

Selling New York After the Credits Roll

By C.J. Hughes
August 1, 2010



From left: Core CEO Shaun Osher and brokers Maggie Kent, John Gomes and Kirk Rundhaug

Reality shows lead to all kinds of outcomes, from divorce to notoriety to genuine fame.

But can they also translate into real estate sales?

If the two brokerages being featured on "Selling New York" serve as a test case, they seem, at the very least, to be helping.

It's too early to quantify exactly how much of an economic bounce the show has created for Gumley Haft Kleier and **Core Group NYC** -- sales can take six months to close and the show has only been on for three months.

But several of the brokers who've been featured on the half-hour show, which follows agents at the two firms as they crisscross the city wheeling and dealing (mostly with high-end buyers and sellers), have said their phones have been ringing when the cameras are not rolling.

"We were really nervous at first, because this is a reality show, and we thought it could embarrass us," said Michele Kleier, president of Gumley Haft Kleier. "But that hasn't been the case at all."

Kleier said a buyer who was filmed at an open house for a three-bedroom on Park Avenue in the show's March debut ended up closing on a different unit in the same co-op last month. (Kleier was short on details, citing a non-disclosure agreement with the buyer.)

Meanwhile, one of her firm's brokers, John Mehigan, landed a listing for a private island in upstate New York when the seller contacted him after seeing him on the show.

Michael Garr, a **Core** broker who appeared just once, in episode eight, got two commissions from his brief screen time. An apartment owner at 252 Seventh Avenue, the Chelsea Mercantile, saw the episode with Garr, in which he hosted a party at his own apartment in the building and declared that he wanted to be the go-to broker at the 354-unit condo, which was converted from a former Veterans Administration office. The owner tapped him to sell her two-bedroom, 2,000-square-foot apartment, unit 11A, which

Garr said went into contract on July 8. Garr would not disclose the price, but it was listed for \$2.45 million.

The same owner also enlisted Garr to find her a new unit in the Mercantile, which he did. She closed on a 1,500-square-foot one-bedroom with home office last month, for an undisclosed price. (The unit that was actually featured on Garr's episode of "Selling New York" -- a two-bedroom listed at \$2.74 million -- is still on the market.)

And the show -- which had 13 episodes in season one and began shooting its second season last month -- is not just generating business from New Yorkers. Garr said a Los Angeles man contacted him soon after the episode to help find him a three-bedroom rental, though the cross-country client has not come to town yet.

Indeed, "Selling New York," which featured an apartment owned by *The Real Deal's* publisher in one episode, has garnered a good-size audience. The average estimated viewership for each episode between March and June 10 was about 1.3 million, according to the Nielsen Company.

By comparison, the ninth season of "American Idol," which aired this winter and spring, averaged about 24.3 million viewers per episode. And "Celebrity Apprentice," in its most recent incarnation, saw an average of 8.21 million viewers.

Some of the brokers who've appeared on "Selling New York" report being recognized by strangers at places like Saks Fifth Avenue and Jamba Juice, and even by a UPS delivery man at their own front door. Kleier said she's had shout-outs from car windows.

Tom Postilio, a **Core** founding member who appeared in two episodes, was recognized by a teller at a Chase bank while, fittingly, picking up mortgage application documents.

Postilio said he "can't say in dollar amounts at this point" how the show has impacted him. But there could be tangible payoffs soon. He's hoping to get a listing for an Upper West Side brownstone whose owners "had seen my episodes ... and said they might want to work together."

More extreme, **Core** CEO Shaun Osher said some sellers have ditched agents that they have been working with for months to sign on with **Core** agents, though he declined to be specific. No broker reported losing a client after appearing on the show.

Both firms declined to say whether they're being compensated to participate, and HGTV did not return multiple calls and e-mails for comment. But one broker admitted to being paid for appearing on the show.

"Selling New York" is not the first reality show to showcase real estate projects in the city. The troubled Upper East Side condo Miraval Living is featured on Bravo's new "Double Exposure." MTV's "The Real World" filmed in Red Hook, Brooklyn, on Pier 41, after a deal with Downtown Brooklyn's BellTel lofts fell through. And, Trump Soho was

unveiled on the "Apprentice."

But there are downsides to being on national television.

Kleier -- whose appearances often include husband Ian and daughters Samantha Kleier Forbes and Sabrina Kleier Morgenstern as well as her Malteses, Roxy, Dolly and Lola -- said she's had so many random calls to her home phone that she recently unlisted her number.

In addition, a woman wanted Gumley Haft Kleier to market her apartment seemingly in a bid to get exposure for her own Internet business on the show. Kleier told her "we're not here to do that."

And then there's the fact that the show flashes the amount of commission each agent stands to make before touring a property -- a feature some in the real estate community might find off-putting.

Osher acknowledged feeling squeamish about that. "But that's what we do, and we're proud of it," he said.

In fact, the show is evidence that brokers work hard for those commissions, Osher said. "It's been really great for brand recognition, but also to help people understand the level at which we conduct our business."