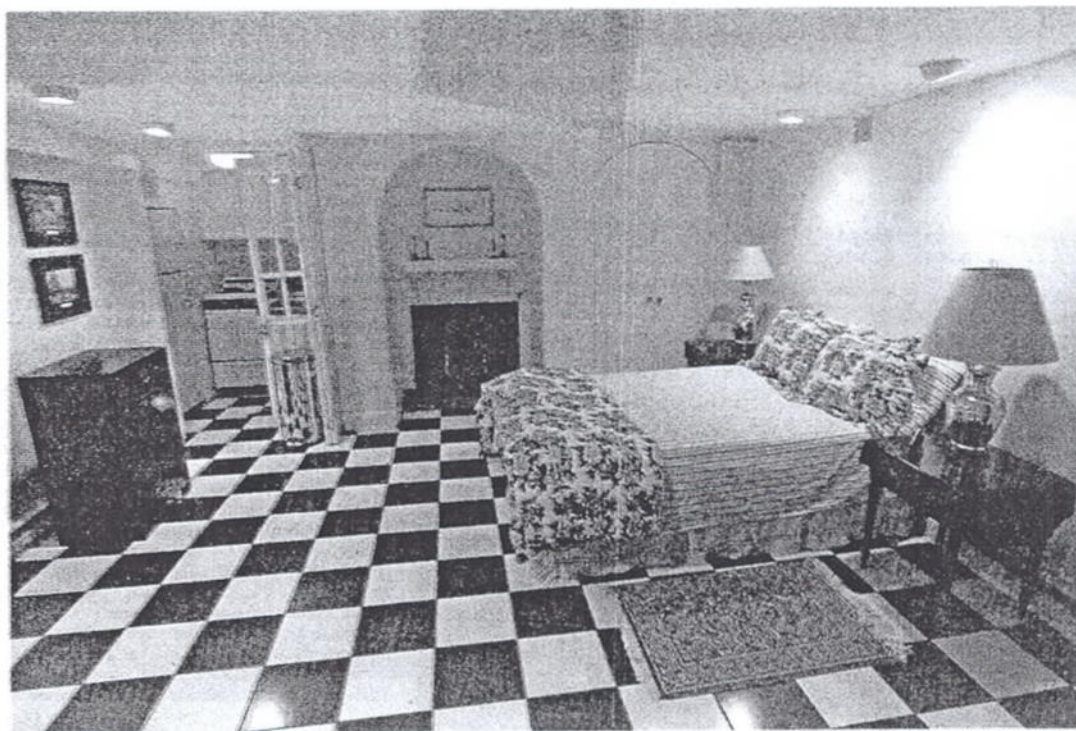


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Real Estate

Cramped studio? *Non. Pieds-à-terre*



PHOTOS BY GEORGE RIZER/GLOBE STAFF

A studio apartment in Beacon Hill is used part-time, a popular option for people who want to keep a foot in the city.

Homes away from home gain footing among part-time
Bostonians looking for a place to stay the city

By Gail Ravgiala

GLOBE STAFF

From businessmen tired of hotels or trying to dodge the commute, to theatergoers who would rather chat about the play over a nightcap than head home over the Tobin Bridge, Boston is finding a growing pool of buyers who want a little place in the city to use a few nights a week, or a few weeks a year.

The French call these small apartments *pieds-à-terre*, literally "a foot on the ground," and, to them, having a snug home-away-from-home in the city is as practical and egalitarian as wearing a shoe. Unlike in the United States, where "*pieds-à-terre*" has an aura of elitism, in Europe, they are considered quite middle class.

"In Paris, lots of people have them," says Charles Spada, a Boston interior designer who makes frequent buying trips to France and maintained a Paris *pieds-à-terre* for five years until he sold it last spring. "It was much better than staying at a hotel, and you have a return on investment as well as a second home." As is common in Europe, he would rent it out when he wasn't there.

Usually small, and in prime locations, the *pieds-à-terre* may never reach the middle-class market it enjoys in Europe, but in Boston, at least, real estate brokers and developers are reporting more and more buyers interested in having a place in town that they can use impromptu.

"The market has been there," says Bradford Rowell of Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage in Beacon Hill. "A lot of people who buy small units are only using them part time."

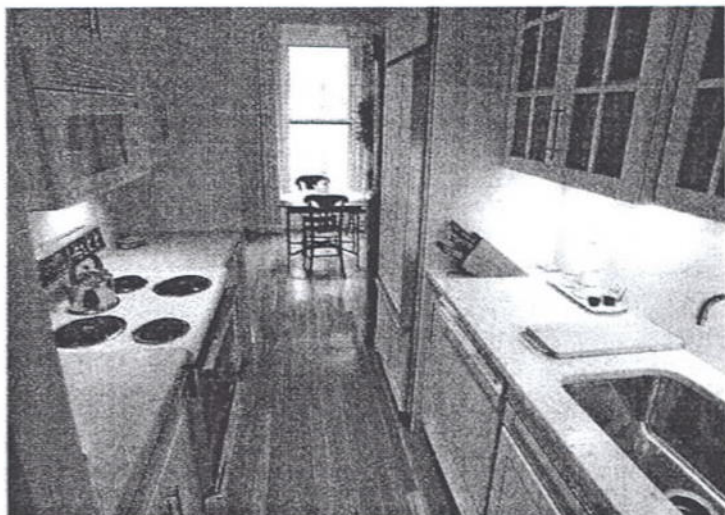
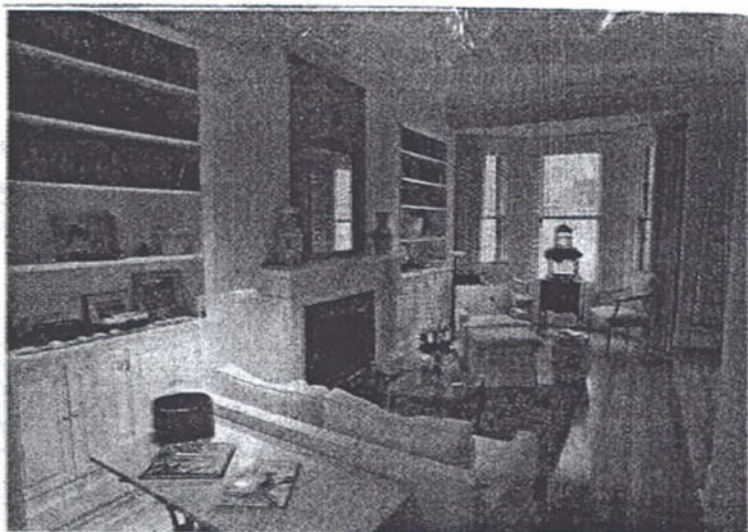
He has a 350-square-foot, garden-level studio listed at \$259,000 that generated national interest when the New York Times recently featured it in a story on *pieds-à-terre* in its Escapes section. "I got calls from California, from Florida, from New York," says Rowell. All of which he sees as affirmation of

Boston's reputation as a world-class city with great cultural appeal.

Other brokers agree that even as the red hot real estate market simmers down, the social, cultural, and business amenities Boston has to offer will continue to draw buyers. "People want to be where the action is," says Curtis R. Kemeeny, president of the Boston Residential Group, developers of 360 Newbury, the 1920s Art Deco building redesigned in the 1980s by architect Frank Gehry and currently being converted from office space into 54 condos.

A good location also translates to convenience for those with *pieds-à-terre*. Foster and Ginger Aborn of Hingham have owned a cozy two-bedroom condo in the Back Bay for 18 years. Foster Aborn, a former executive at John Hancock, still keeps an office at the Hancock tower. "It's great because

Usually small, and in prime locations, *pieds-à-terre* such as this one on Commonwealth Avenue may not be mainstream in the United States, but brokers say more buyers are interested.



'It was much better than staying at a hotel, and you have a return on investment as well as a second home.'

CHARLES SPADA, Boston interior designer who maintained a Paris *pieds-à-terre*

you can decide at the last minute if you want to stay here or drive to Hingham," he says. "We can go to a movie in Cambridge and decide on the way out that we want to stay in town. You have your things right at hand — I always keep a suit here — so it feels comfortable. If we have an early flight out of Logan, or if we arrive at the airport late at night, we can just come here."

And even if they don't spend the night, they can come into town and shop or go to dinner and never worry about parking. The couple agrees that a big advantage is that the condo has a parking space.

Of course, the better the location, the higher the price, and bargain hunters may find themselves out of luck.

At 44 Prince St., a 55-unit condominium complex now under construction in the North End, developer Byron Gilchrest president of Gilchrest Associates, says "You

can walk to everything from here." In the heart of Boston's Little Italy, his complex is close to the waterfront, Government Center, the Financial District, and Logan Airport, and that has made his units appealing as pieds-à-terre.

He has already significantly tapped the market: Of the 40 pre-construction units sold, 10 were bought as temporary in-town homes. Chris Tuite of RE/MAX Waterfront Realty Ltd., the broker for the project, which is expected to be completed in January, says most of those are one-bedroom units, which range from 685 to 845 square feet and start at \$550,000. (A parking space in the 71-car underground garage can be purchased separately for \$70,000.) The buyers range from a Florida couple who plan to use the apartment for about one month a year, to a North Shore couple who hope to be in the city several times a

month.

On Beacon Hill, Rowell has a few smaller units in renovated buildings at more moderate prices. A 455-square-foot studio is listed for \$329,000 and a 525-square-foot, one-bedroom condo is priced at \$349,000. "Either would make an ideal pied-à-terre. The well-established neighborhood has a lot of appeal, he says, offering easy access to downtown and Back Bay as well as the many shops and restaurants right on the Hill.

Having a foot on the earth at 360 Newbury costs a minimum of \$500,000, yet Kemeny says he has some buyers planning to use their condos as part-time city bases. One empty-nest couple from the Western suburbs, for example, "are just not ready to let go of their house. They want to try out city living first."

Convenience, accessibility, and proximity to his businesses and to

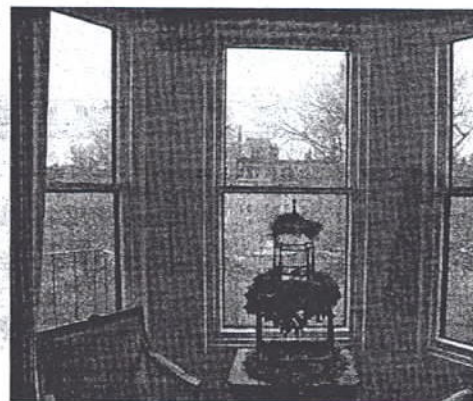
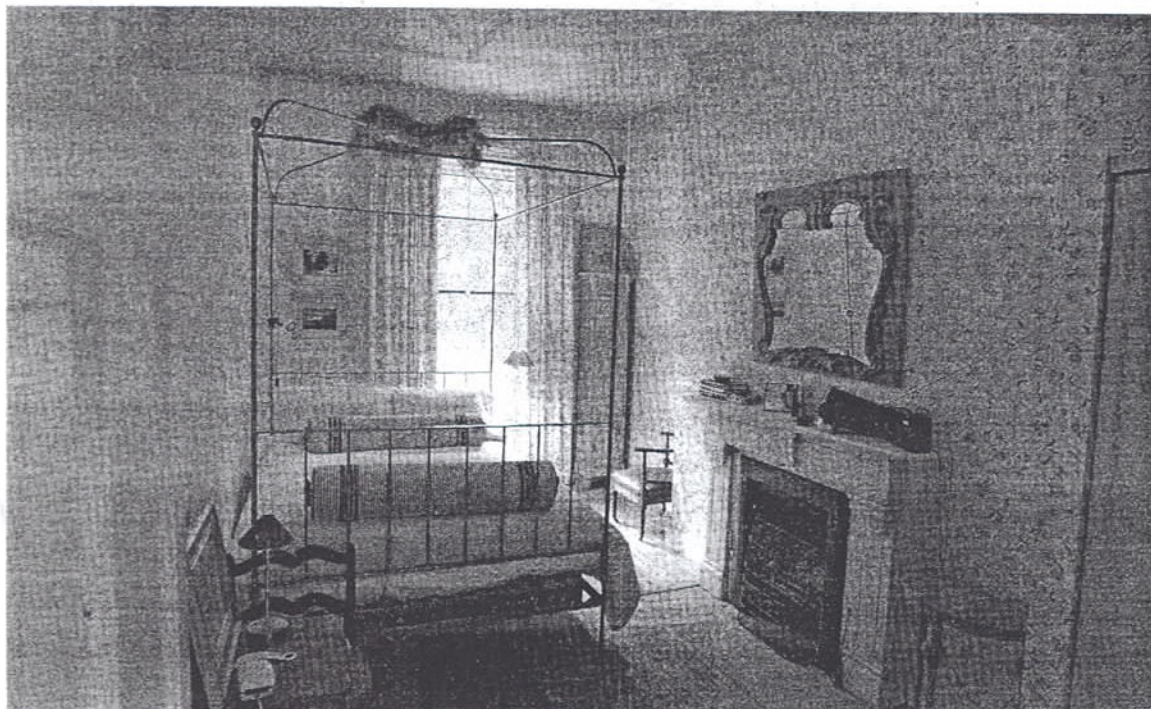
cultural amenities attracted Saul Boucai, who owns several residential properties in Back Bay as well as Truffles Fine Confections in the Prudential Center and Copley Place, and his wife Georgette to 360 Newbury. "We bought here because the building is eclectic and funky, and we want to enjoy city life," says Boucai. They purchased two units, which they are combining into one four-bedroom apartment.

Empty nesters, they plan to sell their family home in Newton and divide their time between their house on Nantucket and the condo in the city. However, Boucai says, "down the road, we will probably also buy a residence in Florida and then this will be even more of a pied-à-terre."

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'We bought here because the building is eclectic and funky, and we want to enjoy city life.'

SAUL BOUCAI



Brokers say the social, cultural, and business amenities Boston has to offer will continue to draw buyers to pieds-à-terre — despite the slowing real estate market.