



# 40 YEARS IN THE HIGH END

No matter how you look at it, 40 years is a long time. When Unique Homes began, luxury was a very thin slice of real estate overall, not every city had a Multiple Listing Service and there were very few ways to publicize homes for sale. Changes brought by the fax, cell phones, computers and the Internet all lay ahead. Today, details of a property can be broadcast worldwide within seconds of being listed. Luxury seems everywhere, making it a challenge to sift through all the hype; real estate professionals have to be as global as they are local.

In this final celebration of all things 40, we take a look at real estate professionals who have been in the business as long as we have. What does it take to thrive over four decades? Persistence is essential, of course, but the pros we profile also point to a love of the business and passion to help people as key.

We start with a centenarian who still drives herself to work every day...

By Camilla McLaughlin

## Ebby Halliday

Ebby Halliday Realtors Dallas, Texas



In 1945, Ebby Halliday ventured where few women dared to go — real estate. And, while selling the American dream to others, Ebby herself came to embody the American dream — a true Horatio Alger who bootstrapped herself from a Kansas farm to selling hats in a department store to being one of the most successful Realtors in the country. Ebby led her company through decades of changing economies.

Today, with more than 1,600 agents, it is the No. 1 independently owned residential real estate company in Texas and eighth in the nation.

**Memorable moment:** “Early in my career, builders had just started building \$100,000 homes, very high end at the time, in Preston Hollow. To build my business, I arranged to hold open one of these homes. One Sunday a shabby old-model car drove up. The builder happened to be there; I could see him shaking his head as if to say, ‘Don’t waste your time on the occupants of that car.’ I met them at the door with enthusiasm and showed them every inch of the house. After conferring privately for about 10 minutes, they called me over and proceeded to peel out \$100,000 in cash! I then learned that the buyer was a Maitre d’ at the old Baker Hotel and he had saved his tips from wealthy oil barons who frequented the hotel.”

**Success secret:** “I give credit to my management team and our many sales associates for our success. As Roger Staubach says in the preface of my book, we both had something in common — we both had great teams.”

## Jerilynn Babington

Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage Santa Rosa, Calif.



Real estate is in the blood for Babington, whose father and grandfather were builders and developers. “When my friends were out playing, I was driving around with my father looking at tracks of land,” she recalls. Armed with a degree from UC-Berkeley, Babington started her career in Bel Air with Connie Wulffson. Right away, she says, “I knew I was good with the high end.” A testament to Babington’s skills — she’s

successfully moved her business several times, first to Santa Barbara and Montecito, then Orinda, and most recently to the wine country, Santa Rosa. Long before it was trendy, Babington actively staged clients’ homes, even maintaining a stock of furnishings and accessories.

**Pivotal event:** A buyer arrived at the end of an open house. Babington arranged to show him a home nearby. He brought along his wife, her parents and his brother. Although Babington recognized the client, Jermaine Jackson, she didn’t realize that his father-in-law was Motown mogul Barry Gordy. And the tyke dancing from room to room? Michael.

**Memorable moment:** Being featured on “Good Morning America” for her staging abilities.

**Biggest change in luxury:** Even the wealthy today are being conservative.

## Bob Borden

LandVest Boston, Mass.



A background in the securities business was an excellent foundation for a career helping New England’s major families make wise decisions about their holdings. Under Borden’s stewardship, LandVest has blossomed into a multifaceted

company equally expert at valuing special properties, determining optimal use for large parcels of land, marketing and managing timberlands, conservation gifting and planning for family lands.

**Memorable event:** Selling the company to Merrill Lynch Fine Homes and then having to buy it back. As a newly minted president, Borden says the negotiating was fascinating.

**Pivotal moment:** Being able to reinvigorate the company. “Many who had been with the company for a long time felt that the heart of the company was gone. It’s a wonderful people story because of the amazing amount of support from the people here.”

## Barbara Cleary

Barbara Cleary’s Realty Guild New Canaan, Conn.



Six college tuitions propelled Cleary into real estate. Independent brokerages ruled luxury then, and Cleary remains a staunch proponent. When large corporations got into real estate in the mid-1980s, she helped found an affiliation of independents in Westchester and Connecticut. When her broker merged with Merrill Lynch, she started her own company. This year, Cleary’s Realty Guild celebrated a

25th anniversary and Cleary has received numerous industry recognitions. Looking back, she says, “What started out as a need has become a really good thing.”

**Game changer:** Voicemail! And “how we could have lived without cell phones.”

**Biggest luxury change:** Yesterday’s luxury has become today’s entitlement.

**Pivotal event:** Starting the System One Network and her own company simultaneously.

**Memorable moment:** Receiving a 2010 global award from Christie’s International Real Estate.

## George Damianos

Damianos Sotheby's International Realty Nassau, Bahamas



Few college grads opted for real estate in the early 1970s. "Real estate salesmen were considered one step above a used car salesman," Damianos says. Friends who went into law and accounting "started out making good money, but over the years the tide turned and those who were good at real estate did a lot better than many professionals." Damianos started "at the bottom, selling whatever I could" in his father's

company. **Biggest change:** The National Association of Realtors evolving into a more professional organization.

**Game changing technology:** The fax.

**Pivotal event:** Learning about franchising in 1994. When Sotheby's offered the Bahamas franchise in 1995, Damianos was already in line.

**Memorable moment:** Selling the British Colonial Hotel in downtown Nassau in the early 1990s.

**All in a day's work:** Walking in to show a house and discovering a burglary in progress. Fortunately, the burglar was hiding in the attic.

## Celia Dunn

Celia Dunn Sotheby's International Realty Savannah, Ga.



When Celia Dunn got her start, there was no multilist, so finding the right house was a challenge. Men still outnumbered women in the profession, but it was one career that offered "women an opportunity to be successful if they were willing to work hard and had a high level of integrity." Synonymous with Savannah real estate long before she founded her company 29 years ago, Dunn and her husband helped to revive the historic district.

**Biggest change:** When she started, "people took you at your word and your word was your bond. A deal was a deal. Today, you cannot count on anything until it's closed."

**Pivotal moment:** The boost of support she got from her broker when she decided to go out on her own.

**Memorable events:** Seeing properties in the historic district she sold decades earlier for \$125,000 sell for over \$2 million.

**Getting started:** Her first showing was in a violent thunderstorm with a nanny (who was terrified of lightning) and children in tow. "I will never last in this business," she later told her husband. But when the buyers purchased the home, Dunn says she realized, "By golly, maybe I can sell a house." And that "just sealed my fate in real estate."

## Maxine Gellens

Prudential California Realty San Diego, Calif.



A sales star even before real estate, this Prudential powerhouse received Century 21's "Rookie of the Year" for San Diego after less than a year in the business. "Back then I really had no idea of what a goal was, but I put a picture of a cruise ship on my calendar in the office and that December my husband and I went on a cruise." Today, being No. 1 is old hat to Gellens and her daughter, whose stack of

awards include Prudential's top spot more than once.

**Game changer:** Cell phones. "Before then, we ran from pay phone to pay phone."

**Pivotal event:** Joining forces with her daughter in 1994. "We merged offices, going to Prudential in La Jolla, and had a huge party, including search lights to celebrate."

**Memorable moment:** Being featured in Cosmopolitan Magazine. Dinner with Warren Buffet.

**Funny anecdote:** Having to present an offer that included the family dog in the sale. The seller agreed and the new owner and dog lived happily ever after.

## Jim Gillespie

CEO, Coldwell Banker Real Estate Parsippany, N.J.



With a degree in Parks and Recreation, Gillespie envisioned a life helping kids. As CEO of Coldwell Banker, he's helped more than he ever imagined. In 1975, a tennis pal encouraged him to try real estate. One of his first customers was the receptionist from the YMCA, his former employer, who called to wish him well, adding there was no way she and her husband could buy a house on their minimum wages.

Gillespie told them about FHA, showed them some homes and negotiated a purchase. When the sale closed, they cried. "They never thought they could own a piece of the American dream. At that point, I knew this was my career for life," Gillespie recalls. Almost 30 years ago, Coldwell Banker tapped him to head a franchise region, but Gillespie never seems to lose touch with buyers, sellers and agents.

**Pivotal event:** Making that first life-changing sale.

**Memorable moment:** The day he was announced as president.

**Success secret:** "Surrounding myself with outstanding people. I want new people to be as good, if not better than me. I give them direction and don't micromanage."

## Betty Graham

President, Coldwell Banker Previews International Beverly Hills, Calif.



Hired at age 18 to be Johnny Carson's personal assistant — and later working behind the scenes in the film industry as a photographer — created trusted relationships long before Betty Graham began her real estate career in Malibu. Early on, Johnny Carson hired her to represent his two homes. "He was very supportive of my career and that was a gift to me," she recalls. Graham owned her own Malibu firm, Coast

and Canyon, before joining Jon Douglas Company, which merged with NRT and Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage in 1997. This year Graham was named president of Coldwell Banker Previews International.

**Biggest change in luxury:** "The most remarkable change is the shrinking of the world. International used to be more smoke and mirrors and it is very concrete now in terms of marketing. Sellers want to know what you are doing for them internationally."

**Memorable Moment:** Johnny Carson was renowned for protecting his privacy. The sales contract for his home contained an unusual item that the buyer inadvertently mentioned to the press. Graham had to get Carson's permission to confirm the item. His response: "You know what, it's a cute story." The item: The buyer, John McEnroe, had to give Mr. Carson six tennis lessons.

**Secret to her success:** Always being open to learning.

## Frank Hardy

Frank Hardy, Inc., Realtors Charlottesville, Va.



A lifelong affinity for the outdoors prompted Frank Hardy toward real estate after graduating from the University of Richmond. When he opened his own brokerage, he focused on upscale and country property. Today, from the Tidewater region to Charlottesville and the counties surrounding Middleburg, his name is synonymous with Virginia luxury.

**Luxury change:** Computers and the Internet allow individuals to live virtually anywhere.

**Pivotal moment:** Selling a 2,500-acre estate on the James River. "I then realized that I might actually be able to make a go of it!"

**Memorable moment:** "Much later, I represented the sellers and purchasers of a 5,000-acre, \$25.5 million property on the James River. That certainly was the most memorable transaction thus far and probably the most memorable moment."

## Rita Hansen

Intero Real Estate Services Evergreen, Colo.



When Rita Hansen's plans for a small boutique derailed, real estate called instead. A move to Colorado did little to dampen her career, which includes owning two companies and national recognition as a top producer since 1978. Developers, artists and sculptors all consider her their Realtor, as do musicians such as Willie Nelson and pro athletes.

**Game changer:** Companies offering less work for lower commissions. "Sellers really need to find out what agents will do to publicize the home."

**Pivotal event:** Selling a property, the Llama Ranch, for \$400,000 to Charles Keating opened her eyes to bigger things.

**Memorable moment:** A Japanese executive responded to an ad (in Unique Homes). The first item on his agenda after she picked him up at the Denver airport? Seeing "Little Bear," a famous bar in Evergreen.

**Never-forget lesson:** A buyer presented bank statements demonstrating his ability to purchase and left a \$250,000 check as a deposit. When Hansen followed up and checked with the bank, she discovered the account balance was only \$5.

## Marilyn Hoffman

Hoffman International Properties Dallas, Texas



"Real estate is something I always wanted to do," Hoffman says. The Bal de la Mer in Monte Carlo, Pebble Beach's Concours d'Elegance, the Salon du Cheval in Paris and dozens of charity galas are only a few of the significant luxury events where Hoffman International has a presence. Formerly a champion rider on the national show circuit, she's also an expert on equestrian properties. The secret to her success? "I

don't take a lot of listings. I am a boutique company and I take just a few listings and work hard to get them sold."

**Luxury change:** You have to do so much more than in the past: Advertise, do brochures, websites and go to events.

**Pivotal moment:** Expanding her scope worldwide, creating one-on-one connections at top luxury events.

**Memorable sale:** A \$20 million house in Door County, Wis., that closed in 24 days. The home had been listed with another broker for less money for a year without selling.

*continued on page 292*



**John Brian Losh** Chairman, CEO Ewing & Clark  
 Publisher, LuxuryRealEstate.com Seattle, Wash.



Few have the same perspective as Losh, who is a luxury broker and also runs the largest luxury group in the industry. Beginning as an individual agent and then owner of Seattle's oldest brokerage, Ewing & Clark, Losh founded Who's Who in Luxury Real Estate in 1987 to establish a network of independent luxury brokers. Luxuryrealestate.com followed in 1995.

**Luxury changes:** The huge influx of foreign buyers; multiple homes; fractional ownership; vacation rentals; private aircraft and "there is a lot more money now."

**Memorable moment:** He wrote a letter to the editor defending someone who he believed was characterized unfairly. This opened the door to a home purchase and referrals from the person he defended. In the end, that single act of kindness brought an estimated \$100 million in business.

**Never-forget sale:** First million-plus sale in the state of Washington 25 years ago. The buyer wrote a check for \$1.2 million but the seller, stricken by a case of seller's remorse, refused to leave — she said she was "taking a nap." Finally, she moved out, taking everything including the rods in the closets. The point, Losh says: The sale of any home is a very emotional experience and sellers (and buyers) do crazy things.

**Patricia J. Petersen** President & CEO,  
 Daniel Gale Sotheby's International Realty Cold Spring Harbor, N.Y.



Theatrical training and PR/marketing proved a perfect background when Petersen, a stay-at-home mom with two daughters in school full time, turned to real estate. An initial sales associate position evolved into management positions and then broker/owner. The Daniel Gale Agency has been a power player in real estate on Long Island's North Shore since 1922. Under her leadership, the company has grown to become a \$2.5 billion organization with 27 offices and divisions and more than 600 associates.

**Game changer:** Transparency. "The consumer has the information; we have the knowledge to effectively interpret that data, which leads to successful transactions."

**Biggest luxury change:** Luxury will always represent different things to different people, but what is considered luxury now is far more inclusive than in the past.

**Pivotal event:** "Being given the opportunity by Jean and Kent Gale to purchase the majority share of the company over time."

**Memorable moment:** Being the recipient of the first award as the No. 1 Sotheby's International Realty affiliate in the world (a title it held for over a decade).

**Diane Ramirez**  
 President, Halstead Property, LLC New York, N.Y.



"The minute I stepped into real estate I knew it was something I loved," recalls Ramirez. Initially just seeking a "little balance" in her life, Ramirez would become one of Manhattan real estate's visionaries. With Clark Halstead, she founded one of the largest and most visible real estate firms in New York, and, along the way, introduced game-changing innovations such as retail storefronts and offices in

key market areas. From the very beginning, the firm was a technology pacesetter.

**Game changer:** Co-brokering with other agents. Listings were zealously guarded, so buyers had to deal directly with the listing agent. Today, exclusive listings get the broadest exposure in the market.

**Pivotal moment:** "Realizing I truly loved this business, that this was my career and I wanted to be in the decision-making seat. I wanted to watch something grow with my vision in it."

**Memorable moment:** Her last transaction as an agent — the 1987 sale of a Upper Eastside townhouse for \$7 million, a price record that stood for years. "It was a very challenging deal and a very sweet way to leave."

**Joyce Rey** Executive Director,  
 Coldwell Banker Previews International Beverly Hills, Calif.



Few people know more about selling luxury property than Joyce Rey. As early as 1978 and as recently as last year, her sales set new price records. She consistently lists and sells the highest priced homes in the U.S.; but it was a desire for knowledge to make informed personal purchases that brought her to real estate initially. She co-founded Beverly Hills luxury icon Rodeo Realty. Few agents have been honored with as

many awards. What makes her a top agent year after year? "Personal enthusiasm and affection for all aspects of the business," she says.

**Luxury change:** The design of the homes. "When I started, there was no such thing as an open kitchen. It was also very difficult to sell a contemporary house. Now everybody gravitates to them."

**Technology change:** Before the fax, which "was huge," carbonized forms were one of the first innovations.

**Pivotal event:** Selling the former Sonny and Cher house for \$4.2 million. "That was a really big deal. That's what changed the face of the marketplace. Prior to that, the highest was \$2 million."

**Most memorable:** When actress Shelley Winters took off her clothes and dove into a swimming pool. She ended up buying the house.

**June Rosenthal**  
 William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty Stamford, Conn.



A son in college and a 13-year-old daughter left Rosenthal looking to fulfill her two passions, people and land. "I also wanted something that wasn't too time consuming," she says, laughing at the irony. With real estate, "you never know from one day to next how many hours you will be working. If you do it right and want to be of service to people, you have to be at their beck and call." Rosenthal spent about 15 years with

Carriage Trade Realty in Stamford before establishing her own company, which this year merged with William Pitt. She is the recipient of numerous awards, locally and nationally.

**Game changer:** Mandatory education for real estate agents. Advent of representation for buyers as well as sellers in 1997, which was "a huge awakening."

**Luxury change:** Consumers expect instant luxury! Even an 8-year-old kitchen is viewed as outdated.

**Pivotal event:** Early on, finding three potential homes a relocating executive loved. Almost 40 years later, he still sends clients to her.

**Famous quote:** "It's better to be the first born, the second wife and the third broker."

**Ellie Shapiro**  
 Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage Phoenix, Ariz.



Men dominated real estate when Ellie Shapiro began her career, but she soon discovered women made the most sales. "We would not only show the house, but would follow through with the inspections, take the first meal over to the new owners and stay friends with them. Real estate was a person-to-person business," she says. "In those days both agents presented the offer to the sellers." Shapiro has

been involved with some of the most significant real estate deals in the region, including the inception of the Scottsdale Hilton complex.

**Pivotal events:** Early clients (often responding to ads in Unique Homes) referred friends and family. Many became lifelong friends.

**Memorable moments:** Notable sales, including the Phoenician property to Charles Keating and a mountain-top property to Leona Helmsly. "She flew in, looked at the property and said, 'Let's get Harry over here to see it.' By the end of the day, they owned the house."

**Success Secret:** Perseverance, dreaming big and always putting herself in the other person's shoes.

**Michael Saunders**  
 Founder and CEO, Michael Saunders Company Sarasota, Fla.



Being a probation and parole officer is an unlikely background, but Michael Saunders says the skill sets are a perfect match. "You have to be passionate about making a difference and be a good communicator and good motivator." This luxury pioneer had a clear vision for her company. "I made the decision that I could not be all things to all people. I started with a value focus on the upper end, marketing and positioning these

important properties in important places," Saunders explains. Now her company works with a range of prices, but has never deviated from providing value and the same high level of service.

**How things have changed:** When Saunders started her company, it was almost impossible for a woman to get a loan without a co-signer.

**Pivotal moment:** Realizing that the consumer drives the business. She credits being consumer-centric and values-driven with getting her through four recessions.

**Memorable moment:** One of the highest sales at the time: "The buyers had a very bright son. He looked up at his parents and said, 'I think I want to live here; the submarine I am going to build will work from this location.' I don't think the submarine was ever built, but they absolutely adore the property."

**Quote:** "The Internet has forced agents to be smarter than the Internet."

**Katrine "Trinkie" Watson**  
 Chase International Lake Tahoe



A car and a real estate license used to be all an agent needed to get started 40 years ago, but Watson began her career sans auto, navigating her first couple of sales without her own car. Her luxury boost came in mid-1970s, when she sold her first property on Lake Tahoe for \$125,000, a huge price at the time. After a stint in her native California selling upscale properties, the mountains beckoned. She

returned to Tahoe to start Chase's offices in California. Today, the name Trinkie Watson winds through the history of Tahoe luxury real estate. "If you are going to be successful, it's a long-term proposition. I really enjoy the upper-end market," she says.

**Change in luxury:** The original lakefront homes were modest. "It was probably in the mid-1990s when I sold the first glamour house on the lake."

**Pivotal event:** Marketing one of the region's first upscale condos in the late 1970s.

**Memorable sale:** In 2006, she represented the buyer and seller of a \$17 million property after working with the buyers for eight years.