

## WE HEARD

# In modern times, sit-down closings lose favor

*Commercial deals are increasingly finalized via phone, email and courier service*

When Scott Singer of the Singer & Bassuk Organization decided to propose to his wife, his client Henry Elghanayan of Rockrose Development was one of the first to know. That's because on the way home from a closing that ran until the wee hours of the morning, Singer, whose firm arranges debt and financing for commercial deals, told Elghanayan he was going to use his commission to buy the engagement ring. The couple wed in 1997.

Today that exchange would not have taken place — at least not under those circumstances. That's because in New York's commercial real estate world, sit-down closings have been largely replaced by closings conducted via email, conference call and courier service.

Of the 454 closings David Schechtman of Meridian



Left to right: Andrew Singer, Scott Singer, Justin Elghanayan and Henry Elghanayan, at the 2013 REBNY Banquet

Capital Group has participated in over the past 10 years, "almost 70 percent have been electronic, and many of the sit-downs don't even have principals or brokers present."

There are, of course, exceptions: sales of small, family-owned properties; commercial mortgage deals done by the local banks, and complex mega-deals.

Evan Levy, partner at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher

& Flom LLP, said monster deals often have last-minute issues that need to be dealt with in person as the closing is unfolding.

But these days, unlike residential deals, most commercial deals don't merit boots on the ground. "We're closing all over the country, here in our office," says Michael Lefkowitz, a lawyer at Rosenberg & Estis.

While electronic or phone closings are probably more expedient, Levy said the positive vibes that comes from face-to-face closings should not be discounted. It enables opposing parties — who may have had to make concessions in order to close the deal — to feel good.

Others are less sentimental. "When people are in a room together, one side [might want] to renegotiate, and that can create acrimony," Lefkowitz said.

Singer, for one, misses sit-down closings. "They took a lot of time, but they were a wonderful opportunity to build relationships, what we would call 'time well wasted,'" he said. **By Marynia Kruk**

# NYC developer answers a higher calling— seeing the Pope

*Subbing for rabbi, Eli Hirschfeld and his wife fly to Rome for an interfaith event between Catholics and Jews*

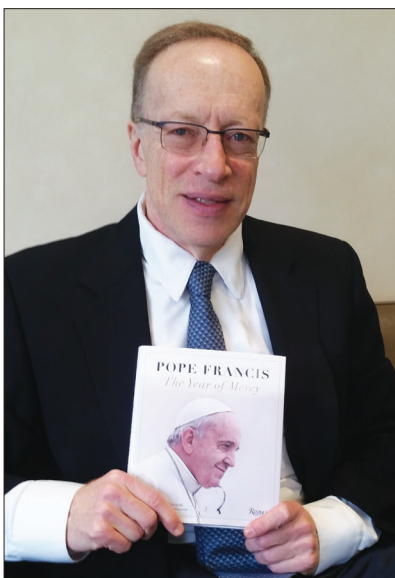
If Rabbi Arthur Schneier of Park East Synagogue didn't have a bad back, a Jewish New York developer wouldn't have had the opportunity to fly to Rome and see the Pope.

That's exactly the way it happened, according to Elie Hirschfeld, who runs Hirschfeld Properties, a company which develops and manages housing, commercial and retail properties across the Northeast. Rabbi Schneier was unable to travel, so he asked Hirschfeld and his wife, Sarah, who are members of his synagogue, to represent him last month, during Pope Francis's visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome.

"It was short notice, but we broke all prior engagements to go," Hirschfeld said.

Park East Synagogue and the Great Synagogue of Rome are sister synagogues. The meeting, which drew about 1,000 people, was intended to foster kinship between the Jewish and Catholic faiths and interfaith dialogue.

Hirschfeld grew up in Great Neck, Long Island in a self-described "conserva-dox" Jewish home, where his family observed a mix of Orthodox and conservative practices. His late father, Abe Hirschfeld, led a life of color and infamy. During his lifetime, the New York parking garage tycoon produced Broadway plays, took brief control the New York



Left: Elie Hirschfeld holding a book by Pope Francis titled "The Year of Mercy;" right: A shot of Pope Francis taken by Hirschfeld

Post, and made multiple unsuccessful runs for public office as "Honest Abe." In 2000, he was indicted for trying to hire a hit man to kill his former business partner and served two years in jail.

Today, his son sits on the board of an interfaith coalition of business and religious leaders, which promotes human



rights, tolerance, and ethnic conflict resolution.

On the day of the meeting, Pope Francis entered accompanied only by Rome's chief rabbi, Riccardo di Segni. Although no words were exchanged, Hirschfeld said the Pope's presence exuded a sense of calm, warmth, and graciousness. "I was a hand-shake away from him," he said.

As a developer from New York, a city which derives its vigor from

replacing old buildings with new ones, he was awed by Rome. "The city just breathes history and religion, pagan, Christian and Jewish," he said.

Since returning home, Hirschfeld said he and his wife are still amazed. "We cannot get over the event," he said.

**By Marynia Kruk**

# Art of the deal: Frank Stella's former home sells for \$22M

*Arthur Minerof of Milan Associates buys pair of once-distressed buildings on a single lot in the East Village*

It may have been the incubator for abstract works of art, but last month's sale of artist Frank Stella's longtime East Village studio was all too real.

Investor Arthur Minerof's Milan Associates picked up two buildings on a single tax lot — one of them the



From left: 128 East 13th Street and 123 East 12th Street

landmarked, longtime home and workplace of the celebrated artist — from Infinity Real Estate LLC, a subsidiary of Steven Kassin's Infinity Group, for \$21.5 million, or \$1,670 per square foot, sources said.

The sites hold back-to-back three-story buildings at 128 East 13th Street and 123 East 12th Street, located between Third and Fourth avenues. The 1904 Beaux-Arts carriage house on 13th formerly housed the Van Tassel & Kearney Auction Mart, one of the city's top sellers of horses and horse-drawn carriages. In 1978, Stella bought it, and lived and worked there until 2005. (The New York artist currently has a retrospective exhibit at the Whitney, which is set to run until Feb. 7.)

Joseph Sabbagh's Ultimate Realty acquired both buildings for \$10 million in 2005, with plans to construct a seven-story condo building on the site. But Ultimate switched gears in the end, and sold all 30,000 square feet

of the properties' combined air rights to the nonprofit Trust for Architectural Easements.

By 2012, the properties fell into foreclosure. Infinity bought them for \$9 million at an auction. Later that year, the city Landmarks Preservation Commission voted to designate the carriage house a landmark. It had been calendared since 2006.

The mixed-use townhouse on 12th Street currently houses Alliance Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, a martial arts studio, on the ground floor, and a duplex rental apartment above it. Meanwhile, the 13th Street carriage house is triple-net-leased to dance shoes manufacturer Capezio Ballet Makers, which uses the full building for the dance studio Peridance. Capezio's triple-net lease expires in 2028, with a five-year option.

Minerof, a Flatiron District-based investor, is planning a long-term hold of the properties, sources said. Nickerson and Nelson could not be immediately reached, while Kassin and Sabbagh declined to comment. **By Mark Maurer**