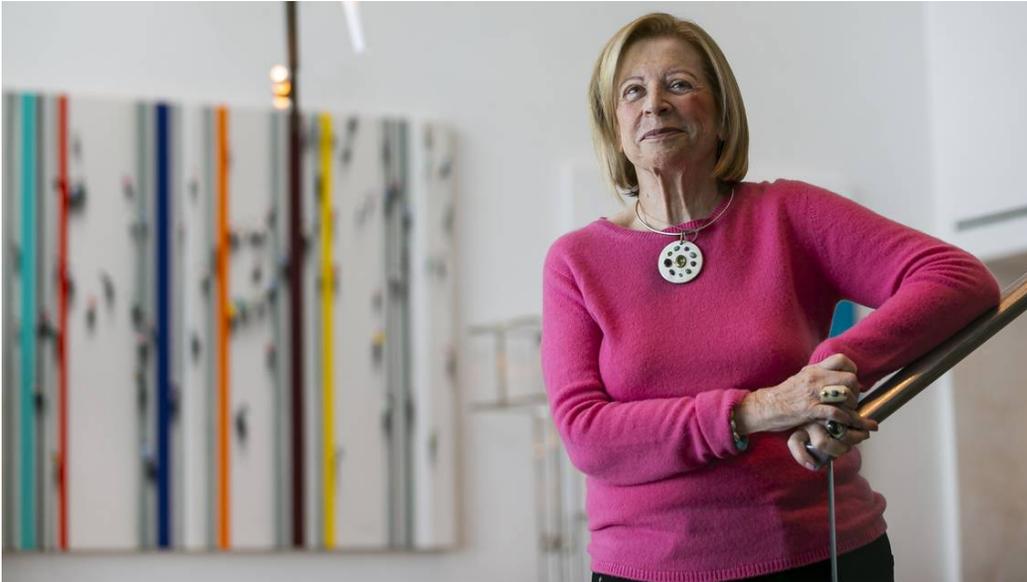


REAL ESTATE NEWS

Real estate veteran Louise Sunshine reflects on storied career and challenges ahead

BY RENE RODRIGUEZ

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Real estate marketing entrepreneur Louise Sunshine, 79, a real estate developer, at her home in Miami Beach, Florida, on Monday, November 4, 2019. Sunshine is relocating to the Residences at Four Seasons Surf Club in Surfside. [MATIAS J. OCNER](mailto:MATIAS.J.OCNER@MIAMIHERALD.COM) MOCNER@MIAMIHERALD.COM

There are an endless number of paths that lead into the real estate industry. But even by those standards, the formidable career of Louise Sunshine stands out.

Her grandfather, Barney Pressman, founded Barneys New York and was a pioneer in using radio advertising to promote the chain's initial location. Her father, Nelson Mintz, owned a real estate investment company in New Jersey. She studied business and real estate at Brandeis University, then married and started a family.

"I was a wife and a mother," says Sunshine, 79. "I had three children — twins and another child — and I was almost 30 years old. And I had been to enough book fairs and 6 a.m. school readings and had cooked my husband dinner at 11 o'clock at night. I did all the things that wives and mothers do. It was incredibly rewarding. But I wanted to do something more."

Instead of real estate, though, Sunshine opted for politics. She began in fundraising and eventually became finance chairman for Hugh Carey, the Democratic nominee for New York governor in 1974.

After Carey was elected, she took on a variety of posts, including State Treasurer of the Democratic Party. She personally met every contributor to Carey's campaign. One of the donors — a young Democrat and aspiring real estate developer named Donald J. Trump — wound up changing her career. In her 16-year stint working for Trump, she worked alongside architects and contractors and bankers, learning every facet of the real estate industry hands-on.

In 1986, Sunshine founded The Sunshine Group, a residential real estate pre-development and marketing firm where her catchphrase “All square feet are not created equal” was born. The company was sold in 2002 to NRT Inc., a subsidiary of the residential real estate giant Cendant Corporation. In 2005, NRT merged with The Corcoran Group, where Sunshine remained until 2006.

“We worked for Louise on many projects when she ran The Sunshine Group in New York City,” said Florence Quinn, president and founder of Quinn PR. “Louise was luxury new-development force in Manhattan. She wrote the book on how to market luxury, new-development residential real estate. She set very high standards for everyone. She demanded excellence in every detail, big and small. She continues to dazzle — her ideas are ingenious — and I can’t wait to see what’s coming.”

After leaving Corcoran, Sunshine relocated to South Florida full time and began doing private consulting work.

Today, Sunshine serves as a consultant to the Miami-based Fort Partners, the real estate and hospitality firm that developed the Four Seasons Resort Palm Beach and the Four Seasons Hotel and Residences at the Surf Club. She uses her extensive New York connections to bring attention to the ultra high-end properties.

“Having pioneered the industry of development marketing, Louise represents the best of the best and was an obvious choice to advise Fort Partners,” said Nadim Ashi, founder of Fort Partners. “Her guidance is incredibly sought after and she is an invaluable member of our team.”

Sunshine recently sat down with the Herald in her six-bedroom penthouse on Venetian Drive (which she just sold at an undisclosed price) for a wide-ranging conversation in the company of her two beloved Cavachons, Beni and Patch.

Q: Tell me about your time working with Donald Trump.

A: Donald and I met because I met every contributor to Hugh L. Carey. And in those days, Donald was a Democrat. This is 1976. Donald needed a license plate. He was this spoiled kid. He was fighting in court for the development rights of the [Penn Central yards in New York](#) and he wanted a license plate with the letters DJT on it. He had wanted that license plate since he was 12 years old, but he could never get it.

So his father called me and this other guy calls me and they all wanted me to get Donald’s license plate. But I wasn’t in the business of manufacturing license plates. And there was already a license plate in use with those letters on it. I did put in a tickler into the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles to let me know if this license plate ever became available.

As things worked out, the people who had this license plate were leaving New York state so they gave it back. So lo and behold, I wound up with this license plate. I was able to call Donald and get him the license plate. From that day on, I could do no wrong in Donald’s eyes. He offered me a job. He said I should leave all my political offices and register as a lobbyist and work for him. I didn’t know what a lobbyist was. I just thought a lobby was part of a building. But we started working together, just me and him, in a two-room office at the Penn Central building on 46th street and Lexington Avenue.

Q: You achieved so much success in the political arena so quickly. Weren’t you reluctant to leave it?

A: Donald is very convincing. He is also very impulsive. He is also very loyal to the people who he likes. Who are few and far between. And they come and go easily.

Q: So he convinced you to take a chance?

A: I am a person who goes with the opportunity. I'm 79 and I'm still seeing opportunities. And I'm in business. I would just die if I couldn't be in business. So I saw this opportunity and I resigned all my political offices and I took it. I thought Donald was a genius, by the way. I used to go round and say "Oh my God, there's nobody like him." And he was unbelievable in those days. My starting salary was \$20,000. And then the first year my bonus was \$250,000. That sort of tells you what happened. I became this unbelievable lobbyist.

Q: You also ascended to the role of executive vice president of the Trump Organization.

A: I was with Donald for 16 years and together we created all of his residential portfolio, most of it ground-up, from scratch. With Barneys, I learned about branding. The radio spots they used in the 1930s — "Calling all men to Barneys! Seventh Avenue and 17th Street!" — are ingrained in my brain. I could brand these buildings as a Trump property and create a brand.

That way you could say Trump properties are worth a thousand dollars more per square foot than any other building, even though they look they same. That was my focus, creating that brand. Donald has attention deficit disorder, and he gave me the freedom to do what I do best. And I'm multi-talented. Believe me, I'm smart. I can do a lot of things at one time.

Q: Was being a woman in a male-dominated industry ever a hindrance?

A: You know, I had an education. I had a background. I knew about marketing through Barneys. I had these innate skills. Women are very intuitive. Men are not. Women intuit things, and intuition is a key skill. Because when you have intuition, you can be proactive. And being proactive is so important. Being able to see opportunity and take advantage of that opportunity.

So Donald let me work with architects and construction people and bankers. I went to every single meeting with Ben Holloway, an officer from Equitable Insurance, to put the [1980 remodeling] Commodore Hotel deal together. Donald never came.



Louise Sunshine, 79, is serving as an adviser to Fort Partners, the real estate and hospitality firm developing Four Seasons hotels and residences along Florida's coastlines. *MATIAS J. OCNER* MOCNER@MIAMIHERALD.COM

Q: So you never experienced sexism at work?

A: Never. Because as you can see by how I talk. I'm very secure in what I say. I can back up what I say. I feel like I can match any man at the table. And if anything, I think I create fear.

Q: What do you mean by that?

A: I mean I'm not a woman who men want to take to bed, so I don't have like eight people trying to talk me into bed at night. I'm a woman who men listen to. I was never in a room with other women. I was always the only woman in the room for many years. When I started my company [The Sunshine Group], I only hired women. It took me 12 years to hire a man.

That was totally intentional, because women are so skilled. In addition to intuition, women can multitask. They can do the dishes. They can go shopping. They can cook. They can have babies. They can go to work. They can have their job at the bank. They go to the gym. They multitask. Think about it. You give a man like three things to do, he pees in his pants. I'm being very forthright, right? You get what you see. and you see what you get.

Q: The foundation of your first company — “all square feet are not created equal” — is particularly applicable to the high-end South Florida market.

A: Right. All square feet are not created equal, and we need to be able to relay that in so many ways to our buyer profile. We spend all our lives doing that. For instance, why is the Four Seasons Fort Lauderdale getting \$1,800 per square foot when everything else in Fort Lauderdale got \$900 per square foot? Why do you have to pay double? We need to be able to explain that. That's not an easy task. But today you have social media and digital media and all these things that weren't around when I had my company. There's been a big evolution in how you explain that all square feet are not created equal.

Q: How did you end up working on the Four Seasons projects?

A: I had already left New York and moved my residency to Miami. Nadim Ashi was looking for an architect to work on the Four Seasons Surf Club development. He settled on Richard Meier. I had done all of Richard Meier's developments in New York. He and I are very good friends. There isn't an architect in the world, actually, that I have not had the privilege of working with. It's been a fantastic education.

So Richard proposed to Nadim that he bring me onto his team because the Four Seasons Surf Club is a worldwide destination. It's not just a building. It's a destination. It's a place where people come, they stay, they live. It's a huge site. It's not a simple little thing. So I've been given the title of Strategic Adviser to Fort Partners. This is the title they give to old age and lots of brains. So I am the strategic adviser for all of their development in Florida now, and they have the exclusive rights to build Four Seasons hotels and residences along the Florida oceanfront. We're building Fort Lauderdale now. We're going to do something in Naples, you know. We might do something in Key West.



The Residences at Four Seasons Hotel at The Surf Club in Surfside, one of the projects Louise Sunshine consulted on since its inception.

Q: How did you go about selling the Surf Club residences?

A: Initially, when we had to do the sales and we were in the pre-development phase, we didn't even have a brochure. Nadim didn't know a thing about New York. So I said "We're going to go to Richard Meier's office and I'm going to introduce you to some of the wealthiest people in New York. And we're going to include them in our thinking about the design and thought process of this building. We're going to have these little meetings with Richard and two or three other people.

And out of the first 10 people that we did that with, seven of them bought a unit. They were all multimillionaires or billionaires. And out of that group of seven, five of them brought friends. And out of those five, three brought friends. That is how the Surf Club community grew. Everyone is very like-minded. They're very interested in art, philanthropy and cultural events.

Q: Have you noticed any difference in potential buyers for the Four Seasons in Fort Lauderdale?

A: They're all New Yorkers or from Chicago or Boston. They're all people who stay at the Four Seasons Hotel and spend up to sixteen thousand dollars a night for a room. Canada has just sort of petered out. I don't know why. Maybe it's the exchange rate. And Latin America buyers have totally disappeared on the high end of the market. I don't know where they are.

Q: What do you think is going to happen with the oversupply of luxury condos in Sunny Isles Beach?

A: It's just G-L-U-T. So this is what we're going to do. We're going to be on a conference call today. We're going to collaborate with a major fund out of New York who wants to buy residential as an investment going forward. They want to buy both in Miami and New York big time, like a half a billion dollars worth. But they don't want to buy one apartment or two apartments. They want to buy portfolios of apartments. They want to make huge investments. We're going to do that together because frankly, I can't. I'm just one old woman and two dogs who are very helpful. You know, I'm a widow and they give me unconditional love.



Real estate marketing entrepreneur Louise Sunshine, 79, inside her Miami Beach home on Monday, November 4, 2019. She will be moving to the Residences at Four Seasons Surf Club in Surfside. MATIAS J. OCNER MOCNER@MIAMIHERALD.COM