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East Brown Cow's "121 Middle" expands to become The Docent's Collection

August 05, 2022 - Northern New England



Tim Soley

Portland, ME East Brown Cow, in partnership with Commonwealth Hotels, has rebranded “121 Middle” to The Docent’s Collection. Launched initially in 2019 as an “urban inn,” The Docent’s Collection continues to welcome guests for short or long-term stays in the city’s historic Old Port district.

The change was a strategic decision following an expansion beyond the existing 17 units located in the 19th century building at 121 Middle St., known as the Thompson Block. Two new “Urban Homes,” a term coined by the brand to describe the units, were recently completed at the adjacent property at 115 Middle St., an early 20th century building known as the Abraham Robinson Block. Available to reserve this summer, the Urban Homes are located at 115 Middle St. will be the first three-bedroom units added to the existing collection of two-bedroom, one-bedroom and studio units.

Owned by East Brown Cow, a Portland-based real estate investment, development and management company, the success of The Docent’s Collection has spurred plans for additional growth. In January of 2021, East Brown Cow purchased three adjacent properties in the Old Port. The upper floors of two of those 19th century buildings, 178 Middle St., known as the Boyd Block, and 184 Middle St., known as the William Widgery Thomas Block, are being converted into 19 additional one- and two-bedroom Urban Homes which will join the collection with an anticipated opening of winter 2023.

“East Brown Cow is excited to continue pushing the boundaries of how travelers experience the urban fabric of the Old Port,” said Tim Soley, president and CEO of East Brown Cow.

“We have a 30-year history of thoughtful development, first-class service, and forward-thinking investment – the expansion of The Docent’s Collection represents an intentional investment in the preservation of historic properties and the creation of meaningful connections within Portland’s fast-changing downtown.”

Woven into the fabric of the Old Port’s historic architecture, cobblestone streets and iconic waterfront, each Urban Home in the collection has been thoughtfully placed within steps of the area’s vibrant arts community, local boutiques, and nationally recognized cuisine. This local culture permeates throughout the Urban Homes themselves, with bespoke interior design by Portland based Ealain Studio and locally crafted pieces from Maine artists and workshops such as Thos. Moser, Anthony Muench, and Tanja Hollander. Commonwealth Hotels provides professional hospitality management services rounding out the luxury travel accommodations.

“Our goal is to create an unrivaled hospitality experience in a diverse travel market,” said Avery Windham of Commonwealth Hotels. “Guests can customize the level of engagement with our team. They can utilize their Urban Home as if it was their own home instead of a traditional hotel, or they can engage our team for a more tailored travel experience.”

The announcement of the rebrand is accompanied by a new logo and website. Inspired by the rich culture of the Old Port, the name speaks to the role of the hospitality team as a knowledgeable guide for guests seeking to experience that culture. The traditional connection of the term “docent”

to museums and art is an intentional nod to the quality design, finishes, attention to detail, and architectural features found within each Urban Home. The brand is showcased throughout the new website, which includes a searchable direct booking engine, new photography, frequently asked questions and more.

The expansion reflects the success of the unconventional hospitality offering since its launch. The Docent's Collection will continue to offer guests a distinctive approach to travel, fusing the first-class hospitality of a hotel stay with modern, mobile-first service and personalized amenities more typically associated with a luxury residential rental. Each Urban Home is expertly designed, with fully equipped kitchens, large dining and living areas, and custom furnishings that honor the historic nature of each space while juxtaposing it with a modern and airy sensibility in order to provide a home away from home experience.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540