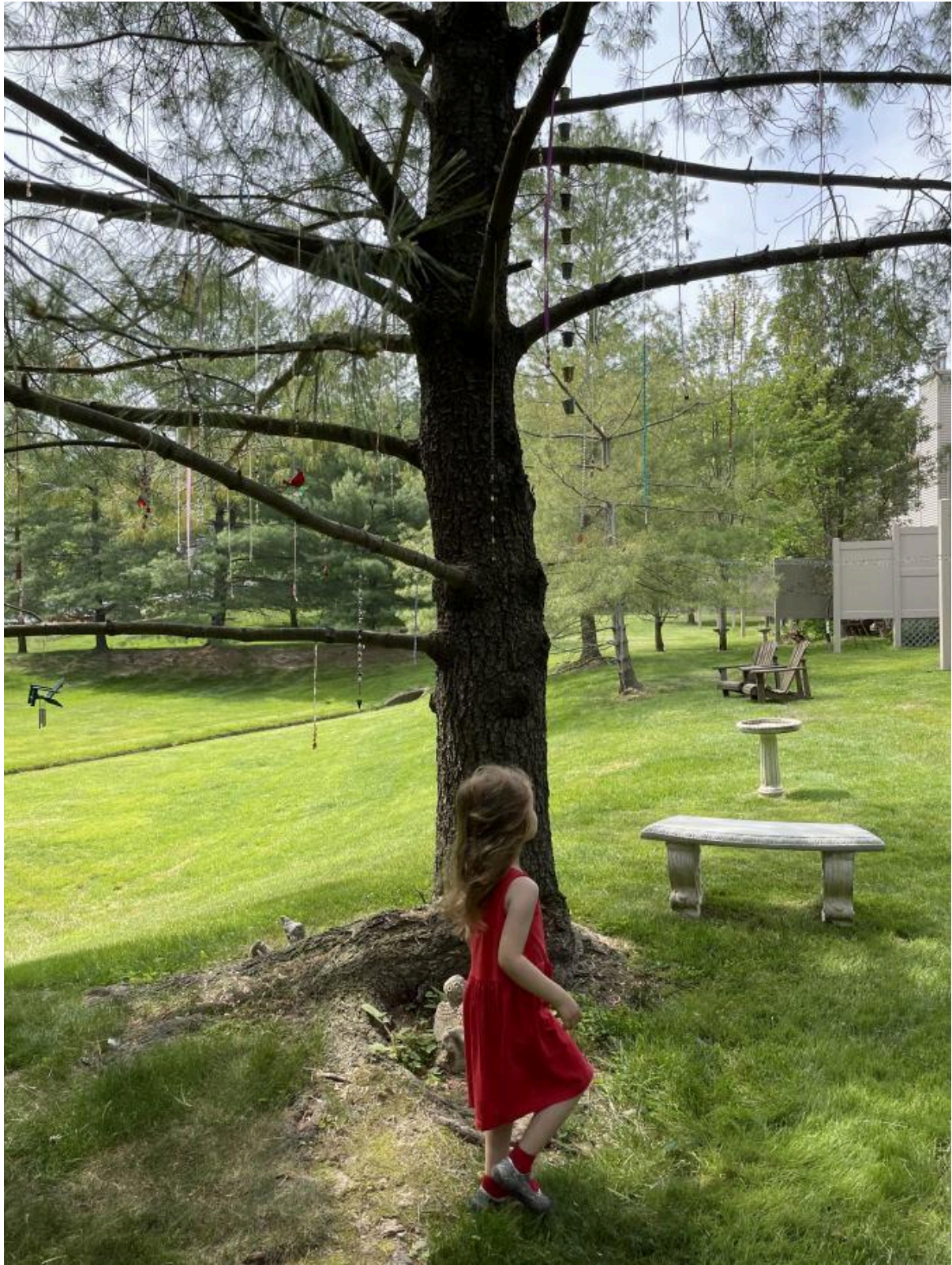
But things didn't go as planned. Even in a place she called "idyllic," Rebecca couldn't stop looking online at Brooklyn apartments. A year later, the couple reversed course, trading Princeton for a smaller condo back in Brooklyn.

"We lived a beautiful, sheltered life there for a year," said Rebecca. "The cicadas were always singing. I definitely cried when I left, but I was also like, 'I have to get out. I just do.'"













The Brodskys traded a 750-square-foot Bay Ridge apartment, left, for a New Jersey townhouse that was more than twice the size.

PHOTOS: LANNA APISUKH FOR WSJ; REBECCA GOLDBERG BRODSKY (2)

It's a familiar story for those who lived through the pandemic. When professionals across the country were sent home from their offices, many took the opportunity to relocate, choosing places they had dreamed of living or where they could afford more space. Five years later, however, many have moved again, either returning to their original locations or starting from scratch. While some were called back to the office when Covid receded, others found that their new homes weren't what they expected, had trouble making friends or grappled with the realities of extreme weather and long commutes.





Jane Brodsky, 7, practices gymnastics in the family's new condo, while Allen Brodsky, 5, does a headstand. PHOTO: LANNA APISUKH FOR WSJ



Rebecca makes a snack for her daughter. PHOTO: LANNA APISUKH FOR WSJ

“The pandemic accelerated many relocations,” said Karen Gastiaburo, sales director of Platinum Properties in New York City. “But now we are seeing a recalibration as people reassess what truly aligns with their long-term needs and lifestyle.”

The Brodskys moved back to Brooklyn in September 2021, this time to Carroll Gardens. Rebecca, the 40-something co-founder of the public-relations firm Dada Goldberg, and Mitchell, who works in information technology, paid roughly \$1.1 million for a two-bedroom condo. Their new home is about 700 square feet smaller than their Princeton apartment, which had cost \$3,000 a



month. To help maximize the space, they have a Murphy bed in the primary bedroom.









In their new Brooklyn home, the Brodskys maximize the space with a bunkbed for the kids and a Murphy bed for the adults.

PHOTOS: LANNA APISUKH FOR WSJ

Rebecca had to take on more clients to afford the condo, but she feels it was worth it. “I couldn’t deal with life in the suburbs,” she said; she missed the constant motion of the city. Now that she’s back in Brooklyn, “I really feel like I escaped prison.”

The Brodskys aren’t the only family to return to New York City after the pandemic.

In 2020, Michael and Jana Porter left Manhattan to take care of her mother in Jana’s hometown of Kansas City, Mo. Michael can do his job in the tech

industry remotely, and the couple were open to staying in Kansas City. But Jana, an academic librarian, couldn't find a job there. Instead, she ended up taking a position at Bronx Community College in November 2024, and the two have moved back to New York City. They are paying \$4,300 a month for a two-bedroom rental at the Inwood apartment building Forty Six Fifty.







Michael and Jana Porter, pictured in Manhattan in March, recently moved back to New York City, where they live in the Forty Six Fifty apartment building in Inwood.

PHOTOS FROM LEFT: ANA CIFUENTES; KEVIN CHU







In 2020, the Porters left their Manhattan apartment building, right. At left is their apartment building in Kansas City.

PHOTOS: JANA AND MICHAEL PORTER

“We didn’t hate Kansas City,” Jana said. “We were starting to make friends, and it was kind of hard to leave.” Though their new Inwood apartment is smaller than their Kansas City two-bedroom, they are enjoying Broadway musicals and feel that New York is a much better fit for them.



Many Americans who left large cities during the pandemic headed to suburbs, small cities and rural areas. Since then, net migration outflow from big cities has tapered off, returning to the prepandemic trend of suburbanization, said Riordan Frost of the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University. New York had one of the country's largest net outflows of residents during the pandemic, but the number of people leaving the state is now below prepandemic levels.

Dr. Edward Lipson, a 76-year-old retired pediatrician, and his wife, retired immigration lawyer Ann Lipson, sold their longtime home in California's Santa Cruz mountains for about \$1.765 million in March 2020. They settled outside Portland, Ore., a city Edward had romanticized for its active downtown areas, outdoorsy lifestyle and moderate climate. In April 2020, the Lipsons paid about \$1.3 million for a house in Lake Oswego, an area just south of Portland that attracted many people relocating during the pandemic.



Edward and Ann Lipson sold their Soquel, Calif., house for about \$1.765 million in March 2020. PHOTO: PHOTO: LIPSON FAMILY











The Lipsons bought a house outside Portland, Ore., for about \$1.3 million in April 2020.

PHOTOS: POWERPICS

But it wasn't what they hoped. They weren't happy with the social unrest and protests they saw in the area, and they experienced heat waves, ice storms and threats of wildfires. "The weather was nuts," Ann said.

Just over a year later, they sold their Lake Oswego house for \$1.65 million and returned to California. In March 2022 they spent \$1.915 million on a four-bedroom Craftsman in Pacific Grove, about 40 miles south of their previous California home.









The Lipsons, shown on the beach near their Pacific Grove home, bought a Craftsman about 40 miles from their previous California town.

PHOTOS: LIPSON FAMILY

“If we had to do it all over again—had we known what we knew later—we would probably have stayed right where we were,” said Ann.

The Lake Oswego area gained residents for most of the pandemic, but Multnomah County, where downtown Portland is located, lost thousands of residents each year in 2021, 2022 and 2023, according to census data.

PANDEMIC REAL ESTATE



## **They Bought and Sold Homes During Covid. Was It Worth It?**

Home prices in the Portland area grew at the beginning of the pandemic due to low inventory, according to real-estate agent Charles Turner of Portland's Lovejoy Real Estate. Prices jumped about 35% between the second quarter of 2020 and the same period of 2022, according to the U.S. Federal Housing Finance Agency. But in the following two years, as demand in the area slowed, prices stayed roughly steady, said Turner.

Housing markets in a number of former Covid boomtowns—including Nashville, Tenn., Phoenix and Austin, Texas— [suffered](#) as the pandemic receded. Home prices in Austin, for instance, rose 60% between 2020 and 2022, but had fallen 11% by mid 2024. More recently, every major metropolitan area in the U.S. has seen home-price increases, suggesting that many housing markets are returning to normal after Covid, Frost said.

While some people have returned to their pre-Covid locations, others are trying out new destinations.



In 2022, Jessica Feingold and her husband, Gus Elliott, traded their Denver home for their dream destination—California’s Orange County. They had been living in Denver with their young son, Nash, for Feingold’s work as a lawyer in the cannabis industry. But on a trip to Orange County, they fell in love with the area’s warm weather and relative lack of pandemic-related restrictions, said Feingold.



Elliott with Nash, now 4, Savannah and their dog, Ripley, in the family's California house.  
PHOTO: MICHAL CZERWONKA FOR WSJ



Feingold and Elliott have put their house on the market for \$3.395 million with listing agents Mark Taylor and Dylan Mason of Compass. PHOTO: MICHAL CZERWONKA FOR WSJ

“We got off the plane at John Wayne [Airport], and I look around, and no one was wearing masks,” said Elliott. “We quickly realized that Orange County was a special, special place.” They sold their Denver home for \$2 million and bought a roughly \$2.8 million house with a hot tub in Costa Mesa, Calif.













Feingold and Elliott, shown at left in Denver in 2019, sold their Colorado home, center, in part because they wanted a warmer climate. At right, Ripley and a young Nash are shown in the Denver home in 2021.

PHOTOS: ELLIOTT FAMILY

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When they moved in a few days before the Fourth of July, neighbors came out of houses decked out in red, white and blue to greet them in the warm summer air, said Elliott, a 40-year-old associate property manager at the real-estate services company [Jones Lang LaSalle](#). It was exactly what they hoped, said Feingold, now 42.









Elliott and Feingold's Orange County home has four bedrooms.

PHOTOS: MICHAL CZERWONKA FOR WSJ

Now that they have a second child, however, they have realized that they want to be closer to Feingold's family near Miami. And the cost of living has become more important to them too. So they have put their Costa Mesa home on the market for \$3.395 million. They hope the move will allow them to get more "bang for their buck," said Feingold; this time around, they want a home with a pool.

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