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Italian real estate investor buys stake in Flatiron building, eyes hotel

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An Italian real estate investor has sealed the deal to buy a majority stake in the Flatiron Building in a quest to turn the landmark into a world-class hotel.

The Rome-based Sorgente Group has bought just over 50% of the iconic structure and plans to keep buying more.

Time magazine reported the deal had been done last summer, but negotiations continued and an agreement was made final only this month.

Sorgente Group officials would not say what they paid for their share of the building, estimated to be worth \$190 million.

"This is one of the world's most spectacular trophy properties," said Sorgente CEO Valter Mainetti. "We will treat the Flatiron like the work of art that it is."

That includes tapping an Academy Award-winning lighting designer to illuminate the triangle-shaped building like a sculpture in a museum, he said.

Sorgente plans to continue increasing its ownership share in the building over the next decade, but plans to transform the building into a hotel will have to wait about 10 years until remaining tenants are bought out. Book publisher St. Martin's Press is the primary tenant.

The city won't stand in Sorgente's way. The Fifth Ave. and 23rd St. location is already zoned for a hotel, and the Landmarks Preservation Commission said it's a go as long as the stunning facade is not modified.

Built in 1902 by architect Daniel Burnham, the Flatiron Building was the world's first steel-frame skyscraper.

The 22-story building soon became one of the most recognizable structures on Earth, appearing on more postcards than any contemporary architectural wonder.

Sorgente's Historic & Trophy Buildings Fund acquires prestigious structures globally. The company recently bought and sold an interest in the Chrysler Building and owns a number of architecturally significant buildings and hotels in France and Italy.