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White Horse Tavern trotted into court over unpaid rent

[C. J. Hughes](#)



White Horse Tavern

One of New York's best-known bars has racked up a huge tab.

The White Horse Tavern, a watering hole in the West Village that dates to the 19th century, owes its landlord more than \$650,000 in unpaid rent stretching back to the start of the pandemic, a new suit says.

The bar's owner, Eytan Sugarman, has only sporadically paid his \$41,500 a month for 567 Hudson St. since March 2020, according to the suit, which was filed Thursday in Supreme Court in Manhattan.

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Sugarman “is unconditionally liable for the arrears,” the suit says, and “additional rent and/or use and occupancy continues to accrue.”

The restaurateur, who also owns the Hunt and Fish Club steakhouse in Midtown, did not return a call left at the White Horse by press time. And he has not yet filed an official answer to the complaint.

But in summer 2020, as restaurants struggled to regain their footing after a months-long shutdown, Sugarman told *The New York Times* that the hospitality business was “facing destruction” and warned that the White Horse could shutter for good.

Around the same time, Sugarman collected \$437,840 in federal Paycheck Protection Program funds to the White Horse, in two installments, to protect 18 jobs at the saloon, records show. That aid has either been paid back or forgiven, according to records.

About 90,000 restaurants closed nationally in the pandemic, according to the National Restaurant Association, and more than four dozen of those were in the city, according to Time Out New York.

Sugarman may be in the hot seat now. But his landlord, Steve Croman, has been in one before himself. Croman, whose 9300 Realty once owned more than 100 rental buildings, was sent to prison in 2017 for eight months after pleading guilty to crimes involving mortgage and tax fraud.

And a federal civil suit found Croman liable for harassing tenants in order to get them to vacate rent-regulated apartments, which led to Croman’s forking over an \$8 million settlement.

But the controversial landlord seems to have barely missed a beat. Soon after getting out of prison in 2018, he began investing anew. And the White Horse is an example.

In 2019 Croman, through a shell company, purchased 567 Hudson, which is a mixed-use building at West 11th Street that also has two apartments. The purchase price was \$13.7 million, according to a deed.

That same year Sugarman took over operations of the White Horse, which was supposedly a haunt of writer Jack Kerouac and is where poet Dylan Thomas seems to have begun the bender that led to his death.

Sugarman has fallen behind on his bills before, according to court records. In 2014 the landlord of his Midtown restaurant Destino sued him and his partner for \$200,000 in back rent. And suppliers for a subsequent restaurant, Southern Hospitality, which was on Ninth Avenue and West 45th Street from 2011 to 2019, also chased him and his affiliate companies for tens of thousands of dollars in unpaid bills, records show. Justin Timberlake was at one point an investor in both businesses, according to news reports.

And in 2019 a Utah bank sued to collect \$107,000 that was outstanding from a business loan, according to filings.

The White Horse, which dates to 1880, purports to be the city’s second-oldest continuously operated bar. The oldest is likely McSorley’s, on East Seventh Street in the East Village, which claims to have opened several years earlier, in the mid-19th century.

An email sent to Eric Pitter, Croman’s attorney, was not returned by press time.