

Meet the 8 women driving the luxury real estate industry in NYC

By [Heidi Mitchell](#)

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The power women of New York real estate (from left): Diane M. Ramirez, Pam Liebman, Dottie Herman and Wendy Maitland.

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Elliman. Corcoran. Christie's. Halstead. Stribling. If you search New York's major residential real estate brokerage firms, in every instance, "the man in charge" is, in fact, a woman. Even in the rare case where the CEO title is held by a man, the top salesperson is not. No other industry in

New York is so completely dominated by women.

This glass ceiling actually broke a generation ago. Back in the 1970s, pioneer Louise Sunshine was doing deals with The Donald; in 1980 Elizabeth Stribling launched her namesake firm.

“Women understand how a residence works, and women are the decision makers,” says Sunshine, who started her own brokerage firm in 1986 — and hired only women. It took her a quarter of a century to even let a man onto her team at the Sunshine Group, she says, a decision she didn’t take lightly. “Women are intuitive, and they were born juggling. And men — they don’t always listen,” she deadpans.



Among the most powerful women of New York real estate (from left): Wendy Maitland, Dolly Lenz and Paula Del Nunzio.

Photo: Jim Wright; Prop styling: Alix Winsby/The Prop Stylist

Back in those days, even the most ruthless saleswomen had to fight to be taken seriously. “They used to call us the Fur Coat Ladies,” says Diane M. Ramirez, CEO of Halstead Property. She recalls the stereotype of residential brokers as wives of Wall Street titans, women not considered inherently business-minded.

Stribling has similar memories. “People used to think real estate brokers just walked up and down Park Avenue,” she says. “But in the mid-1980s, the condo boom came along, and suddenly we were selling a lifestyle.” Practically overnight, brokers morphed into branding experts, and the women at the top emerged as leaders. “A lot of the early brokers were women,” notes Ramirez, “so it was natural for them to be heads of firms or to start their own firms.”

Forest City Ratner Companies chairman Bruce Ratner — admittedly a man — sees the success of these women as the sign of a true meritocracy. “If you sell a lot, there is nothing in your way,” he says. “It’s a level playing field, but it’s one of the few ones.”

That’s not to say it’s a feel-good girl’s club — fierce competition has created famous rivalries, cementing that drive to the top. But if you’re looking for a townhouse or penthouse, chances

are one of these women will have a hand in the transaction. They prove that you don't need to be an Alpha Dog to master the art of the deal.

Pamela Liebman (President & CEO, The Corcoran Group)



Pam Liebman now oversees some of NYC's most iconic new developments, including Zaha Hadid's 520 W. 28th St. (pictured) and the residential towers rising at Manhattan's Hudson Yards.

Photo: Related Companies

Year she joined the company: 1985. "I am one of the longest serving employees," she says. Not surprising, since her mother has said that one of little Pam's first big words was "condominium," when she was four. In her first year at Corcoran, she was named top-selling agent, closing the first million-dollar deal of '85.

Known for: Being a deal junkie, and being direct. "I'm sort of a 'what-you-see-is-what-you-get person,'" she says. "I'm only 5-foot-1, but I pack a punch in that little package."

Breakthrough deal: Liebman took over Corcoran in 2000, and orchestrated its acquisition of Citi Habitats in 2004 and subsequent merger with The Sunshine Group in 2005, which created the Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group, headed up by another woman, Kelly Mack.



Pam Liebman

Photo: Anne Wermiel/NY Post

Next big thing: Liebman recently closed the deal to handle sales and marketing for all of Related Companies' new Manhattan residential condo developments, including the Hudson Yards project and the Zaha Hadid-designed West Chelsea condominium at 520 W. 28th St. Corcoran is also selling condos at 220 Central Park South, which is being developed by Vornado. Estimated sales through 2017 are around \$30 billion.

Centripetal force: Liebman has her driver, Morris, to thank for arriving on time. "My husband says there is real time and there is Pam Time, which is not always on time," she jokes. "Morris gets me there, and he doesn't mind that I'm the worst back-seat driver."

Personal mantra: "You'll often hear me saying, 'Stop acting like No. 1!' at the office," she says. "We're in an aggressive market, and we can't rest on our laurels."

Fun fact: As a wheat-free vegan, Liebman admits that mealtime can be tricky. "Ordering lunch is probably the hardest part of my executive assistant's job," jokes the New Jersey and Miami resident.

Bonnie Stone Sellers (CEO, Christie's International Real Estate)



Copper Beech Farm in Connecticut was sold by Sellers in April for \$120 million, a then US record for a private home.

Photo: Courtesy Christies

Year she joined the company: December 2012, as the company's third-ever CEO.

Known for: Working 18-hour days and focusing her affiliate network of 27,000 agents on 360-degree deals. "Many Christie's clients have the same passion for real estate as they do for art, so it's a terrific synergy," she says. Recently her team sold the estate of copper heiress Huguette Clark, which included three Fifth Avenue apartments, a collection of Monet Water Lilies, Art Deco jewelry and a New Canaan home. The estate's total haul hovered above \$90 million.



Bonnie Stone Sellers

Photo: Anne Wermiel/NY Post

Breakthrough deal: Despite her Dickensian last name, Sellers has never been in sales. She has degrees in architecture from Penn and Harvard, and a law degree from Columbia, but ultimately wound up running the real estate group at McKinsey & Co., where she spent 18 years. Under her tutelage at Christie's, the firm briefly took the title of highest sale price of a private home in the US: \$120 million for Copper Beech Farm, in Greenwich, Conn., in April 2014.

Next big thing: Expanding into the Middle East and further into Asia. "And we're going to take on every nook and cranny in the US: We've hit every major market already."

Personal mantra: "Make an impact. Deliver with excellence. Maintain your reputation and integrity in everything you do."

State of the industry: "Luxury real estate doesn't follow housing, it follows luxury goods, and we're seeing incredible growth at the top of the market being led in cities like New York, which attracts the world's wealthiest buyers."

Fun fact: Sellers met her husband in law school, just as her parents had done.

Dolly Lenz (CEO, Dolly Lenz Real Estate)



Dolly Lenz may be best known for her regular appearances on CNBC's "Secret Lives of the Super Rich," but she has a long history brokering deals city-wide. Among her most recent: Leo DiCaprio's \$10 million condo at the eco-cool Delos building. She's also marketing a West Village manse (pictured) for \$47.5 million.

Photo: Gerner Kronick + Valcarcel, Architects, DPC

Year she launched the company: June 2013, after a 25-yearlong career in residential sales. "In under a year we have signed up \$560 million in exclusive listings, with an additional two new developments coming to market this year. This places us fourth in the entire NY residential brokerage industry," she says.

Known for: She's been called "a combination of Babe Ruth and Jack the Ripper" — a nom-de-guerre she doesn't dispute. Lenz likes to work alone, and doesn't adhere to the dress code and norms of her high-profile peers.



Dolly Lenz

Photo: Anne Wermiel/NY Post

Breakthrough deal: The sale of the Setai Hotel site on Fifth Avenue for \$200-plus million, in 2007, which she closed during her tenure as a vice chairman at Prudential Douglas Elliman. Most recently she sealed the deal on Rupert Murdoch’s penthouse at One Madison, for \$57.3 million.

Next big thing: Marketing the New York Foundling’s 60-footwide corner mansion in the West Village, at 27 Christopher St., for \$47.5 million. “The proceeds of the sale will benefit children and families in need, which is very gratifying,” she says.

Centripetal force: Her two adult children, who work in finance. “They are my millennial research department.”

Personal mantra: “Whatever doesn’t kill you makes you stronger. And I have the scars to prove it.”

Fun fact: Lenz grew up in the Bronx and Washington Heights and clawed her way to the top. One of her first clients was music mogul Tommy Mottola: “I rented him and Mariah Carey an apartment, and went on to sell him in and out of many fabulous apartments [after].”

Diane M. Ramirez (CEO, Halstead Property)



This year marks the 30th anniversary of Halstead, where Diane M. Ramirez now serves as CEO. She's led the expansion of the firm in Brooklyn's Bed-Stuy as well as Harlem — including its newest project, The Adeline, at 23 W. 116th St. (pictured).

Photo: Emily Gilbert

Year she launched the company: In 1984, with her business partner Clark Halstead. “We were very much marketing-minded,” she says, at a time when brokerages were still “very mom-and-pop.” She moved up to president in 1999. “Elizabeth Stribling already had Stribling, Barbara Corcoran was a great and colorful leader, Dottie and Howard Lorber bought Elliman, and then Pam Liebman took the reins for Corcoran,” she recalls. “There were a lot of great women out there in the early days.”

Known for: Working with her peers to bring polish and define best practices in what was a fairly rag-tag industry.



Diane M. Ramirez

Photo: Anne Wermiel/NY Post

Breakthrough deal: Just as she stepped into management, she was closing a major deal: an East Side townhouse bought by Calvin Klein. “That was my last deal. It was on for \$6.5 million and we got a bidding war going, and it sold at \$500,000 over ask — a record at that time.”

Next big thing: Halstead just expanded in Hoboken and tripled in size in Harlem. “And we are the first major firm to open in Bed-Stuy. We’re very excited about that.”

Personal mantra: A quote from Andrew Jackson resonates with Ramirez: “Take time to deliberate, but when the time for action arrives, stop thinking and go in.”

State of the industry: “I may be tri-state, but New York is the sun: everything revolves around New York,” she says. “Everywhere I go, everyone wants to know how NYC is doing.”

Fun fact: Ramirez has a DIY streak. “I have bought and sold 30 apartments of my own,” she says. “I love to buy a wreck and renovate it.”

Paula Del Nunzio (Broker, Brown Harris Stevens)



Broker Paula Del Nunzio is known for scoring serious multi-million dollar sales across New York. Career highs include Fifth Avenue's Duke-Semans Mansion — which she sold twice — and the record-breaking Harkness Mansion, which went for \$53 million in 2006. She is currently selling a massive penthouse at 25 Columbus Circle (pictured) for \$68 million.

Photo: Cary Horowitz

Year she joined company: 1995

Known for: Being the townhouse queen — she's sold 64 since 2006.

Breakthrough deal: 4 E. 75th St., aka the Harkness Mansion — still the record for the highest price paid for a single-family NYC townhouse, at \$53 million. The 50-foot-wide, 22,000-square-foot townhouse closed in October 2006.



Paula Del Nunzio

Next big thing: It's not a townhouse, but it's got a serious pedigree. Del Nunzio is marketing the original William Randolph Hearst penthouse at Riverside Drive and 86th Street, with seven terraces and 17-foot ceilings, for \$38 million; she also has another property, at 25 Columbus Circle, asking \$68 million.

Centripetal force: Her yellow lab (okay, and her husband).

Personal mantra: “To all sellers: you can only sell this property once,” she advises — although she has sold one of Manhattan's highest-ticket townhouses twice. The Duke-Semans Mansion at 1009 Fifth Ave. went for \$40 million in 2006; five years later, Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim bought it for \$44 million. She believes that sellers should vet their brokers with the same care they would use in selecting a financial advisor or attorney.

State of the industry: She pegs marketing as the “key factor” that allowed her to sell all those townhouses in the past eight years, for over \$1 billion. Del Nunzio draws on her 14 years in advertising to analyze each property and develop creative marketing plans — allowing her to get an average of 94 percent of the asking price.

Fun fact: Del Nunzio has a quirky background for a broker. She studied chemistry at Columbia University, wrote around 20 movie trailers for Columbia Pictures and speaks decent French, Russian, German and Spanish.

Dottie Herman (CEO, Douglas Elliman)



A decade ago, Dottie Herman bought Douglas Elliman with Howard Lorber. Since then, the firm has tackled myriad million-dollar listings, like their major project, 432 Park Ave. (pictured), where available residences start at \$16.95 million.

Photo: dbox

Year she purchased company: 2003, with business partner Howard Lorber of The Vector Group (and also the owner of Nathan's Famous hot dogs), for \$72 million.

Known for: Exhausting all her options, and never being exhausted. Colleagues aren't surprised to receive emails from Herman time-stamped 1 a.m.

Breakthrough deal: In 1989, Herman borrowed \$9 million to purchase Prudential Long Island Realty, owning and managing 36 offices across Long Island, the Hamptons and Queens. When she bought Elliman, she batted for the rafters. "I always thought that if Robert Moses could build bridges and roadways linking Manhattan to Long Island, then I could do the same with my business," she says.



Dottie Herman

Photo: Anne Wermiel/NY Post

Her motto: From Manhattan to Montauk.

Next big thing: Douglas Elliman Development Marketing is handling the sales and marketing, in collaboration with CIM Group and Macklowe Properties, of 432 Park, slated to become the tallest residential tower in the Western Hemisphere when it's finished, in 2015. Designed by Rafael Viñoly, the building features penthouses starting at \$73.5 million.

Centripetal force: A love of caffeine and her Starbucks barista: "Coffee keeps me going — morning, noon and night."

Personal mantra: "Never be afraid to ask; the worst that could happen is someone could say no."

Fun fact: Herman is a die-hard Billy Joel fan. Look for her commuting between her Long Island homes and Manhattan in her Mercedes SL, blasting the Piano Man. "We're both from Long Island — I grew up a couple of towns away from him," she says. "I just went to see him in concert, and he's still so great."

Elizabeth Stribling (Founder and Chairman, Stribling & Associates)



For nearly 35 years, Elizabeth Stribling has led her eponymous firm, which has focused on everything from grand condo conversions like the Plaza to a new boutique UES project 151 East 78th by architect Peter Penoyer (pictured).

Photo: Williams New York

Year she launched the company: April 1, 1980. “I’m an April Fool’s girl!”

Known for: Pearls, couture and a Southern accent. Libba, as her friends call her, is often called a cheerleader for New York. “I can’t tell you how many times people have asked if I’ll run for mayor,” she says.

Breakthrough deal: With the Elad Group, Stribling transformed the Plaza from a hotel into a \$1.5 billion sellout. “That was into the stratosphere,” she recalls. “It was a lot of fun. As I bounded up those fabled stairs for five years, I felt like Eloise every day.” Plaza buyers included designer Tommy Hilfiger.



Elizabeth Stribling

Photo: Sigrid Estrada

Next big thing: She's excited about new conversions on the Upper East Side, including the former Ackerman Institute, at 151 E. 78th St. "We launched this project in April and we got 79 percent of the contracts signed in five weeks," she says.

Centripetal force: Her daughter, Elizabeth Ann Kivlan, "who is the apple of my eye." (Kivlan became the president of Stribling early last year.)

Personal mantra: One rule has guided her through her career — "It's very simple: work hard and be honest." Look for it on her website.

Fun fact: Surprisingly, this Cambridge University-schooled southerner has lived in the outer boroughs since 2011, when she moved into One Brooklyn Bridge Park. "I love it. I see the Statue of Liberty. I look at the Brooklyn Bridge. I see the sun rise and the sun set."

Wendy Maitland (President of Sales, Town Residential)



Best known as one of the earliest “brokers to the stars,” Wendy Maitland pairs an innovative sales approach with far-sighted philanthropic work and an active lifestyle. Most interesting of all, perhaps, is Maitland’s university background: At NYU and Yeshiva, she studied psychology and later had a private practice. Today, however, her biggest project is purely steel and glass: The Charles, on First Avenue, whose massive penthouse (pictured) went into contract for nearly \$38 million.

Photo: Williams NewYork

Year she joined the company: Maitland was one of Town’s founders when she joined in 2010 after serving as senior vice president at Brown Harris Stevens and Corcoran. This April, she was promoted to Town’s head of sales.

Known for: Fostering healthy relationships. She recently led brokers to New Orleans to volunteer for Brad Pitt’s Make It Right Foundation. Also: running a little late and her love of hummus.

Breakthrough deal: Her biggest single sale as a broker was of 118 E. 70th St. in 2006, which set the record at the time for the highest price per square foot of any townhouse in New York City (at more than \$4,200). “When that client engaged me to find him the perfect home, he said, ‘You’re never going to find anything,’ ” she recalls. “He’d been searching for two years with different brokers, and I found him the house within a few short months.”



Wendy Maitland

Photo: Anne Wermiel/NY Post

Next big thing: Maitland and her team are working on closing deals at The Charles at 1355 First Ave. One recent transaction turned out to be a major challenge. “I lost five pounds, battled fatigue and memory loss and developed ‘potty mouth syndrome’ (now cured, thankfully),” she says. The weight loss might also be attributed to exercise — Maitland is a proud devotee of Soul Cycle spinning studios.

Centripetal force: Jemma Muradian, her hair stylist. “She is the master of the universe at her craft,” she says. “Her authentic, positive attitude is contagious.”

Personal mantra: “Listening is the most underrated skill. What people say, and what they don’t say, will tell you everything.”

State of the industry: “It’s like the greatest Rubik’s Cube of all time, and it is such a joy when all of the pieces fall into place on an intricate deal, or on a project, or on a career in this industry.”

Fun fact: Bob Roth, the director of the David Lynch Foundation, taught Maitland transcendental meditation, which she practices twice a day, every day.

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