

**18** Sellers backtrack on 'best and final'

**20** Industry praise for mayor's appointees

**36** The NYC area stadium stimulus

**49** Final sales of Helmsley era

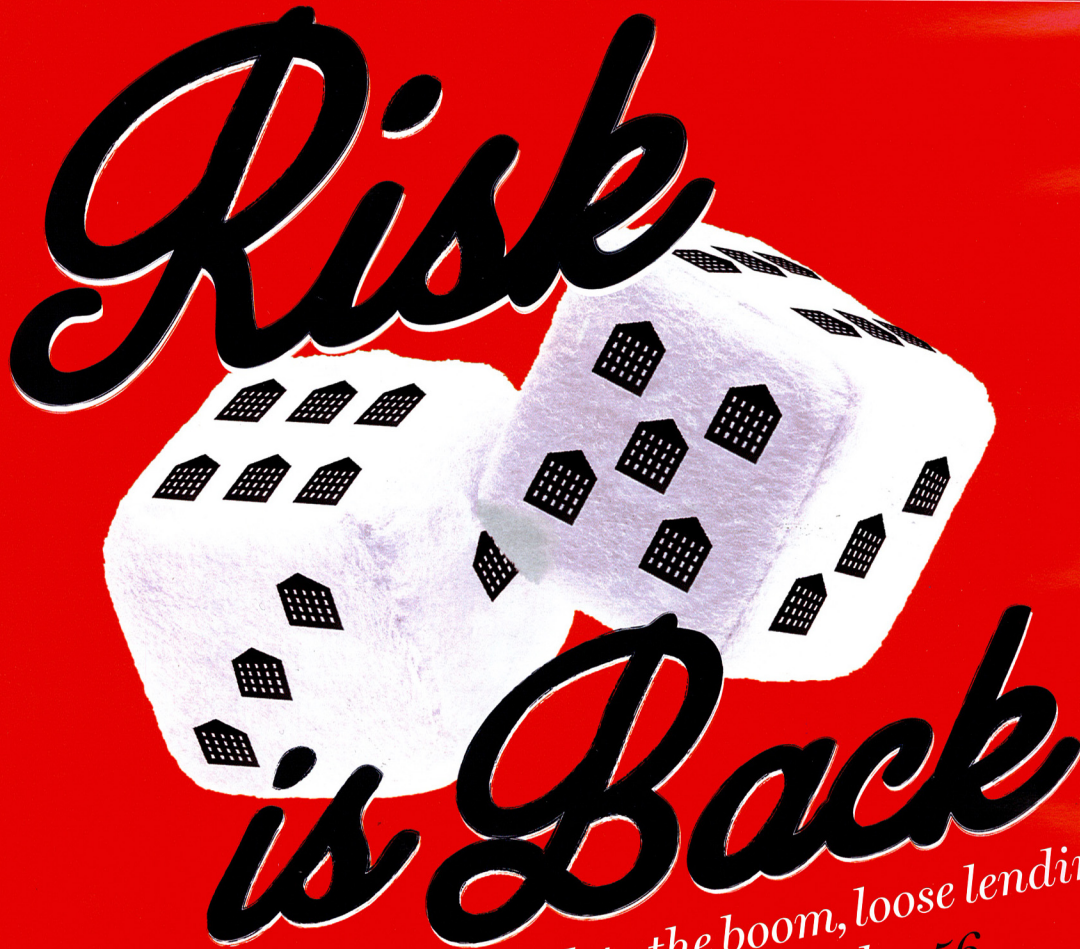
**128** Sealing deals with Instagram

# THE REAL DEAL

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*In throwback to the boom, loose lending on rise in NYC deals p56*

## Sticker shock at NYC condos

*A ranking of new buildings hitting the market shows almost half asking \$3,000 a square foot or more p38*

## Jared Kushner, accidental CEO

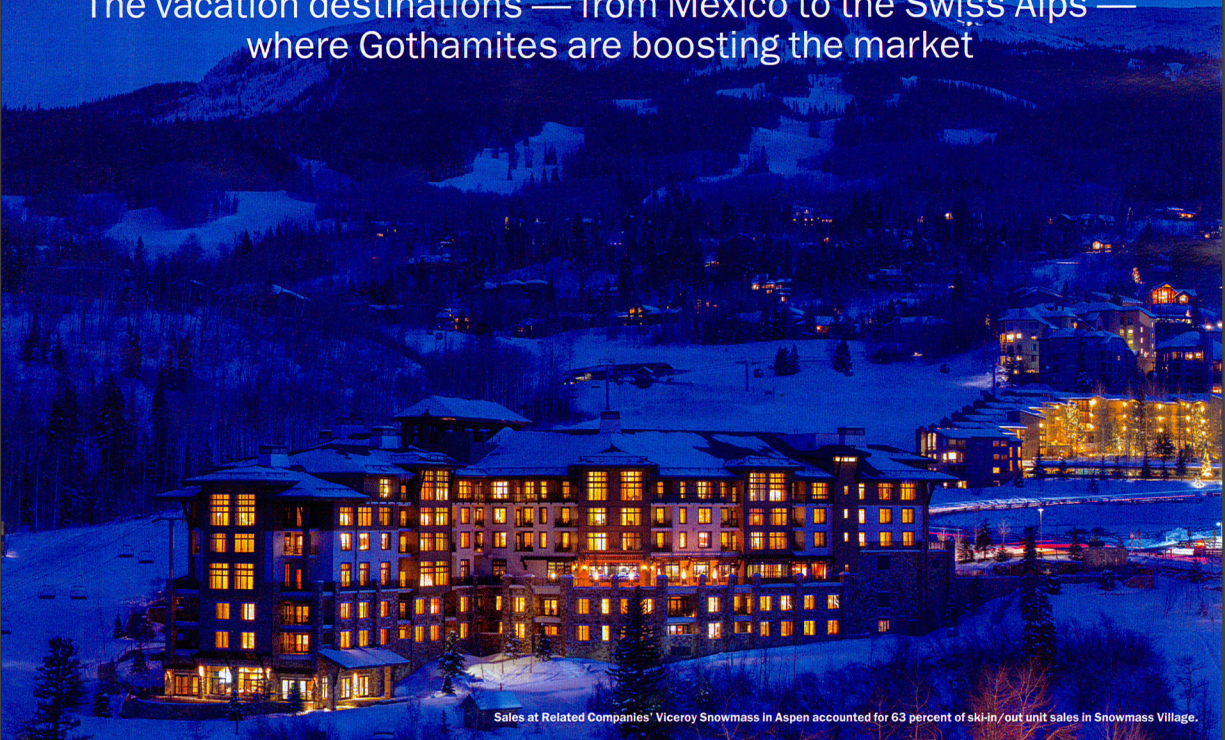
*The 33-year-old took over his family empire early, but has silenced doubters with \$3.5 billion in buys p31*

## Lies about size at office towers

*NYC landlords getting bigger profits by increasing 'loss factor' for unusable common space p42*

# The winter getaway roundup

The vacation destinations — from Mexico to the Swiss Alps — where Gothamites are boosting the market



Sales at Related Companies' Viceroy Snowmass in Aspen accounted for 63 percent of ski-in/out unit sales in Snowmass Village.

By CHRISTOPHER CAMERON

Last month's snowstorm and polar vortex left New York City's streets unusually empty as tourists and natives alike remained inside, huddled up by their radiators — or fireplaces if they were lucky. But the savviest New Yorkers don't sit by idly, suffering cabin fever. They "winter."

So it's the ideal time to assess the second-home markets — from Miami to Mexico, and from Aspen to the Swiss Alps — that so many New Yorkers flock to.

This month, *The Real Deal* did just that, rounding up some of the most popular winter getaway destinations.

Andrew Heiberger, the founder and CEO of Town Residential, is one of the many who has switched his vacation destination allegiance in recent years. Hei-

berger, who has vacationed in Miami every winter since he was a child, bought a unit in the Setai, a luxury hotel and condominium in South Beach in 2002.

He sold that unit in 2009, and — although he still visits South Florida yearly — he recently began wintering on the exclusive island of St. Barts, which is part of the French West Indies in the Caribbean.

"It's a beautiful island; it's luxurious; the food is excellent," Heiberger said.

Still, it isn't all about the sun. Cosmopolitan New Yorkers are also big buyers in Vermont ski towns, in France, and in a number of other winter getaway destinations.

Read on for a look at some of the locations where Gothamites are helping to boost the market.

## The Alps

The Swiss Alps may be one of the most exclusive second- (or third-) home markets in the world, but the dramatic mountain region is no less desirable for it.

Brokers say buyers from around the globe, including from New York, flock there year-round looking to get a piece of Switzerland's ever-tightening inventory in resort towns like Villars, Verbier, and Zermatt — proximity to Geneva being key.

And the market is only getting more competitive. Last year, Switzerland banned the construction of new vacation homes, which prevented about 50 new units from coming to market in Verbier alone, according to Simon Malster, managing director of Investors in Property, a London-based firm that specializes in marketing ski chalets in the Swiss Alps.

And with only a few new construction properties available to foreigners in the resorts of Zermatt and Saas-Fee remaining, Malster predicted that in two to three



Garden Golf, a ski resort in Crans-Montana, Switzerland, overlooking the Rhône Valley

years that there won't be any new homes available. That, he said, could send prices soaring.

While overarching market statistics were not available for the region, Malster said prices range from around 6,000 Swiss francs per square meter (or about \$1,875 per square foot) in the new under-construction Titlis resort in Engelberg to 25,000 francs per square meter (or \$7,812 per foot) in the über-luxurious Verbier village.

And New Yorkers are among those buying.

"New Yorkers account for roughly 50 percent of our inquires," Malster said, adding that he regularly flies to New York because of the high demand for Swiss properties among New Yorkers. Among the high-profile vacationers in the region are singers Tina Turner and Shania Twain.

Most recently, one of Malster's New York clients, a banker, paid \$3.3 million for a top-floor apartment in the Garden Golf, a ski resort in Crans-Montana.

"It offers a secure environment in the center of Europe, and the Swiss franc is one of the strongest currencies in the world," Malster said. "These properties are not expensive to run [because] taxes are cheap, and buyers may be able to



Singers Tina Turner and Shania Twain are among the high-profile regulars in the Swiss Alps.

borrow up to 70 percent of the purchase price from a Swiss bank at around 1.5 percent."

But secure and cheap money doesn't make buying in the Swiss Alps easy. Swiss laws regulating the second-home market limit vacation homes owned by non-permanent residents to roughly 2,200 square feet, according to John Stephenson, a London-based "negotiator" with brokerage Knight Frank who specializes in the Swiss and French Alps.

So for buyers who can't close a deal in the Swiss Alps, the French Alps are a good alternative. "The French Alps tend to be better value for money," Stephenson said, "and the market is completely non-restrictive in comparison to Switzerland."

## St. Barts & Anguilla

**S**urrounded by tranquil Caribbean water and white-sand beaches, St. Barts has become a popular winter getaway for New Yorkers in the know.

Famous for its top-notch restaurants, celebrity vacationers like Paul McCartney and Ryan Seacrest, and New Year's Eve yacht parties, real estate on the island is naturally in high demand. Yet the destination has less than 100 sales per year, according to data from Knight Frank.

Back in 2009, Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich reportedly purchased a 70-acre estate on the island for more than \$90 million. The neighboring villa is currently on the market for \$60 million.

But growing demand has strained the small island's



Zemi Beach Resort & Spa, a newly developed beachfront resort on Anguilla, which has 87 hotel rooms and 28 condos



Celebs Paul McCartney and Ryan Seacrest have been spotted in St. Barts.

limited inventory, reducing the number of sales, driving average prices into the \$5 million-plus range and forcing most visitors to rent, explained Robson Zanetti, international sales director at Town Residential.

However, a few high-end property sales helped push total sales volume on the island over \$100 million in 2013, doubling the roughly \$50 million in deals that the island saw the year before, said Zanetti, who is based in New York but refers clients internationally.

"Homes on St. Barts only come to market for one of two reasons. An extremely wealthy person decides to move to an even more exclusive island, or a couple gets divorced," Zanetti said.

Meanwhile, St. Barts' neighbor Anguilla offers much of the same luxury and tropical beauty at a more reasonable price, making it an increasingly popular vacation home market for New Yorkers.

"Anguilla is enormously popular with New Yorkers," said Naomi Cambridge, sales director at Zemi Beach Resort & Spa, a newly developed 115-unit beachfront resort in Anguilla with 87 hotel rooms and 28 condo units that range in price from \$2 million to \$3 million. "Like everyone else, we are still recovering from the recession, but interest has been growing steadily."

## Aspen, Vail & Park City

**W**hy fly to the Alps when there's Aspen and Vail stateside? The two Colorado ski destinations have long been popular winter getaways with New Yorkers.

But the Western markets are currently undergoing a dynamic shift, according to Susan Hershey, an Aspen-based broker with Sotheby's International Realty.

"New Yorkers treat Aspen like the Hamptons," Hershey said, "and increasingly they are making commitments for weeks or even months."

While resorts such as the Viceroy Snowmass, developed by the Related Companies, and the Residences at the Little Nell, developed by a joint venture called CWA Development, remain popular with New Yorkers, Hershey said there's been increased interest in buying large single-family homes in areas like Red Mountain and the West End.

In fact, the Aspen market saw 431 sales in 2013, a 27 percent increase from 2012, according to a fourth quarter report by Tim Estlin, a broker at Aspen Snowmass Sotheby's International. Sales at the Viceroy alone were responsible for 63 percent of ski-in/out unit sales in Snowmass Village. Overall, the average price per square foot of single-family homes in Aspen fell 12 percent to \$938 in 2013's fourth quarter year-over-year. However, the price per square foot of condos grew 2 percent to \$1,000.

Meanwhile, in Park City, Utah, the winter vacation market is also booming. The Stein Eriksen Lodge, a five-star resort developed by Los Angeles-based Regent Properties, is debuting the Stein Eriksen Residences this month. The 16-home, 38-condo development is located in Deer Valley, a mile outside of Park City, and prices range from \$2 million to \$7 million. Sources said about 20 percent of owners in the Stein Eriksen Lodge hail from New York.

## Miami

**I**t's hard to imagine Miami without its New York invaders. The real estate scene, of course, is teeming with New York players, from brokerages like Douglas Elliman and Sotheby's to developers like Related, Property Markets Group and JDS Development as well as the Plaza Group.

And the South Florida city is only gaining popularity with New York buyers.

"Miami Beach is hands down the most popular neighborhood with [the northeast demographics]," said Daniela Bonetti, a broker at One Sotheby's International Realty, and part of the sales and marketing team at the eight-unit Beach House 8, a boutique condo, where prices range from \$5.9 million to \$14 million. Bonetti said most of her clients are from New York, New Jersey and Long Island.

In 2013's fourth quarter, inventory of luxury single-family homes in Miami rose 22.7 percent, year-over-year. Despite that increased supply, the median sale price still managed to increase 4.3 percent to \$1.4 million, partially due to growing demand from New York buyers, according to a Douglas Elliman market report.

Miami Beach's growing culinary scene is a lure for



Grove at Grand Bay, a two-tower, 99-unit condo in Miami

Northern urbanites, with hot new restaurants with New York-based chefs — such as Mark Iacono, whose much-buzzed Brooklyn pizza joint Lucali has been frequented by Beyoncé and Jay-Z.

And Miami Beach isn't the only South Florida neighborhood attracting New Yorkers. Philip Freedman, director of sales at Grove at Grand Bay, a two-tower, 99-unit condo in Miami, added that Coconut Grove is also growing in popularity. "It's a walkable distance to the marina. Yachting is very popular with New York buyers," he said.

## Vermont

**F**or New Yorkers who don't want to fly across the country or halfway around the world to ski, it doesn't get better or cheaper than the slopes of Vermont, where the second-home market is still recovering from the recession.

"We are on the onset of improvement," said Adam Palmiter, whose eponymous brokerage is based in Mt. Snow. "Last year was better than any year since the decline in 2006, but this year is already looking even better."

However, the average price in Mt. Snow was down about 15 percent, to \$214,000, in the fourth quarter year-over-year. And in Stowe, the average price fell to \$431,000, an 8.4 percent decline, according to Lisa Coneeny, president of Vermont Country Properties, a Sotheby's affiliate.

The market in Mt. Snow has been aided somewhat by numerous new vacation developments over the last six years, including Boulder Ridge, Outlook, Snow Vidda, and Trails Edge. But Mt. Snow's priciest sale of 2013 — a 4,800-square-foot house in the 25-home development called the Peaks — sold for just \$990,000.

In pricier Stowe, the most expensive sale of 2013 was a 3,400-square-foot home, which was sold for \$2.7 million. The seller won the home in an HGTV Dream Home contest two years earlier.

## Los Cabos

**L**ocated at the southern tip of Mexico's Baja peninsula, the gated oceanfront communities of Los Cabos tempt New York buyers as well as celebrities such as Jennifer Aniston, George Clooney and Tiger Woods with sunshine just about every day.

"Mexican vacation homes are becoming more and more popular with American buyers," said Town's Zanetti, who occasionally deals in luxury Mexican prop-



Jennifer Aniston, George Clooney and Tiger Woods are some of the celebrity guests who vacation in Los Cabos.

erty. "It's international, it's on the beach, but it's close to home."

Cathy Buchanan, a salesperson at Los Cabos-based Snell Real Estate, agreed: "2013 was an amazing year for us. We sold about \$200 million."

The average sale price for single-family homes in Los Cabos increased 21 percent to \$690,000 between 2012 and 2013, according to Carol Billups, the owner of Cabo Realty Pros. Inventory of active listings, meanwhile, increased 7 percent.

Most of Los Cabos' luxury single-family homes — many in the \$3 million range — sell in the fall, winter and spring months, from Thanksgiving to June. **TRD**