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In Manhattan, Luxury Condos Revive

A Manhattan condominium owned by a financially troubled Italian film producer was sold in a foreclosure auction for \$33.2 million, the highest price paid for Manhattan apartment this year and a sign that New York real estate prices are stabilizing.



Alamy

Trump International Hotel, where a 5,500-square-foot apartment owned by an Italian producer was sold for a 2010 Manhattan record price.

A Chinese businessman who was not identified purchased the 5,500-square-foot apartment with 20-foot ceilings and views of Central Park that had been owned by Vittorio Cecchi Gori, the producer of more than 200 films including "Il Postino" and "Life is Beautiful." The new buyer paid the lofty price of more than \$6,000 a square foot even though the apartment was in ruins after being gutted by Mr. Cecchi Gori for a renovation. The sale closed on Monday.

The price in the current deal underscores signs of recovery in luxury housing in Manhattan in the last few months, after an extended period of sluggish sales and falling prices. It followed a series of high closing prices on other luxury cooperatives and condominiums last December.

Last June, when sales in the Manhattan market were still largely stalled, a Russian businessman agreed to pay \$18 million for the apartment, in Trump International Hotel and Tower. But that deal fell apart.

Interest in the Cecchi Gori condo has been intense. After the deal with the Russian businessman collapsed, four buyers stepped forward late last

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year and made offers at or above \$18 million, according to Howard Margolis, the broker at Prudential Douglas Elliman who worked on the sale for the last year. That led to a formal auction, which was held in January and continued for five hours and 35 rounds of bidding between two of the bidders, brokers said.

The winning bid of \$33.2 million was made by a limited liability company, listed in care of Rothschild Bank & Trust in Zurich. But brokers in the building said the actual buyer was a Chinese businessman involved in manufacturing.

Mr. Cecchi Gori's financial troubles predate the latest recession, and involve complicated allegations of a bankruptcy fraud in Italy that date back years, and that put him in jail for a time.

Niels Juul, the temporary chief executive of Mr. Cecchi Gori's Los Angeles production company, Cecchi Gori Pictures, said the film producer expected to be completely vindicated by the Italian courts, and was currently involved in several film productions.

Court records show that Mr. Cecchi Gori eventually fell behind on a \$28 million debt to [Fortress Investment Group](#). The loan was secured by three houses, in New York, London and Los Angeles, each of which has now been sold. Mr. Juul said that with the higher sale price on the New York apartment, Mr. Cecchi Gori expected eventually to receive some of the proceeds of the auction.

The apartment, which Mr. Cecchi Gori bought in 1997 for \$10.4 million, also was owned at one point by developer Donald Trump, who paid \$5 million for it in 1997. But after Mr. Trump separated from his then-wife, Marla Maples, he listed the apartment for rent at the then-astronomical sum of \$100,000 a month. Mr. Cecchi Gori bought it few months later.

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