



Pucker Gallery Relocating from 171 Newbury St.; Home of 44 Years Sold for \$13.2M

April 28, 2014 By Joe Clements

BOSTON—The landmark Pucker Gallery is relocating within the Back Bay following a sale of its longtime home at 171 Newbury St. to Dutch capital at an eye-popping \$1,553 per sf, an all-cash \$13.2 million transaction negotiated by **Boston Realty Advisors**. The five-story, 8,525-sf building that has housed the multi-level gallery since 1967 and is now home to international

retailer Clarks Shoes on the ground floor attracted a range of investors from around the corner and around the globe, relays BRA principal **Michael d'Hemecourt** in acknowledging the agreement that closed on Friday.

"We did hit our projections," d'Hemecourt says of the coveted listing first unveiled by therealreporter.com last June. Similar Newbury Street transactions over the past year provided further comfort the ambitious target was attainable, he says, as did 171 Newbury St.'s location between Dartmouth and Exeter Streets and having an asset larger than many of the mixed-use structures that have been a popular investment during the past three years. The response to 171 Newbury St. was especially encouraging, he notes, given certain contingencies of the buyer needing to provide a leaseback up to three years to find a new venue for the gallery and separately acquire "a high-quality, net-leased property inside Route 128" where the capital could be deployed as a 1031 tax-deferred exchange. BRA was able to accommodate all of those objectives, with Bernard H. Pucker and Suzanne Pucker inking a deal at 240 Newbury St., less than two blocks from 171 Newbury St. The exchange asset satisfies the clients' requirements, and will close within the mandated 45-day time frame, d'Hemecourt says in declining to identify that property.

The latter piece is a bit unusual for a sales assignment but observers explain the inclusion overcomes a challenge many CRE owners pondering a sale today have to address—where to place proceeds, and in the case of a user/owner such as the Pucker clan, what to do with the existing business. For d'Hemecourt, the successful multi-pronged outcome reflects the parties involved being committed to their respective missions.

"It was pretty complicated and did have a lot of moving pieces, but fortunately we were able to put them all together, and we think a lot of that had to do with getting a good team in place, and also having a buyer and a seller who were very flexible and willing to work cooperatively to get past any issues as they came up, and that made it all possible," says d'Hemecourt, praising the investor for delaying the sale while the exchange option was identified and in doing the leaseback that will not be as long as anticipated. The 5,800 sf lease of the third-floor of 240 Newbury St. begins in September. BRA Managing Principal **William H. Catlin Jr. and Robert LeClair** were charged with that portion of the task, while d'Hemecourt was joined by principals **Christopher D. Sower and Jason S. Weissman** on finding a buyer for 171 Newbury St. and securing the net leased investment.

In the earlier article, it was relayed how the Puckers were driven by a desire to put their multi-level gallery onto one floor, and to be in a space that could be customized for modern displays. The couple paid a mere \$409,000 for 171 Newbury St. in Dec. 1979, 12 years after opening Pucker Saffrai Gallery in the early days of what has become a major element of Newbury Street. The listing story did indicate potential challenges to finding just the right space in the Back Bay, and d'Hemecourt says that being so near the current operation "was really fortunate" but also a product of BRA's grassroots knowledge of the district where the firm was founded more than a dozen years ago by Weissman. "They did a great job in getting that done so quickly and meeting that objective in every way," says d'Hemecourt of the leasing experts.

As to 171 Newbury St., d'Hemecourt deferred questions about its future to the buyers, who were not available for comment as of press deadline. Corporate records indicate principals of 171 Newbury Street Asset Holdings LLC to be Jan Jaap Boering and Frank Van Trigt, each with an Amsterdam address.

The Clarks Shoes lease ties up the 2,600-sf ground level of 171 Newbury St. for 10 years, but BRA painted a picture of a property with a soon-to-be blank canvas in the upper levels, with the floor plates said to be amenable for both multifamily uses, office space or even as home to a single occupant who might want a mixture of both concepts. Multi-level retail has also been able to work on Newbury Street, and d'Hemecourt terms the Pucker property "a special building" that has ornate elements including an iron grate and mansard roof, plus benefits from being on the sunny side of the thoroughfare.

Market watchers maintain the investor is making its inaugural purchase in the Hub, but has an appetite for similar urban properties. The entity reportedly was among a stampede of buyers chasing 18-28 JFK St. in Harvard Square, one of the most significant CRE deals of 2012 that was concluded when Dr. Gerald Chan paid \$31.6 million for the mix of apartments and retail featuring Pizzeria Uno, a deal that BRA was also exclusive agent in helping its longtime owner harvest that prime building, as therealreporter.com was first to reveal in December 2012. Again, d'Hemecourt pointed to the buyers for any discussion of their past, present or future in the Boston CRE scene that has drawn investors from numerous countries in search of a safe haven.

The sale of 171 Newbury St. was not the only significant Back Bay property to change hands on Friday, as a partnership of Novaya Ventures and Urban Meritage wrapped up its \$8.01 million purchase of 39 Fairfield St., a/k/a 240A Newbury St., right next to Pucker Gallery's upcoming destination, as well as 41 Fairfield St., which traded for \$6.55 million. The seller in those instances was restaurateur Joseph P. Cimino, trustee of JC Realty TR, while UMN 240A Newbury LLC was the buyer of a property that had not traded since fetching \$1.7 million in Jan. 1991. Its companion property was bought in March 2004 for \$1.5 million.