

A classic gets a little doctoring

A Dayton, Ohio, doctor and his wife are polishing up an architectural gem. It started when the suburban Dayton medical building they bought last October for Jim Apesos' plastic surgery practice turned out to be one of a handful designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Built for Dr. Kenneth Meyers in 1956, the building is one of at least four medi-

REAL ESTATE

BY ANNE KATES

cal clinics designed by Wright, who tried his hand at everything from gas stations to game preserves.

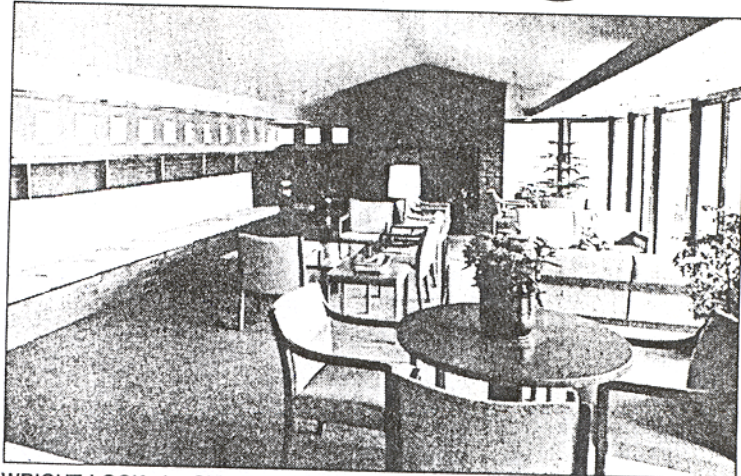
Most of the clinics, built from 1955 to 1959, have been converted to other uses. The Meyers clinic, though still a medical building, had been subdivided and remodeled so many times that little of its original look survived.

Enter Jim and Liz Apesos. Realizing the building was historically significant, they knew "it wasn't fair not to do a restoration," Liz Apesos says. Luckily, Dr. Meyers' widow had the original plans. Total cost to buy and restore: \$550,000.

The clinic recalls Wright's familiar residential designs, appearing to grow out of a hillside. Examining rooms surround a central rotunda and a waiting room wing that boasts a cathedral ceiling and massive hearth. The walls are red brick inside and out. A concession to the '80s: Wright's concrete floor has been carpeted, the fiber painstakingly



Courtesy of Frank Lloyd Wright Memorial Fund
WRIGHT: Designed at least four medical clinics — and a few service stations.



WRIGHT LOOK: An Ohio plastic surgeon and his wife bought and restored this Frank Lloyd Wright-designed medical clinic in suburban Dayton for \$550,000.

died terra cotta to match the concrete.

Furnishings, from the bench seating to the Japanese potted plants, were recreated from Wright's original design.

No stranger to renovation, Liz Apesos put herself through college buying, remodeling and selling older homes. But the Wright clinic shines "like a little jewel. I didn't know about this man until I got involved in this project. His ideas of form and function are timeless."

Help for brokers: The bane of many a real estate broker: Sell now, get

paid later. Now, a New York City firm lets residential real estate brokers turn their commission IOUs into cash, fast.

Realty Factors Ltd. is applying to real estate a practice common among major corporations. It's called factoring, or selling your accounts receivable — at a discount — to a third party.

The appeal for brokers: They can pay tax, tuition, and other bills on time, or they can jump on investment opportunities without having to wait weeks or months for their commission check.

Broker commissions usually run 6%

of a home's sales price. RFL's minimum commission purchase: \$2,000.

RFL limits its risk that a broker's deal won't close by buying commissions only after a home sale contract is signed, and at least 10% of the sale price has been deposited in an escrow account. It only buys commissions on owner-occupied residential home sales.

For footing the risk of a bum deal or bearing the cost of a late closing, RFL pays less for a commission the further off the closing. For example, RFL will pay 95 cents on the dollar for deals that close in 30 days, 92 cents for 60-day closings, 89 cents for 89-day closings.

Factoring, though not unheard of in real estate, is rare enough for RFL to claim it's pioneering the market. "It's got to be a \$15 billion to \$20 billion market," says RFL founder Don Stewart, a former American Express banker.

This year, RFL expects to double the \$7 million in commissions it purchased last year. So far, RFL says it has done business with 270 firms in New York, Connecticut and Pennsylvania, and plans to expand to eight other states.

"I can see firms popping up all over the place," says finance Professor Campbell Harvey at Duke University. Commissions could even be bundled into securities by Wall Street the same way auto loans, credit card receivables and other debt is now, he says. "This could be the first stage."

Some experts worry about promoting a pattern of deficit spending among brokers. "It's not something I'd recommend. I'd rather get a line of credit from the bank," National Association of Realtors President Ira Gribin says.

Condo market is stable in downtown Boston

While headlines have been blaring that Boston-area housing prices are tumbling — led by a drastically overbuilt condo market — the condo scene in the city's downtown neighborhoods seems to be holding up very well, a new study says.

In neighboring Middlesex and Norfolk counties, condo sales last year totaled 7,080 units, down from 8,380 in 1987, *Banker & Tradesman* newspaper says. In the first quarter of this year, sales totaled 1,544 — an annualized pace of almost 6,200 units.

In contrast, Boston Financial Consulting Group says condo sales in six downtown Boston neighborhoods rose to 2,033 units last year from 1,609 in 1987. First-quarter sales of 515 units suggest a 2,000-unit year in '89.

The average first-quarter price: \$203,301, vs. 1988's average \$202,551.

Downtown condo sales in Boston

Year	Units sold	Avg. price
1984	2,297	\$95,209
1985	1,517	\$123,916
1986	2,063	\$161,239
1987	1,609	\$164,232
1988	2,033	\$202,551

Source: Boston Financial Consulting Group

The strength of the downtown market has withstood tax revision, the stock market crash, interest rate swings and condo conversion regulations that took a toll on the overall regional market, the BFCG study says.

It helped that Boston's economy

added jobs at a 2.5% annual rate from 1985 through 1987. But the downtown buying trend doesn't depend on job growth, the study says. Up to 30% of downtown condo buyers are empty-nesters and second-home buyers — a group traditionally less sensitive to changes in the job climate than, say, first-time buyers.

The study also indicates the good news probably isn't over for downtown Boston condos:

► They're still affordable. Condos priced \$200,000 or less accounted for almost 64% of sales in 1988.

► A limited supply of condo units in coming years should keep supply and demand in sync. One-third of the condos to be completed this year are already under contract.

— Anne Kates

Retail chain has strong ties to England