



Secret Brokers Society lands in London: The team is in place, and the mandates are rolling in - by Joseph Aquino

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After a short hiatus, The Secret Brokers Society (SRS) is back together in full swing: making calls, exchanging ideas and market secrets, doing deals. Our format was always simple—Put the best worldwide brokers together in a room, or on a call, extract their egos and of course the politics, and what do you have? An all-star team!

Our team is in place, and the mandates are rolling in.

We are representing a retailer to sell their ground floor retail presence. In New York City, Dallas and Los Angeles, all within the design districts. The Los Angeles property is just about gone, and offers are coming in on the other two locations.

As I write this, in early November, I have been to Europe on business nine times in 2018, and I'm still looking forward to MAPIC in Cannes this month, and a trip to London after Thanksgiving.

In September, I brought a 35,000 s/f American entertainment user to London and along with my SBS Group, English Strategic Partner, we visited and toured Covent Garden, Canary Wharf, Spitalfields, and Battersea, the old power plant that sits on the river Thames. It was an amazing tour with much opportunity for this entertainment tenant and many of my other retail customers.

London is a remarkably beautiful city. New York has a grid street system, thanks to our French-influenced city planning. This can be a little sterile. London's streets are full of turns and bends, and it's a joy and adventure to travel them. Just watching those red-double decker buses riding the opposite side of the street can be fun! Our mates complain a little about the possible outcome of Brexit (if any), but I see a vibrant economy and smiling, well-dressed locals.

London is a wonderful melting pot. We might think New York City is diverse, but it's nothing compared to London. You see people from all over the world, and they don't blend in. They stand out so that you notice them (in a very positive way). I saw a lot of Italians (from Italy: not my paisani from Brooklyn); Parisians from France, Catalans from Barcelona; Aussies from Down Under; Bavarians from Munich; folks from Nepal, Russia, Bahrain, and just about any other country you can think of. When you're in London, you know you're in a European city. From any continent (excepting Antarctica) London is accessible.

I recently spent a week at my English partner's offices. We visited various British and other

European retailers, to discuss bringing them to the U.S., and we discussed American companies coming to London and other European cities. My partner does cross-border deals all day long on all of Europe's "High Streets," and manages more than 100 shopping malls, many of which would be great fits for our American retail tenants. This company also has a mandate in Madrid to lease a new shopping mall.

Meanwhile, New York City is in desperate need of fresh European and Asian retailers and restaurateurs. We plan to get mandates along Fifth and Madison Aves., as well as in SoHo and the Meatpacking District, to bring these tenants in.

Here in New York City, I observe that property owners don't have many choices if they're looking for a retail broker. Plenty of retailers in Europe and Asia are looking for space, but I can't help noticing a lot of newbie brokers who might have impressive Power Point presentations but little practical experience. They're working hard to woo owners, but they rarely have a track record that proves their worth. My English team consists of 45 seasoned brokers, and along with my leadership, the job will get done.

I've been known for retail leasing for most of my career, but I have experience in selling hotels and other commercial buildings, and lately I've been returning to that discipline. Not many people know that I worked for Stephen Brenner, the hotel guru who passed away some years ago. I understand hotels and their customers, and the key points of knowledge that you need to work with them. Not many investment sales brokers have leasing experience. Consequently, they will sometimes quote an inadequate market rent for the proposed property. I take away that worry.

Working with The Secret Brokers Society has created a "ringolevio" effect, in which the best brokers in the business can tag each other with the best and biggest deals—many of which require extra talent and knowledge to complete. I'm working to complete the sale of a 200,000 s/f building. The calls and emails originated from London and made their way to Norway and back to New York, to an owner whom I've known for 30 years. It was great to see him again! The world gets smaller every day, but thanks to more sophisticated connectivity, it gets bigger too. If you're part of The Secret Brokers Society, it's a lot easier to find yourself in the center of the action, where you can get a lot of deals done.

Every year, we see the most eminent male actors, at the Academy Awards, stepping up to the stage to accept an Oscar—and they include their wives at the top of the list of people they thank for all their help and encouragement. I'd like to thank my wife for all the success I have. She has been my biggest supporter and fan, and has kept me together throughout the past three years. I can also thank her for putting me on this worldwide journey 17 years ago, when we first met. Some of you know she is from Belfast, Northern Ireland. Her company has offices in London, Zurich, Singapore—and now in Bucharest. Between traveling with her when she goes to these offices, traveling to luxury retail conferences, and meeting clients and colleagues all over the world, the two of us have acquired four passports, with every page stamped by various countries by their officials. I love her, and love being by her side as we fly all around the world. Thank you, sweetheart!

In closing, I'll say "Ci vediamo a presto, e buon viaggio!" That's Italian for, "We'll see each other soon, and have a wonderful trip!"

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