

From Silk to Mortar

by Catherine Sensor

Before Pilar Rossi and Debbie Baum became real estate agents at The Corcoran Group, these good friends shared a history of fashion and business.

Pilar designed her own sought-after brand of clothing and established eponymous boutiques from Monte Carlo and Bal Harbour to Madison Avenue in New York. Debbie sold and marketed some of the best-known brands—Perry Ellis, Donna Karan, and Nicole Farhi—and served as US president for the German designer Rena Lange. Debbie then started her own multi-brand showroom, helping build labels like Luca Luca, Krizia, and, yes, Pilar Rossi, into thriving wholesale businesses.

Real Estate Became Fashionable

So, why did Pilar and Debbie leave fashion for real estate? To hear them tell it, they never really left. Instead, they brought what they learned over decades in fashion with them: impeccable taste, a keen interest in their clients, business savvy, and their devotion to service. At a time when the Internet provides the public with insight into the market, it's these skills that have made them indispensable.

Debbie says: "Your home, like the clothing you wear, reflects who you are."

"Real estate will always be in fashion."

— Debbie Baum

Real estate is the ultimate fashion accessory, and it takes a stylist's eye and designer's creativity to fit property to personality. She says, "I work intimately with my clients and I understand what they need and what they're looking for. When you enter an apartment, you need to have a vision. You have to be able to see the potential and explain what the client can do with it. You tweak it to make it reflective of who you are. In that way, I'm a personal stylist."

Pilar, who honed the same skills making some of the world's most beautiful women feel even more beautiful, understands the powerful allure of style and how it translates to property. "Manhattan is a glamorous town," she says, "and we have clients coming from all over the world who want to live here. They have wanted a pied-à-terre all their lives, and it's important we make that dream come true. I have one client who said, 'I already have Miami, but New York is... New York!'"

"Real estate will always be in fashion," Debbie says. And it's particularly hot right now. "With all of the reality TV shows about real estate, big numbers being bandied about, and celebrities buying and selling, real estate in Manhattan has been elevated to a very glamorous profession," Debbie says. But ultimately, like fashion, it's a business, and a competitive one at that.

"I've been in this business for over 12 years and no matter what the temperature of the market is, people want to buy and sell," Debbie says. "Right now, with low inventory levels, it's super competitive. 'Highest and Best' transactions are the norm, and I've been on both sides of these deals. If a client tells me they *want* it, well then, I have to get it for them."

And Debbie is getting it for them. She was the No.1 Corcoran Manhattan agent in May.

Born in Barcelona, and having lived all over, from Rio to London to Milan, Pilar exudes international chic. Her



global career in fashion and high-profile name have made her especially popular with foreign buyers who want to add New York to their international lifestyle. "I have contacts throughout South America and Europe," she says. "They all want to live in New York, especially South Americans."

Trends in New York Real Estate

Like fashion, real estate in New York City has its trends. So, which neighborhoods, building amenities, and design features are hot right now? Here's what these fashion mavens are seeing:

Location: "It was downtown for the longest time," Debbie says. "People love downtown, and they always will, but we are starting to see demand for the Upper East Side all of a sudden. People are gravitating toward

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— Pilar Rossi

it because prices are relatively affordable compared to other areas in the city, and there is an ever increasing nightlife. Thanks to the Second Ave subway line and new developments, there's a lot of excitement."

For those who have the patience to wait for the completion of the first part of the Second Avenue subway line, she says, "I think east of Third Avenue is a great investment."

Other neighborhoods on Debbie's radar include Midtown East, Washington Heights, and areas on the water in the Bronx and Queens.

Buildings: With price-per-square-foot climbing to unprecedented heights, New York's skyline is also soaring. Pilar and Debbie say many new condo developments are getting taller and taller.

Looking the Part

Pilar and Debbie may have left fashion, but it certainly hasn't left them! When we spoke on a hot, Sunday afternoon, both were elegantly turned out. Pilar wore a printed silk jacket of her own design and slacks; Debbie wore shades of tropical green and tan that beautifully offset her auburn hair. So, what do these well-dressed ladies wear when they're working?

Not surprisingly, both women dress up. Debbie says, "How are you going to present a seller's apartment if you can't present yourself?"

Pilar agrees. "I dress to respect my clients," she says. Pilar's working uniform of choice is a chic little jacket, a blouse, and either slacks or a skirt. "I don't go sporty."

Debbie confesses to getting dressed up even to go on an airplane. "When I worked with designers, I only wore

their clothes, but now I can wear them mixed with other designers I love."

Of course, because both women are often running all over town with their VIP clientele, footwear presents a special challenge. "If I'm showing apartments all day, high heels are impossible," Pilar says. "I can't work if my feet hurt, so I'm usually wearing Ferragamo flats."

"I treat myself to the luxury of heels only when I have a car service," Debbie says. "I recently worked with International buyers and we saw more than 20 apartments over the course of two days! Car and heels."

On the other hand, if she has to walk for miles she will happily break out her Prada or TOD flats. Pilar and Debbie will both go the distance for their clients, all while looking fabulous.