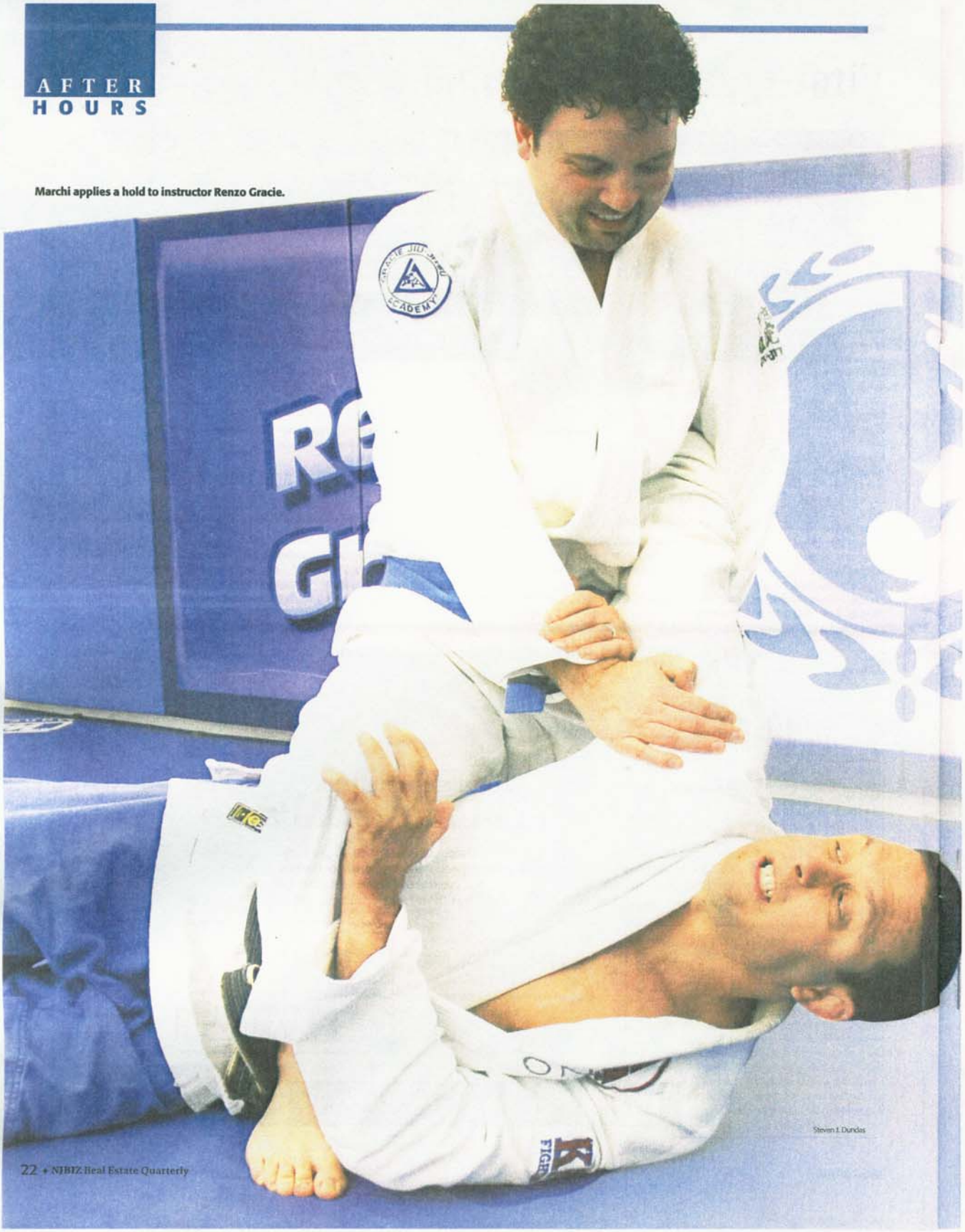
Marchi applies a hold to instructor Renzo Gracie.



Steven I. Dundas

A Deal Here, a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Move There

The martial art has become a way of life for CB Richard Ellis executive Dean Marchi

By Thomas Gaudio

DEAN MARCHI, first vice president of the private client group at real estate services company CB Richard Ellis in Saddle Brook, began learning Brazilian jiu-jitsu from the legendary Royce (pronounced Hoyce) Gracie 14 years ago.

"If I'm getting into the world of real estate or anything else, I want to learn from the best people and apply that technique—whatever that technique might be—in the most effective manner possible," says the 40-year-old Marchi, who in March brokered the $3.3 million sale of 18 Washington Place, a 25,200-square-foot building in Newark.

One principle that Marchi has taken to heart is Gracie's admonition to learn to execute martial arts moves properly before using them and thereby save yourself much time and frustration in the long run.

Marchi says the private client group can be as exciting as the jiu-jitsu he practices. "I absolutely feel that we're changing the way this industry operates by using new techniques," he says of the CB Richard Ellis division whose U.S. offices share a database of 150,000 buyers and sellers from around the world. "Real estate isn't just local anymore. It's a national and even international business now. It's the second revolution that I've witnessed in my life."

The first one began in 1993 when Marchi was living in Mexico, where a friend showed him a videotape of Royce Gracie using Brazilian jiu-jitsu to defeat numerous practitioners of fighting styles like kung fu and judo. Marchi, a former high school wrestler and student of tae kwon do, became "completely enamored of what I saw as a revolutionary idea" after seeing the tape. The ensuing years of training under the Gracie family "really shaped my life and who I think I've become," he says.

In Brazilian jiu-jitsu the goal is to take the fight to the ground, gain a superior position and apply holds—such as choking an opponent with an arm—to force submission.

The style has become synonymous with the Gracie clan, which has been practicing the sport and engaging in it professionally since the 1920s. Royce Gracie and his brother Rorion (pronounced Horion) opened the Gracie Jiu-Jitsu Academy in 1990 in Torrance, Calif. The pair, along with their brothers, cousins, children and nephews, today run training sessions in many countries.

The Gracies played a major role in creating the Ultimate Fighting Championship, a mixed martial arts tournament in which combatants use different hand-to-hand combat styles to fight and earn points during three rounds of five minutes each. A number of bouts end prematurely because combatants submit or the referee stops the fight for fear that a fighter will be seriously injured.

The tournament has gained a loyal following through videotape rentals and pay-per-view events on cable television since it started in 1993.

Royce Gracie won seven matches in the first two UFC tournaments and has earned a spot in the league's Hall of Fame, with an all-time record of 13 wins, two losses and two ties.

"When you think of those early days of UFC, none of them were using Gracie's style of jiu-jitsu," says Marchi, who trains in New York City under Renzo Gracie, a cousin of Royce. "Now, you can't compete [in mixed martial arts tournaments] if you don't know Gracie jiu-jitsu. They [the Gracie family] have changed the sport forever and changed the way people look at fighting in general."

During the UFC's infancy, fighters were often savagely beaten: blood and broken bones were common. The league has since made changes to reduce the brutality that include requiring fighters to wear padded gloves and issuing penalties for executing moves like head butts and throat strikes.

Marchi has never fought in a mixed martial arts tournament but says he had success in Brazilian jiu-jitsu matches within the Gracie academy and against grapplers from other academies before he stopped competing in 2000. Now he trains about twice a week for enjoyment and to stay in physical and mental shape, he says.

Concentration is a big part of rolling—Marchi's word for ground grappling—because "it's easy to get caught if you make a mistake, especially if you're rolling with one of the Gracies, so you've got to be intensely focused on what's happening and thinking ahead to the next step. Everything I try to do—and I can't say I'm always successful—I try to bring that level of intensity, that laser beam focus on the task at hand. And, of course, always think two and three steps ahead."

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Focus seems to run in the Marchi family, which owns a 77-year-old Manhattan eatery called Marchi's restaurant. At the restaurant, which was founded by Marchi's grandfather and is now run by his father and two uncles, "we cook the same dinner," Marchi says. "You don't have a choice: the same [fixed price] dinner every single night. Of course it's good. We've been doing the same dinner for more than 70 years."

The family also invests in real estate. It owns properties including the building above their restaurant at 251 E. 31st St. in New York City and a 25-unit apartment building in East Orange. ◆

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