

# James Lane

— Real Estate & Design —

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*Photo courtesy Compass*

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# Compass’ Cindy Scholz

## Championing Women Of Real Estate

By Ty Wenzel

With literally thousands of agents vying for success, they need to differentiate themselves in ways that solves problems within its own confines. Cindy Scholz, who began her career in real estate at the tender age of twenty, went further. She not only leads in building a network of entrepreneurial activations but founded the Women Of Compass which offers support and mentorship to women in this hyper-competitive industry. We wanted to learn more.

**Cindy, Compass has just taken the lead in top rankings for a brokerage in the nation and you were the 14th agent to sign on with them when they first launched. Why did you choose Compass for your license?**

Joining Compass allowed me to become a business, not just a broker. Compass attracts top talent from numerous industries, and I knew I wanted to spend my formative years surrounded by successful and driven peers and mentors. During my first month at Compass, Robert Reffkin invited me to a conference gathering like-minded entrepreneurs. Robert paid for this out of his pocket knowing I would create relationships that would further my career. Fast forward eight years and from that conference, I have met some of my closest friends and loyal clients. Robert, and the entire Compass team, continue to invest in my success. I receive the same support even with over 20,000 agents.

**Hudson Advisory is ranked #8 in the United States by the Wall Street Journal, conducting well over \$2 Billion of real estate sales throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, The Hamptons, and Miami since 2017. In 2021, Hudson Advisory completed \$1.3 Billion in real estate transaction volume. How long have you been a member of the Hudson Advisory Team and what part do you play in the ensemble?**

I’ve always respected how Clayton and Stephen run their business. I always wanted to collaborate but didn’t see the path forward. That is until our world turned upside down and Covid hit. March 2020 New York City real estate came to a screeching halt. Like many, I escaped to the East End. My job very much defines who I am, so naturally I felt very lost. My mentors at Compass suggested I call Clayton and try to start a Hamptons arm of Hudson Advisory. Clayton and I spent hours getting to know one another in the Hamp-

tons and decided to join forces to launch Hudson Advisory Hamptons. What started as a “Covid project” has quickly become a very successful business line where we are now one of the top teams in the Hampton market. New York City is where dreams are made, and the Hamptons are where they are lived. Our strong team, and brand, has allowed us to service our clients in New York City and the Hamptons.

**Would love to learn more about you and your history — is it true that you started in real estate at age 20?**

Yes, I went to school for speech therapy and realized it wasn’t my passion. My mentor suggested I go into real estate before finding a “real job” — he didn’t feel the instability of real estate was a pathway to a career. I loved the entrepreneurial spirit of the profession. I thrived in the environment where your input directly impacts your results.

**With luxury real estate, often clients live and play in different parts of the country and sometimes the world. For what regions do you sell and do you have any affiliations with other states or offices?**

We are often selling clients their second or third home. Our referral relationships stretch across the country. Clients wanting Malibu Beach Homes to ranches in Montana are covered under our network.

**You are such a trail-blazer, Cindy, when it comes to philanthropy and women’s initiatives. What really stands out is that you founded “Women Of Compass.” Can you tell us more about that and how people can get involved? What inspired you to start that journey?**

Being a female entrepreneur can be a lonely place if you do not have the right support system. I co-founded Women of Compass to elevate our profession, and assist agents to grow personally and professionally under the leadership of strong women. Being an entrepreneur most of your learnings are reality based. To be blunt, there are too many cheerleaders and not enough coaches. Women of Compass solves this by gathering inspiring leaders that generously share their knowledge. We started Women of Compass as a small grassroots organization. We went from 50 members to over 5,000 nationwide. Any and all agents are welcome to be members.

**We would love to learn**



Photo courtesy Compass

**more about your work as a tech entrepreneur and investor.**

I feel the need to pay it forward and support fellow entrepreneurs in advisory and investing. Investments I make are driven by my belief in the founders and passion for the project. Being a strategic investor is important to me as I want to feel there are mutual benefits. When possible, I love investing in female entrepreneurs. Most recently I invested in my friend’s pistachio milk company - Tach. The milk is delicious, and you’re sure to find it out here this summer, but most importantly I know the founder won’t sleep until everyone is nuts over Tach.

**What does being active in the Milken Institute’s Young Leaders’ Circle mean to you and what does it entail?**

The Milken Institute convenes the best minds in the world to tackle urgent challenges and envision exciting opportunities. The Institute brings together individuals with capital, power, and influence to change the world. Milken Young Leaders is a group of accomplished individuals under 40 rethinking entrepreneurship, finance, health, tech, media, and philanthropy. Our YLC group is focused on the power of connection. I am grateful to have developed deep relationships with members over the years.

**You push quite a few art initiatives, such as Chashama, which advocates helping individuals see the value in art. Why is the art sector such a meaningful part of your journey?**

Art is the heartbeat of any city. As prices of real estate continue to rise it is important we help artists stay in the cities we love. Chashama provides commercial and residential space to artists at a fraction of the cost. We throw the best galas with over 100 performance artists. The Chashama parties should not be missed!

**We imagine the pandemic hit your business pretty hard. Can you tell us how you worked through 2020 and how it has changed the way you work going forward?**

The pandemic led me to Hudson Advisory and we as a team took the time to grow and invest in the business. For example, we have a Head of Brand which most teams do not have. Marissa has taken on a high-level approach to our branding, marketing, and operational efficiency, consistently making sure our properties are well positioned and in line with our aesthetic. Covid forced me to produce new effort strategies that I never thought possible. I started to do Transcendental Meditation which has been life changing.

**Let’s talk about the Hamptons - how often does your business in NYC crossover to the Hamptons or do you have Hamptons exclusive clients as well?**

Most clients are from NYC. The Hamptons are a natural extension for many of my clients. Brokers will often refer me business where I serve solely as their Hamptons agent.

**What’s your favorite ele-**

**ment about the Hamptons? Do you have a favorite village and why?**

Sag Harbor is the best place to reside year round. Sag is rich with history and has the best social scene. I love being able to go to the beach and on the way hit multiple farm stands. A close runner up to Sag is Amagansett — being in Amagansett during the summer is the epitome of beach living. Both towns have the laid back vibe that I tend to gravitate towards.

**What do you do for fun when you’re not working and what’s coming up for you in terms of your work and philanthropic endeavors?**

My work and fun are often blended as I spend three to four nights a week entertaining clients. I enjoy getting to know my clients and then blending them with like minded people. Dinner parties are my speciality. I am known for throwing dinners of 12 people who don’t know one another but should. Guests leave with new ideas and often new friends. It has become a tradition to host a huge Hampton Clambake for clients and friends. This summer we have multiple events planned.

Some will focus on bringing female investors together, and others are simply to enjoy beach bonfires and chat life. Horseback riding is a newer hobby which I am loving and find it peaceful to be connected to nature. And anyone who knows me knows that I love wine. Yes, I enjoy the consumption of wine, but more so the art form of making the wine and learning about the winemakers.





Paulina Keszler.  
Photo by John Musnicki



Mercedes Counihan.  
Photo courtesy Corcoran

# The Rising Stars

## Up & Coming Agents To Know In Hamptons Real Estate

By Ty Wenzel

There are a lot of competitive industries on the East End, but none so intense as the real estate sector. Entering this world where millions of dollars are at stake may seem daunting and although most brokerages support new agents with mentoring and top-of-the-line marketing tools, it is still very difficult to break into the luxury real estate business. We asked some of the marketing departments of local brokerages if they’re seeing any superstars coming up and here’s who they said were the future rock stars of Hamptons real estate.

With that, James Lane Post began a series of “Up & Coming Agents To Know.”

### PAULINA KESZLER OF DOUGLAS ELLIMAN

**Paulina, it seems like a natural progression for you to get into luxury real estate, being Michaela Keszler’s daughter! It seems like a really organic way to start your career off. Can you elaborate on what it’s been like?**

Yes, having a successful parent in real estate made stepping into the industry a little less intimidating because I have known some of my colleagues for well over ten years. In a competitive market like this, it’s helpful to know some people and have relationships. My mom has taught me so much about what makes her such a great broker. Working alongside her has been an education, and I’m able to implement many of the insightful things I’ve learned from her in my own career. We work pretty much 24/7 but it really helps that we have fun working together. At the end of the day nothing gets you further than hard work, dedication, and enjoying what you do. Nothing is handed to you in this business.

**You studied fashion (I did too!) and are also an aspiring screenwriter. How do you think that helps you in terms of how you approach real estate sales and also in representing your buyers?**

I have always been creative. Studying fashion at Parsons didn’t only teach me about the ins and outs of fashion, it also taught me about trend forecasting and how to work with people on all stages of a project. I do believe that creativity is just another way of connecting with

people, and I think the same is true for real estate. My goal is to know my clients, understand their needs and desires, and match them with a home they’ll love.

**You started out in real estate in 2019, and in 2020 you were named Elliman’s Rookie of the Year in the Hamptons. This came in the midst of a truly unprecedented market and uncertain times. How did your real estate business pivot during the pandemic?**

I started at Douglas Elliman in October of 2019 and spent the first couple months learning as much as I could. There is a lot of information on the back end that you need to be fluent in before you can really get to business. I spent my first three months shadowing my mom – just observing and trying to absorb any knowledge she had for me. Then Covid hit and suddenly everything changed. My phone started ringing nonstop, and my career took off. My first year quickly became a crash course and I must admit, the fast pace and high stakes quickly made me fall in love with real estate.

**Do you have any advice for sellers and buyers right now as we get back to normal?**

For sellers, if you have thought about selling in the near future, the time might be now. A historic lack of inventory has really created a sellers’ market. For buyers, I would strongly suggest keeping your eye on the market and creating a good relationship with your broker. Keep communication open, because when something good comes on you have to be ready to move quickly. There are still great deals being made every day for buyers and sellers.

**You are passionate about giving back, which is the backbone of our mission statement at James Lane. Can you tell us about Uncommon and how you’re involved?**

Uncommon is an organization that makes longterm investments in low-key communities by building innovative, sustainable workspaces to run free education programs in technology. My connection to Uncommon, is that I am one of the founders of the Nicki Keszler Innovation Hub, which was created in honor of my late brother. Nicki was a lover of life, a traveler, an aspiring software engineer and someone

who loved giving back and putting a smile on another person’s face. The Hub was built and was placed in Zimbabwe, in a low-income, high-density suburb. We believe that everyone, everywhere should have access to life changing technology education and employment opportunities. We transform recycled shipping containers into state of the art, solar-powered workspaces to run our free technology Bootcamp locally. We bring education, equipment, and infrastructure to the communities we serve to eliminate the barriers our students may face. The goal is to create awe-inspiring learning environments where our students and young adults are encouraged to wonder, create and thrive. Anyone interested in finding out more can visit our website at uncommon.org.

**Are there any trends you’ve noted in real estate sales because of the pandemic?**

So much has changed since the start of the pandemic in real estate. In the Hamptons, we are now a larger first home market than ever before. People want to live here full time. We are seeing more young families with children enrolled in the schools. The quality of life here is unbeatable, and now that a lot of people have the flexibility to work from home, there is less of a need to live in the city full time. Another thing that has changed with Covid is the idea of South and North of the highway. It seems like privacy and property, especially with tennis, has become extremely desirable regardless of location. With so many people spending more time at home, we also see builders and designers moving away from the open concept style of living and moving more towards traditional layouts and individual spaces. We’ve had many clients make jokes about needing rooms and doors so they could get a break from looking at their families all day. I have also never seen so many vegetable gardens. It seems like everybody has become a farmer!

**Did growing up in Germany help to build your global network? Do you work with international clients now in your real estate career?**

Yes, being bilingual and understanding the European buyer has been a huge advantage while working with the global market. I went to international school in Germany and it really helped me build up an international network. I still have a lot of strong ties with people overseas who are now looking to buy or rent in the Hamptons.

**What do you love most about living and working in the Hamptons?**

As far as Hamptons real estate goes my favorite thing is the many different styles of homes I get to see. One showing may be at a modern glass box overlooking the ocean and the next showing is a beautiful village compound built in 1750. This is a place where people go to build their dream homes and I love seeing what that means to different individuals. The most special thing about living in the Hamptons for me is the natural light and the ocean. These are two things that inspire me and fuel me. Another perk is having the debatably best metropolitan city only two hours away.

### MERCEDES COUNIHAN OF CORCORAN

**Mercedes, you’re local and**

**grew up in Southampton. What advantage does that give you as a realtor on the East End?**

I feel very connected to the East End because my story began here and my knowledge of the area and what it has to offer, not to mention how much it’s changed over the years, helps with my insight and how I connect with my clients.

**Your background is in education. How and why did you pivot into luxury real estate?**

Yes, I have my MS in School Counseling and development and have spent most of my professional career working with children and adults as a counselor or director. I feel my background in education helps with really understanding and listening to what people need and work really well with all personalities. I have always been interested in real estate and development. I was lucky enough to build my own home as the general contractor from start to finish in my mid-twenties so that hands-on experience made me love the process. I had to dive right into understanding building codes, permits, regulations, and even the process of applying for my own variances. All the way down to the finishes and when I went on to building my second project my knowledge and what people would look for in a new home grew with me. I was paying attention to more detail and that made me realize that combining my love for helping people personally I could also integrate my love for real estate. The most important part is connecting with people, communication, and loyalty. Really understanding what people need and want during a transaction. There is so much emotion on both sides of a deal and the satisfaction for making sure my clients feel supported and make it over the finish line.

**Can you tell us about the general contract project that you built out into your own vision? Sounds like a natural progression into real estate as well.**

My new construction build was something that I started as an investment. I had an opportunity to purchase some land and it went from there. I worked closely with my architect and a business partner and we began with looking at what styles and ideas worked for the area and the vision started to unfold. At the same time I decided to get my real estate license and so my love or learning and my love of the real estate business combined. I think what really helps me is I like to be connected to each piece of the process. No one really wants to deal with the Health Dept or stay on top of village codes, etc. and I have the utmost respect for everyone in each division. I make sure to know everyone’s name. There are a lot of agents in a small area. You have to leave a positive impression. With other brokers, contractors, inspectors, and everyone you encounter.

**You’re killing it by getting listings and putting them into contract. What’s your advice to sellers and buyers as the world opens up?**

I think being a local and known for my work ethic and competitive nature has given me the upper hand with locals who have trusted me to get their properties sold. I have been lucky to be getting deals closed quickly because that’s the way the market has positioned itself. Sellers are seeing such a huge return on homes and buyers





who know what they want are willing to get the deals done at numbers that we haven't seen before. Of course, this doesn't last forever but it doesn't leave much space for error. My thing is getting all the knowledge I can about each property and staying proactive with my due diligence so that I can make the deals as seamless as possible. I also think referrals have helped me grow because it goes back to the work I'm willing to do and staying as humble as possible. Being a broker is tougher than people think. I have so much respect for my co-workers and I make sure to learn a little something from every agent I encounter. This job doesn't turn itself off. There are sacrifices that I have to make. My family time takes a hit so without their support none of this could happen.

**Are there any trends you are seeing post-pandemic that affect buying or selling properties on the East End?**

I think the pandemic buying has subsided, but we will continue to see an increase in home sales. Right now mortgage rates have taken a dip, and the lack of inventory keeps driving the numbers. So my prediction is that the market will continue to be competitive and the East End will remain one of the most sort after locations.

I just came up on my second year as an agent making the 2021 Multi Million Dollar Club and I'm looking forward to a successful 2022!

**ANN GEGELYS OF SOTHEBY'S INTERNATIONAL REALTY**

**Ann, you specialize as an agent in not only the East End, but Washington, DC and New York City. How did you find yourself embedded in the luxury real estate market in the Hamptons in particular?**

The Hamptons has always held a special place in my heart, having visited for the first time when I was eight years old for a family vacation. As the years went on, my husband and I enjoyed renting out east and sharing this pristine area with our daughters. We had always dreamed of owning a home in the Hamptons so I watched the real estate market out here for many years and developed a true understanding of the value of the different towns and neighborhoods.

Once our daughters went to college, the timing was right for us to move to the Hamptons. By this point, I had learned the intricacies of each Hamptons town and was able to clearly spot good value and location. We found a home that we fell in love with and made it our permanent home, allowing me to continue my career with Sotheby's International Realty in Bridgehampton. I have enjoyed working with the clientele in the Hamptons and learning even more as I continue to meet amazing clients and show beautiful homes.

**Your background is quite impressive. Can you describe your experience on Wall Street in a Fortune 500 financial institution. You were also a VP within the Consumer Bank of Chase Manhattan Bank?**

I joined Chase in the early 1990s and spent 11+ years working in various consumer-facing roles. While working with the bank's top tier consumer clients and senior management, I

was able to hone my skills in business development, sales, marketing, and relationship management. Understanding the needs of this sophisticated audience, and how to proactively problem solve for them, helped to establish a foundation for delivering an exceptional customer experience.

**How do you believe this background gives you an edge in luxury real estate sales?**

Our clients are sophisticated and informed. And much like banking, real estate clients want an exceptional experience; someone who will go the extra mile. Working in financial services, my analytical and research skills were critical for assessing the market and customizing products that would meet client needs. The same is true for helping my real estate clients. My clients appreciate my ability to provide research and models that help them identify a good value and opportunity, whether purchasing or selling.

In addition, I'm also a professional with extensive project management experience. Working as a project manager in financial services, I developed a discipline in leading teams and individuals through complex tasks. I look at each real estate transactions similarly, in that each one is unique and commands a project manager who will anticipate needs and challenges. I make it a priority to inform clients of what to expect as a seller or buyer, helping them avoid potential challenges or understand.

Last, working with a top banking institution allowed me to acquire direct-to-consumer marketing skills essential to attracting consumers in a competitive market. From social media and print marketing, to audio visual content, I have a deep understanding of the media landscape and how to curate a strategic marketing campaign for maximum reach with each unique property. In working with Sotheby's International Realty, I'm fortunate to have a global partner who leads in luxury property marketing. Sotheby's International Realty is the #1 most profiled luxury real estate brand in the news and has over one million social media followers and an award-winning YouTube channel with 47 million views in 2021. This unparalleled exposure provides clients with an unbeatable reach when it comes to getting their property sold.

**Are there any trends you are seeing post-pandemic that affect either or both NYC/East End markets?**

The pandemic shifted so much in housing. More than ever, people want place to call home. We're seeing buyers looking for properties that offer the option to be a permanent home, or a residence with scale for extended periods and extended family. This translates to a growing desire for larger properties with customizable space for offices, gyms, and entertainment — all helpful should we experience further lock downs. At the same time, buyers are also less likely to desire inventory that requires significant work, as supply chain issues continue to hinder renovations. At the highest end of our market, we're also seeing an increase of "off-market" deals, from a subset of extremely wealthy buyers and sellers, who put a premium on maintaining their privacy.

**What's your advice to sellers and buyers as the world opens up?**

At the beginning of the pandemic, we thought



the housing market would pull back. But within a few months, we knew this was not to be the case. Home values accelerated at an unprecedented level, including the Hamptons. At this junction in 2022, we're seeing rising interest rates, geopolitical risk, and inflation all create a sense of uncertainty. So now, more than ever, it's important to understand local market conditions and acquire expert guidance from someone who works in the market on a daily basis. Taking the above factors into account, as well as the prices of competing properties and the overall levels of inventory and demand, will all help you to best position yourself to receive full value if you are a seller, or fair value if you are buyer.

**SUSAN HARRISON OF COMPASS**

**How did you find yourself embedded in the luxury real estate market on the East End?**

My husband and I own a business in Southampton, and have been part of the community out here for a long time. Our children have gone to schools out East and in New York City. My father-in-law is on the Board of the Southampton Hospital. I have been in the Hamptons since I moved to New York in 1995, and we relocated to Southampton full time during the pandemic. Immediately I was inundated with clients reaching out to me for help in finding them houses out East. My early Covid shut-down experience was signing leases and making offers instead of baking banana bread! It was a frenetic time. Many of my rental clients decided to buy homes, and my clients who already owned homes out East decided it was an amazing time to sell. My clients started to realize what my family and I had been lucky enough to experience all along. What the pandemic did was change the way people viewed the Hamptons. They fell in love with the beauty and conveniences of the East End and came to experience it as a year round community, easily accessible from New York City.

**Your background is very impressive. Can you describe your experience on Wall Street and the fundraising efforts you led for the European real estate private equity firm?**

Thank you! I was recruited out of my Private Wealth Management role on Wall Street to join a European firm, Quinlan Private, who wanted to raise capital for their first fund from US investors to build hotels, residential, and retail and office properties in England, Ireland, and Central Europe. I traveled around the country meeting with Family Offices and Endowments to discuss their portfolios and how our investment strategy could be a good fit for the returns they were seeking. It was honestly a pivotal point for me, as I shifted my focus away from the public markets and fell in love with the real estate market. Being able to sell something that is a physical asset is so much more interesting to me than stocks and bonds.

**You were also a VP at Goldman Sachs and UBS?**

Yes. I graduated from Harvard Business school and started working immediately at Goldman Sachs in their Private Client group and six years later was recruited to UBS. I've always been drawn to entrepreneurial roles. I was the first in my Goldman Associate class to build a self-sustaining business.

**How do you believe that gives you an edge in real estate sales?**

Real Estate is all about people, and listening to them, understanding what they need. Whether you are building investment portfolios, or selling or buying their homes, your clients must feel that they can trust you, and that you have their best interest at heart. I think I uniquely have an edge in that I have a similar professional background to many of my clients. I speak their language, they are my peers. It is comforting for people to work with someone who understands them and what they are looking to achieve. On Wall Street, I was used to dealing with ultra high net worth individuals and families and their investment portfolios. When you are operating at that high of a level, there can be a lot of layers and complexities involved. It is a very transferable skill set to when your client is looking to buy a \$20 million home in the Hamptons. They need someone who is savvy, creative, and who understands all sides of the transaction necessary to get the deal done. And in both instances, they require your utmost discretion. It is interesting, in that the barriers to entry in the residential real estate business are very low, so there are loads of agents out there. However, there are very few that truly understand the high end luxury consumer, and that is why I am focusing on that market.

**Are there any trends you are seeing post-pandemic that affect either or both markets?**

In the Hamptons, the word we are all talking about right now is inventory. There just isn't any! Off-market transactions are becoming more and more prevalent, especially in the \$10M+ market, and I anticipate doing more of them in 2022. In terms of what buyers are looking for — everyone wants turn-key and they are willing to pay a premium for that product. To that end, I am keeping a close eye on inflation, as new construction and renovation will be impacted as costs of labor and materials rise.

In Manhattan, a big post-pandemic trend has been for outdoor space. Anything with a bit of green became very coveted. Townhouses of course, and unique spaces that offered outdoor living. Additionally, condominiums with high end services and amenities such as a private dining room, concierge, wellness center, gardens, and outdoor spaces, etc., continue to be very popular as city dwellers want to feel they have space outside their four walls to live.

**What's your advice to sellers and buyers as the world opens up?**

For my sellers, my advice is to have a realistic expectation of pricing. The last two years have been full of stories of bidding wars and escalating offers. But what has always been true, and even more so now, is that overpricing a property is the kiss of death. Buyers are too smart now to overpay — even in this low inventory environment.

I tell my buyers they need to be patient, but prepared. When their dream property does become available, it will not last! Decisiveness and ninja-like reflexes are necessary to get what you want in this environment. And of course, a broker who will work tirelessly on your behalf!





Serkan Yapicilar and Kara Kelly.  
Photos courtesy Naturalist Interiors

# Naturalist Interiors

## Bringing Biophilic Design Home With Ingenuity And Perseverance

By Nicole Teitler

Biophilic design aims to bridge a connection between natural elements and manmade environments. It invites the outside world in, particularly among urban spaces, to create an inviting sense of calm. Since E.O. Wilson first coined the phrase in the early '80s, it has sparked curiosity and inventiveness around the globe — such as with Second Home co-working spaces, The Jewel in Singapore, or One Hotels — and it continues to grow in popularity.

Naturalist Interiors, a biophilic design company started in 2017, caters to this growing trend. It specializes in handmade wall gardens and reclaimed walnut wooden furniture from the forests of Turkey, made with epoxy resin. Each piece contains modern materials and natural elements, all customizable, that bring a component of overall well-being to a space.

Founded by Serkan Yapicilar, Naturalist Interiors quickly established a foothold in the wall garden industry with \$300,000 worth of sales in its first year. Today, the company installs more than 150,000 square feet of moss across the country, with some of its top clients including LG, Hermes, Hilton Canopy Hotels, Rolex, USA NSA and DOD, Serena Williams private home, Bank of America, The United Nations office at World Trade, The W, Charles Schwab, to name a few. All work is handmade in Hoboken, New Jersey and installed by Yapicilar himself, every time.

“Moss walls are seemingly all over the place at this point and we are happy to have been one of the pioneers in the US market. However, plant walls are fewer and far between as they not

only require a higher quality material to be used but also a heightened attention to details as creating a ‘natural’ flow is not as natural as one would think,” Kara Kelly, CEO of Naturalist Interiors explained. While moss walls are less maintenance, they have a less robust appearance than a lively plant wall. Fortunately, Naturalist Interiors plant wall, or wall gardens, are naturally preserved to last five to seven years without the requirement

of water, light, or soil.

Kelly and Yapicilar work side by side (they also happen to be husband and wife). Kelly steers the company’s sales, from outreach to the installation process, while Serkan manages the books and fabricates the physical pieces. Together, along with their dedicated team of creatives, they have crafted beautiful interior spaces out of a seemingly futuristic film.

Naturalist Interiors design team, also known as the Moss Stars, primarily produce large-scale commercial installations. They work closely with interior designers and architects, or project managers, to create lush and leafy wall gardens. “With any creative process, I feel the creative themselves are what bring uniqueness into each of our projects,” Kelly said of the living art pieces. “Our creative process thrives on having a lead designer appointed for each project we work on seeing it through the installation and the touch-up process.”

The process begins when a client pulls up an image, whether found in a magazine or photograph, that they’re looking to replicate. Then, together, they have a conversation about the different variations that can be brought to life. From here, a

visual rendering of the design is created for the client to approve and the wall garden is fabricated, a process that takes three to four weeks. Once it’s ready, the wall garden is seamlessly installed into its permanent home, which oftentimes contain multiple panels, and is carefully touched up before it’s ready to be unveiled.

Biophilic designs have proven to decrease stress, increase productivity, boost mental health, and overall enhance mood. As a result of the pandemic, with more people spending time at home or utilizing co-working spaces, living walls have become more popular for common spaces and office spaces.

Though mostly hired for larger pieces, Naturalist Interiors also specializes in residential installations both large and small, including private homes in the Hamptons. Last year, in summer of 2021, the company made their Hamptons showcase debut at Topping Rose House’s Holiday House Hamptons. As architecture continues towards an environmentally conscious shift, residential clients express an appreciation for green art because it is something they, now, see everyday.

More than a company dedicated

to ingenuity, Naturalist Interiors showed true perseverance in late December of 2021 when a tragic fire ravaged through the building that housed both its showroom and warehouse, affecting more than 70 local businesses. It lost everything; materials for wall gardens and custom furniture, even entire completed projects such as one for the Javits Center in New York City. Quick acting, Kelly immediately began to source replacement materials and scouted the area for a new location. Within two weeks time Naturalist Interiors signed a new lease with over 8,000 square feet of vacant space. As they continue to rebuild, bigger than before, the company cannot forget the fire that literally took away everything — from them and their fellow tenants. As a way to bring the community back together again, they now sublet part of that space to three other companies who were victims of the same fire.

Kelly said of the experience, “Knowing that we have been able to help others who are up against the same struggles get back to work means the world to us. In the toughest of times community and humanity are what pull us through.”







Photo by Madison Fender

# Michael Giannelli

## The Guru Of The English Garden

By Ty Wenzel

After decades of working in fashion, Michael Giannelli embarked on a new journey by taking over an iconic East End oasis of a garden center where his high-end aesthetic was put to work on landscapes with a nod to the English garden. Not to be confused with the cottagecore style, his guiding principles are for the classic garden that will thrive for generations. We caught up with Giannelli to find out why he decided to revamp and relaunch East Hampton Gardens on Gingerbread Lane and what his work offers his East End clients.

**Michael, you were a customer of East Hampton Gardens for a long time before taking over when the owners retired. Can you tell us about how it all came to be and why this was what you wanted to do?**

After spending 30 years in fashion design at Gap, Loft, and Victoria's Secret I decided for my 50th birthday I would purchase East Hampton Gardens and move out to East Hampton full time. I was a client of Carol and Brian's, the previous owners, for 20 years and always joked that I would buy the store one day. They decided to retire and I decided to move east and the rest is history.

**What was the renovation of the space like and what did you add or remove?**

We did a complete overhaul of the shop and the grounds. The first step was the rebranding of the store and changing the logo, etc. Our signature is a navy and white stripe with a Kelly green ribbon. My partner, Greg

Shano, did the interior design of the shop and added beautiful wallpapers and details to the interior. I've always loved Palm Beach so we took some inspiration from different interiors and used white bamboo etageres, brass tables, and stone garden tables as the fixtures for the shop.

**You are a multi-talented designer/landscaper/retailer ... Can you explain all of your services?**

I've learned so much growing up in retail and how to merchandise a shop or a line of clothing. It is a real passion of mine to bring the story to life within the shop and the grounds of the nursery. We incorporate water features, gravel pathways, and a small barn, and are constantly merchandising the grounds to make it fresh all season long. For the interiors, we partner with Greg Shano Interiors, and he takes the lead. For the landscape design and retail that is all me.

**Which is your favorite service and why?**

I love to take a very personal approach to the garden design and partner with the clients to ensure their vision is achieved. I bring a ton of ideas and inspiration and walk the grounds with the client and find out how they use the property. Do they want an herb garden, perennial garden, shade/woodland garden, outdoor ping pong table? Whatever they can dream up. It really is fun when you click with the client and they give you the freedom to create a beautiful space. I also love floral design and we offer weekly styling services and arrangements for small lunches or dinners. And we always have an assortment of fresh and faux florals to choose from.

**Your background was in fashion. How do you think this helps with your work?**

I was always using color and print to tell the story of a collection. Now I use color and flowers to create the vision. It was a very easy transition going from fashion to gardening. I will admit there was a bit of a learning curve as far as running a nursery versus going to a corporate job every day!

**How did the pandemic affect your work - were landscaping jobs stopped or did it grow because of the onslaught of new year-rounders?**

I'm very lucky to say that our business has grown each and every year we have been open. This being our sixth summer I have big expectations for the shop! We did see a major shift to outdoor entertaining and outdoor living. Plenty of people moved out here year-round but I can now say that many have returned back to the city. My clients' children were eager to return to in-person schooling once it was allowed.

**How would you describe your landscape design style? We get the English cottage vibe, like a careful study of Gertrude Jekyll, but with a twist.**

Exactly! I love the perfectly imperfect English garden style but I must give it structure. I love boxwood, hydrangea, peony, roses, lilac, camellias, and topiary. I have an old fashion take on gardening. I love a formal parterre, a knot garden, and love to establish garden rooms. Even if you have a small space it is really fun to design different destinations one for dining, one for lounging, a small pool, etc.

**Can you share any trends you see in landscape design that you're loving?**

Unfortunately, the low-maintenance garden seems to always come up. I am a believer that really doesn't exist. Any garden needs tending. What I love is not designing into a "trend" but designing a classic, beautiful space. Classics last forever, trends come and go.

**Your shop has a nostalgic aura to it, with pieces made for homes to give them an approachable luxury element. What products are you seeing for spring that our readers would love?**

I love entertaining whether in the garden or in the home, so we have a lot to offer in that category. Great new napkins, and tablecloths, placemats, napkins rings, glasses, and bamboo flatware. We also have great barware, Christofle silver pieces, and William Yeoward crystal. For outdoor entertaining, we have a beautiful line of melamine dishes and serving pieces and Italian acrylic glassware that looks and feels like glass but won't shatter and destroy your pool.

**Your partner, Greg, is an interior designer. How would you describe his interior design style?**

Both my partner and I made life changes at around 50 years old. Greg went back to school for interior design and worked with Steven Gambrel until he went out on his own. I have a passion for gardening and translate my passion into my brand, East Hampton Gardens.

Literally, when I celebrated my 50th birthday I said to myself, "Michael it's time for a change," and the first thing I did was to stop listening to people. There was so many "what about this? What about that? How much is it going to cost? etc."

Too much negativity kills a dream. I had a dream and a vision plus the support of my partner, Greg, and

made it happen.

**What trends do you see for this sector that you are loving for spring and beyond?**

What I'm seeing is people really love neutrals in a coastal way. Adding rattan, seagrass carpets, Sunbrella fabrics that don't fade into their interiors. We have some really great pieces that can add a coastal feel to your home but we love to mix it up with some more color and prints.

**Why the East End - what do you love about it?**

I use to love the bucolic feeling of the East End — the open fields, the relaxed way of life, long weekends shopping at small mom and pop stores — but I think that has really started to wain. I opened my shop with the intention of bringing back personal attention, the bespoke shopping experience, with the unique assortment of gifts and home accessories. I think what will never leave the East End is the beautiful light, the sunsets, the beaches. Once I see the water I instantly relax.

**What do you do for fun when you're not working on beautiful homes and gardens?**

Now what I love is going to the beach early in the morning with Harper, my dog, and walking with my friends. I love meals at home with friends, game nights, and movie nights. I try and avoid the crowds, especially after a long day at the shop.



Photo courtesy East Hampton Gardens





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