



New York Estate of Mind

Step inside the rarefied world of Manhattan realty

By SHERRY NOIK, QMI Agency
September 3, 2010

There's no panel of "expert" judges, no tribal council or comically oversized weigh-in scale, no Snooki or Situation, but there is just as much drama.

This is a reality show with all the class of a \$28.5 million Fifth Avenue penthouse.

And that's just the kind of jaw-dropping place you'll see in season one of *Selling New York* on HGTV Canada.

The 8,360-square-foot suite takes up the entire top floor of the old Stanhope Hotel, famous as either (depending on your vintage) the location where Charlie Parker died or where Carrie and Big began their affair.

Homes-Extra got a tour of the place courtesy of the Kleiers – mom Michele, and daughters Sabrina and Samantha. The ladies of high-end brokerage Gumley Haft Kleier Inc. guide us expertly around the property, pointing out the endless highlights, as though we could actually pull out a chequebook and make a deposit.

They can't help being vivacious. Born and bred New Yorkers, these brokers with their six-figure commissions and attached-at-the-hip BlackBerrys are as much celebrities as some of their A-list clientele. They even get recognized as we travel around the city (the show has just finished airing in the U.S.).

Even so, New York is the real star of this show. Home to some of the most storied real estate in the world – The Dakota, Park Avenue, the Upper West Side, the Chelsea, SoHo, Trump – it's no wonder there's such a turf war when 8 million people are vying for their piece of an island just 59 square kilometres big.

Here, at the centre of the universe, are homes most of us can only drool over.

Like the two-storey, 7,000-square-foot SoHo loft listed by Core, the other brokerage firm we see in action in *Selling New York*. I mean, you might be able to come up with the \$12.995 million asking price, but the monthly Windex bill to keep 32 windows clean? No, thanks.

Core founder and CEO Shaun Osher is cagey about exactly which famous people have checked the loft out (hint: Alicia Keyes) but does stress, "There's nothing generic about what we do."



True. No feature sheet I've ever seen lists a Julian Schnabel original and an 8-foot-high Dale Chihuly. Another item that doesn't come standard: stairs made by the specialty metal fabricator that worked on the Louvre pyramid.

These are the top of the heap of Manhattan apartments (they're nearly all apartments; single-family residences are a tiny percentage of the market). Sales may be half what they were two years ago – 7,430 in 2009 vs. 13,430 in 2007 – but that doesn't mean the agents are any less busy.

They plan lavish cocktail-party showings – one minute they're schlepping cases of Evian, another they're inking a multi-million-dollar sale. They become their clients' therapist, confidant and best friend – and there's no such thing as "downtime" in the city that doesn't sleep.

"In real estate," Michele Kleier tells me, "one of the secrets to success is to always be available." When she was pregnant with one of the girls, she worked right up until her water broke. "I put a towel between my legs and walked over to my doctor's office."

Tough town. Which is also why the agents provide invaluable help in preparing the dreaded "board package" to submit to condo and co-op committees who get to thumbs-up or thumbs-down buyers.

In this stratospheric segment of the market, buyers are in limited supply and listings can languish for a few months or more. That's what leads Core agent (and Canadian expat) Maggie Kent to suggest to one client that he reduce his asking price by – wait for it – \$1 million.

That's New York real estate: big price tags, and personalities to match.

Selling New York premieres September 8 at 9:00 p.m. on HGTV Canada.