

WALL STREET JOURNAL



NATALIE KEYSAR FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

While Most Brokers Unwind, This One Does Condo Deals

By JOSH BARBANEL

During the dog days of summer, as other real-estate brokers head for the Hamptons, Vickey Barron stays put in Manhattan.

There, she can be found showing prospective buyers around a lavishly finished model apartment in a 1920s art deco office building in Tribeca, where 22 floors are being converted into condominiums.

"I think August is a magical month, because everyone who is out looking is serious," Ms. Barron said. "It is easy getting deals."

Her current project, Ralph Walker Tribeca at 100 Barclay, has generated a spate of activity this month, including deals on six condos from \$3 million to

The Weekend Profile Vickey Barron

◆ Has worked as a real-estate broker since 1999

◆ Previous three assignments: selling condos at buildings designed by Ralph Walker

◆ Born in Baltimore, grew up in Long Beach, Calif.

◆ Previously ran a medical-recruiting firm

more than \$7 million in just six days. One buyer bought three: one to live in and two more as investments, she said.

Late summer is typically a slow period for real-estate sales, to the point that some owners have taken their apartments off the market when they go on vacation.

In the Manhattan real-estate calendar, apartment showings fall in December because of the

holiday season, as well as in August. As a result, January and September are the slowest months for signed contracts, according to real-estate-data website UrbanDigs.com.

But a few new developments are producing brisk sales, brokers say.

"August is notoriously not a busy month, but our traffic is up," said Sherry Tobak, a senior vice present at the Related

Companies. She is heading up sales at Carnegie Park, a 31-story, postwar tower near East 94th Street and Third Avenue that is converting from rental apartments to condos.

The 1987 building, with a lobby and amenities space redesigned by architect Robert A.M. Stern, is due to open as a condo in the next few months. Since sales started at the beginning of the year, close to 200 of its 287 units are in contract, including five signed in August and four more contracts out with buyers for signature, Ms. Tobak said.

Ms. Barron, a 58-year-old broker with Douglas Elliman, said that her secret to doing business in August is simple: Listen closely to the buyer and respond to his or her needs.

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"If you understand how to ask the right questions and figure out that someone is the right buyer for the product, you can close the deal," she said.

Over the years, Ms. Barron worked especially hard in August when many star brokers were away, said Chris Peters, her manager at Douglas Elliman's Chelsea office. Twice she won an office award for the highest sales total in August, he said.

Ms. Barron was born in Baltimore and grew up in Long Beach, Calif., after her parents separated, she said. She attended a progressive college but didn't graduate, later studying acting and theater independently.

Before moving to New York in the late 1990s, she ran a medical-recruiting company that signed up American doctors to work in Guam. She could walk into a medical conference and spot at a glance which doctors were open to the challenge of relocating to a Pacific island and which weren't, she said.

For the past five years, Ms. Barron has worked on sales at three condo conversions in art deco buildings designed by the architect Ralph Walker for New York Telephone Co. Verizon, its successor company, sold the upper levels of the buildings to developers.

At 100 Barclay, located just north of the World Trade Center and formerly known as the Verizon Building, 159 condos are being created with loft-like spaces



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Vickey Barron in a model apartment at 100 Barclay St. with client Arran Patel, who bought in the building.

and large mullioned windows. Listings range from \$2 million to nearly \$15 million.

There, Ms. Barron shows off one of the grand spaces condo owners will have private access to: half of a landmark, block-long, 22-foot vaulted lobby, with 12 hand-painted murals and elaborate bronze details.

"Ralph Walker has become a brand, like Hermès," she said.

Beth Shak, a professional poker player and designer, and her partner, Mark E. Yadgaroff, a financial adviser, met with Ms. Barron last week and made a deal to buy a 12th-floor condo at 100 Barclay. Their lawyer is reviewing the contract, Ms. Shak said.

Ms. Shak added that Ms. Barron was the opposite of the pushy broker she expected.

"She was really laid back," Ms. Shak said. "She didn't seem to care if we wanted the unit or not."

Ms. Shak and Mr. Yadgaroff ultimately chose it, she said, because of its big windows, river views and storage space for her hundreds of pairs shoes.

Ms. Shak now lives at 101 Warren St., two blocks from 100 Barclay. She decided to move after construction began on a condo skyscraper next door that she worried would eventually block some of her views.

At that building, 111 Murray

St., sales have also proceeded with unseasonal swiftness. About half of its 157 units are now in contract, said Susan de França, president of Douglas Elliman Development Marketing.

So far this month, eight units have sold, she said. "I don't think the summer has actually started," she added. "In the first week of August, we have not seen any kind of a slowdown."

Working every August means that Ms. Barron rarely gets a summer break, but she is OK with that.

"I love working the end of December and January too," she said. "All the other brokers are on vacation."