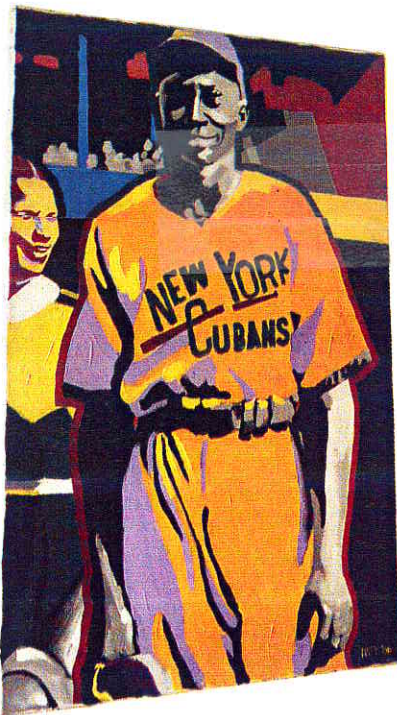




Ivey is cradled in a LoveSac in his Venice Lofts living room.



A painting by Ivey's father. His mother's art, mostly street scenes, also is displayed.



Teammates' sneakers decorate the apartment.

Home court

As his in-season residence, 76ers guard Royal Ivey picked a place in Manayunk that he could personalize.

By Paul Jablow FOR THE INQUIRER
Photography by Clem Murray STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

You'll spend perhaps a third of your time living in a place, but you have a permanent residence hundreds of miles away. You might have to pull up stakes at any time. But you don't want to rent a furnished place. You want something with your own stamp so you can feel totally comfortable in it.

For Royal Ivey of the 76ers, the answer was an apartment in Venice Lofts in Manayunk.

By renting a luxury apartment and most of its furniture and then turning his family and his work into decorating motifs, the backup guard has created an oasis away from the nomadic stresses of professional basketball.

"It was the first place I saw," said Ivey, 27, who has been there about a year. "I loved the amenities and when I saw the views, I couldn't go anywhere else."

Completed two years ago by Dranoff Properties, the three five-story buildings on Flat Rock Road are designed to blend with the existing mill structures of the Manayunk Canal waterfront. Common amenities include gas grills in the yard, a fitness center, a clubroom, a 24-hour concierge, and a furnished hospitality suite that tenants can rent for short-term guests. The apartments have luxury touches such as marble counter tops in the master bathroom and granite in the kitchen.

They also have 10-foot ceilings, high enough not just for the 6-foot, 4-inch Ivey but for his front-court teammates if he asks

them over. His three-bedroom, two-bath unit is 1,430 square feet and has a northern view of the canal from one bedroom and, from the living room, a western view of the Belmont Hills, across the Schuylkill.

"I'd call it a bachelor pad," he says, but it's most of all a place for relaxation. Pictures of his girlfriend at the University of Texas/Austin are prominently displayed alongside basketball action shots. He shares the apartment with Steven Louis — his cousin, personal assistant, and boyhood friend from Queens, N.Y.

Sneakers are draped by their laces over the duct pipes, and two end tables in the living room are piled with autographed sneakers from his teammates. Pick up one from power forward Elton Brand and you could probably kayak down the canal in it. Ivey's living room features a LoveSac, basically a giant beanbag on which he enjoys reclining. "Lie down on it and you won't get up," he says.

Overall, says Ivey, the apartment "is pretty basic. I've seen apartments that are just too cluttered."

He said he was attracted by the openness of the layout and by the quiet setting. On Flat Rock Road, it's away from the bustle of Manayunk's "downtown," Main Street, but easily walkable for a luxury meal, a casual dinner, or takeout. He likes the fact that it has an atmosphere very different from other places where he has lived: Hollis, Queens; Austin, Texas; Atlanta, where he moved as an NBA rookie with the Hawks; and Milwaukee, where

he played for the Bucks before joining the Sixers last year.

Given that his permanent residence is in Atlanta, where he owns a three-bedroom house, Ivey did not want to make a huge investment in time, money, or energy in decorating. He bought some furniture and accessories from Target, rented several pieces from Cort, and left all the walls their original off-white color, although the landlord permits repainting. Most of the hardwood floors remain uncovered. The small kitchen has everything he needs for bachelor cooking, which in his case is lasagna on down. The living room rug and couches are olive green or pistachio, and that quiet color scheme is a backdrop for the apartment's distinctive touch: artwork by his parents.

Ivey is the only athlete in a family of educators and artists. His parents, Rod and Jennifer Ivey, have shown and sold their work throughout the New York area, although his mother also spent 35 years as an elementary school teacher. Royal Ivey gets his first name from combining the names of his maternal grandfather, the late Roy Allen, one of the first black television producers and directors.

Most of Jennifer Ivey's pictures displayed here are street scenes. Those of Rod Ivey, who makes his living as an artist, feature sports figures, particularly baseball players from the old Negro Leagues.

And although his mother isn't known for it, Ivey said she demonstrated another talent that helped him get set up.

"My mom taught me how to shop," he said. "One stop." ¶

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