

James Lane

— Real Estate & Design —

June 2026

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ROBERT REFFKIN



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Robert Reffkin. Photos courtesy Compass

Robert Reffkin & The Compass Team

Inside The Company's Vision For Branding & Thoughts On The Future Of Real Estate In The Hamptons

By Ty Wenzel

On the East End, real estate has always been more than just buying and selling; it's a mix of business and almost myth. It's a place where architecture, social standing, privacy, and how people see things all come together, often in ways that connect to the wider world. In the last few years, few companies have shaken things up as much as Compass.

It started as a real estate company focused on technology, but it has grown into one of the biggest players shaping today's luxury market, including on the East End. Things like brand image, the agent's reputation, and selling a whole lifestyle now matter just as much as where a property is located.

We chatted with Joe Fuer, who manages Compass in the Hamptons, Neda Navab, Compass's President, and Robert Reffkin, the Chairman and CEO of Compass International Holdings. We discuss their brand, what goes on in buyers' minds, and how the Hamptons market is changing over time.

Walk into a Hamptons open house, and you can often tell it's a Compass listing before you see the sign. How intentional is that aesthetic and does branding risk making everything feel the same at the top end?

Joe Fuer: The aesthetic is intentional to a point. While we like the consumer to identify the Compass branding, as they will automatically associate that with a professional, curated experience, and a knowledgeable, trusted professional waiting to greet them, we still personalize the aesthetic to fit the overall mood, design, and feel of the home.

In the Hamptons, some agents are as powerful as the firms they work for. Do you see Compass as building agents' brands or ultimately vying with them?

Neda Navab: While we have branding

guidelines and best practices, we support the uniqueness of individuals and teams. The reason many of the top real estate professionals chose Compass is that we deliver the advantages of a big firm but with a boutique feel. Big is our engine, but boutique is our edge.

Big is the power of the platform that we have built for them. Big is the incredible referral network they have. Big is the fact that we have an opportunity to partner with Redfin.com, a top-three search portal in the U.S., to give coming-soon listings more visibility and more options for sellers and their real estate professionals.

But boutique is our edge. It's that feeling our real estate professionals get when they walk into the local office and the person at the front desk knows to ask about how their grandfather is doing, or how their closing went on Sunday, or whether the inspection came through as they hoped. And I think our real estate professionals deliver the power of big and boutique for their clients.

The Hamptons saw a once-in-a-generation surge during the pandemic. Now that the urgency has cooled, what's the reality on the ground that people aren't talking about?

Joe Fuer: People don't need to sell and don't need to buy. It's very discretionary.

Has Compass changed who gets access to this market?

Neda Navab: Our role has been to modernize the real estate experience with greater transparency and more tools and services that benefit all consumers.

We've seen record-breaking sales but do you think the Hamptons has a true ceiling, or are we still early in the global ultra-luxury cycle?

Joe Fuer: I don't think there's a true ceiling. The Hamptons has always been a luxury market anchored by its proximity to New York City, which connects it to a global buyer base. As long as wealth continues to expand and inventory remains limited and highly selective, there's room for new benchmarks. Many buyers quietly wait on the sidelines for these trophy properties, and they're ready when the right one comes to market.

Hamptons agents are famously independent. What does Compass offer that makes a top local broker stay when another firm comes calling?

There's a perception that Compass is both collaborating with and competing against legacy Hamptons firms. Is that tension intentional?

Neda Navab: Collaboration and competition can coexist and be healthy, not mutually exclusive.

When you walk through the Hamptons now, do you see it as a market, a status symbol, or something else entirely?

Robert Reffkin: The Hamptons is one of the most beautiful parts of the world. It attracts residents and visitors worldwide while also supporting a strong local community and full-time residents, all in one place.

Five years from now, does the Hamptons feel more exclusive or more accessible and what role does Compass play in shaping that?

Joe Fuer: I think it will be both. The market will become more exclusive as exceptional properties continue to push pricing higher, but also more accessible as it expands further west. Affordable housing is a major topic right now, and while some progress is being made, there's still a lot more that can and should be done. We are always looking for opportunities to help everyone find their place in the world.

What's something you believe about the Hamptons market right now that most people in the industry are getting wrong?

Joe Fuer: Even though inventory remains historically low, the fact that over 40% of listings have seen price reductions tells you this is really a pricing conversation, not as much a supply issue. Sellers came out with elevated expectations, and the market is correcting that in real time. Demand is still there, but it's highly selective, and the right properties, priced correctly, are still moving.



Neda Navab



Joe Fuer



Photo courtesy Saunders & Associates

The Saunders Stewardship Impact

Sarah Doud On Market Insights And Supporting CMEE

By Ty Wenzel

James Lane Post has partnered with Saunders & Associates to create the series “The Saunders Stewardship Impact,” which shines a light on the organizations that are close to the hearts of its agents. This is the third installment, featuring Saunders & Associates’ real estate agent, Sarah Doud.

The Hamptons market, a place rich with history and often tight on inventory, has increasingly drawn eyes from around the globe. In this complex environment, Sarah Doud draws on a unique blend of her past: the deep roots of a family steeped in Hamptons real estate and development for generations, alongside

the keen eye she developed as an Emmy Award-winning journalist. This background has given her an unusual knack for the business, combining sharp strategic thinking with a precise way of understanding and telling a story.

At Saunders & Associates, people know Doud for her long-term view. She often advises clients to simply get into the market whenever they can. She also has a way of using today’s media to really show off a property, a skill that proves essential in a market that has become so competitive and focused on brand recognition.

But Doud’s day-to-day work isn’t just about closing deals. She is just as invested in the future of the community she lives in, supporting the Children’s Museum of the East End by raising funds and donating to the beloved organization.

You have supported the Children’s Museum of the East End, a wonderful organization for families. What first drew you to support CMEE, and how has your involvement evolved?

My kids! CMEE has been an important part of their childhood — from birthday parties to rainy days indoors — the museum offers a safe learning environment that we have enjoyed often.

CMEE has become a cornerstone for East End families. What do you think makes it such a vital resource in this community?

The thoughtful creations and hands-on experiences CMEE offers children are unlike anything else on the East End. We are lucky to have it local and available year-round.

Events like the annual Family Fair have become major moments on the Hamptons social calendar. What do they represent to you beyond fundraising?

Last year, it was a new puppy! CMEE helped our family grow and continued to offer my children happiness at home with Spot, our adopted puppy from Wags & Walks — who was also a vendor at last year’s Family Fair... let’s see what this year brings (laughs).

The annual Family Fair has become one of the Hamptons’ most anticipated philanthropic events. Why do you think it continues to resonate so deeply year after year?

A lot of people volunteer their time to create a happy experience for everyone who comes

through the Family Fair — from crafts to gifts, the vendors who contribute and show up for CMEE really strengthen the experience and create a memorable day for the visitors. I hope to see you there!

CMEE’s mission is rooted in accessibility and inclusion. Why is this important for you to support?

Every kid deserves happiness — CMEE offers that and much more with development and education. As a mother, it becomes even more clear on how important it is for all kids to have access to these resources.

You come from a multi-generational Hamptons real estate and development family. How has that legacy informed your perspective on today’s ultra-competitive East End market?

My advice to buyers in this competitive market is to play it like Monopoly. If you land on it — buy it! Often, people wait for a house or property to check every single box — and the reality is the Hamptons Market historically trends up, and getting your foot in with a home that meets most of your criteria will still become an incredible asset.

Having personally built and renovated homes, how does that experience shape the way you guide clients, particularly in evaluating long-term value versus immediate appeal?

Immediately, big returns are tighter since Covid. Exploring opportunities in growing areas like Hampton Bays and the North Fork can be the ticket to success. I still very much enjoy the long-play — buy-and-hold. As long as your carrying costs are covered, the longer you wait and allow the asset to grow, the more money you’ll make.

The Hamptons market has become increasingly global and brand-driven. How do you differentiate your listings in a space where presentation is everything?

I’m a storyteller. I’m an Emmy Award-winning television journalist with a multimedia degree — so marketing your property with video, social media, AI, and my local connections becomes the perfect storm. Saunders also has an extensive network and provides an additional platform to reach beyond the Hamptons.

Your business is deeply rooted in relationships. What does cultivating trust look like at the highest level of this market?

Repeat business is the greatest compliment. Referrals are a cornerstone of my business. Trust is built when you deliver on your promises, and there is proof of performance. I give my clients the same advice I’d give myself, and because of that, the business grows every year.

With the East End continuing to evolve post-pandemic, what shifts are you seeing that buyers and sellers may still be underestimating?

West of the Canal — the market hits often under \$2 million, and Hampton Bays in particular offers more waterfront than other towns. Westhampton, Quogue, and East Quogue offer charming main streets. The values are very appealing.

Do you see your philanthropic work as an extension of your real estate career? Part of shaping not just properties, but the future of the community itself?

Community involvement is an important part of growing the future for my family here on the East End. Connections make business, but most importantly, it makes a better community — one that I am honored to be a part of and welcome newcomers to.

Learn more about Sarah Doud by visiting hamptonsrealestate.com.

Largest East Hampton Village Commercial Assemblage Hits The Market

3 PROPERTIES | 2.18-ACRES | RETAIL, FITNESS, RESIDENTIAL, OFFICE, INDUSTRIAL



3 & 9 Railroad Avenue, East Hampton
\$24,750,000

The Railroad Avenue Commercial Campus
21,280sf | 6 Buildings | 1.97-Acres

3 & 9 Railroad Avenue form a two-parcel commercial assemblage totaling 1.97 acres with 21,280sf of leasable space – an exceptionally uncommon scale in East Hampton Village. With expansive yard areas, multiple access points, and a diversified building mix, this offering presents a true “campus” opportunity for investors & end users seeking long-term control in a market defined by scarcity.

This once in a lifetime development canvas offers irreplaceable opportunity in a supply constrained market. Rare ability to control, curate, & elevate a marquee commercial footprint where true scale is almost never available.

The assemblage supports a wide range of fitness, service, retail, warehouse, and office-oriented uses. This flexibility creates a durable platform for stable operations today and strategic development repositioning over time.



105-107 Newtown Lane, East Hampton
\$13,750,000

The Gateway to East Hampton Village
10,900sf | 2 Buildings | 0.21-Acres

105-107 Newtown Lane is one of the largest commercial, mixed-use buildings in East Hampton. It includes three street-level commercial units, eight 1 bedroom rented residential apartments, and a separate 4-bedroom, 4-bathroom rental house. The Property is 9,342sf (0.21-acres) with 10,900sf of Gross Floor Area in the main building plus a 3,000sf of basement space. This 10,900sf is split roughly into 6,800sf of residential space and 4,100sf of commercial space. In addition, the 1,150sf of garage space may be converted to dry retail.

A truly showcase commercial asset with great recurring income.



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HAMPTONS COMMERCIAL
REAL ESTATE TEAM

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Unlimited Earth Care

Frederico Azevedo Talks Collaboration With Bea Pernia & A Celebration Of 20 Years

By Jessica Mackin-Cipro

Unlimited Earth Care has teamed up with interior designer Bea Pernia of BEA Interiors Design for a summer collaboration. On June 27, as Unlimited Earth Care celebrates 20 years at its Bridgehampton headquarters, an event will unveil pieces from Pernia's Bubble Collection at the space.

Debuted at Design Miami in December, Pernia's Bubble Collection features hand-crafted furniture in organic forms and natural materials. The collection will complement the landscape designs of Frederico Azevedo, the award-winning designer and founder of Unlimited Earth Care, who uses native and adaptable plants to create natural, expressive outdoor spaces and integrates stone, water, and sculptures to enhance the landscape.

We spoke to Azevedo about the event and collaboration.

Tell us about the upcoming collaboration between Unlimited Earth Care and Bea Pernia.

Yes, I am excited to announce that Unlimited Earth Care will collaborate this summer with interior designer Bea Pernia of BEA Interiors Design and feature a curated selection of pieces from her latest Bubble Collection at the Garden Concept Store in Bridgehampton.

How did this collaboration come about?

I met Bea at Design Miami during Art Basel in December, and when I saw her work, as a garden and landscape designer, I was excited because I was immediately imagining what they would look like in a garden. Her work heightens the inherent textures and colors of natural materials, and they're a beautiful complement to my designs. In my work, I focus on building rich color palettes with native and well-adapted plants and flowers and creating overflowing, curving floral borders that could almost feel spontaneous, but they're composed very intentionally. The Bubble Collection enhances a garden or landscape without distracting from the colors and textures of the environment.

Can you share the background of the Bubble Collection and how it complements Unlimited Earth Care's

landscape designs?

The Bubble Collection is a series of hand-crafted furniture in marble, travertine, limestone, and wood, in these organic forms that respond to nature, but still feel very sculptural. My approach to designing landscapes and gardens is also about balancing my sense of design and the beauty of natural materials and colors. Bringing furniture and sculptures into the garden, what I call the "more" of garden design, is the part of the design process where I really get to collaborate with my clients. Maybe there's an area where the light is particularly serene at a certain time of day, or where butterflies visit, and they would like a seating area there, so they come to my store, and I help them find something special. I really enjoy sourcing bespoke and interesting pieces for the Unlimited Earth Care Garden Concept Store, and I'm excited to carry a

curated selection of pieces from the Bubble Collection this summer.

The event on June 27 celebrates Unlimited Earth Care's 20th anniversary. What are you most looking forward to at the event?

This year, our summer event will be held at the Unlimited Earth Care Headquarters in Bridgehampton at 2249 Scuttle Hole Road from 4 to 7 PM. Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres will be served, and guests will enjoy shopping and mingling amongst the flowers. Unlimited Earth Care is celebrating twenty years at our Bridgehampton headquarters and, of course, our collaboration with Bea Pernia. Your readers are very welcome, and I am most looking forward to seeing everyone there and talking design and flowers.



Frederico Azevedo. Photo by Ron Asadorian for Rob Rich/SocietyAllure.com



Bea Pernia. Photo by Ton Gomes

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Arthur Dunnam and Kelly Zerbini. Photos courtesy of Dunnam Zerbini

Dunnam Zerbini Design

When Maximalism Learns Restraint

By Ty Wenzel

These days, design often feels rushed. Images fly around, repeating endlessly until everything starts to look much the same. In such a hurried world, it seems the most captivating spaces are the ones that don't reveal all their secrets at first glance. They prefer to unfold slowly, letting you discover them little by little, their true charm stemming not from how much they hold, but from the careful thought behind each element.

For Kelly Zerbini, who leads Dunnam Zerbini Design, this idea of holding back isn't a barrier; it's more like a guiding principle. Her spaces, often described as rich with layers yet always feeling understated and composed, reflect a way of thinking that values what you choose to remove just as much as what you decide to include. The result is a room that feels lived-in and considered, rather than just put together — a place designed to support the everyday flow of life without ever trying to steal the show.

Working within a practice that carries the distinct influence of Jed Johnson, Zerbini approaches each new undertaking as an ongoing conversation — a give-and-take between her client, the physical space, and the objects destined to inhabit it. While nods to history, pieces sourced from across the globe, and skilled craftsmanship are all certainly part of her toolkit, they're never the end goal. Instead, she uses them as means to an end, carefully crafting interiors that truly feel personal, rooted, and, perhaps most importantly, built to last.

Recently, in a Bridgehampton guest house, these guiding ideas truly came to life. There, layers found their balance with clear intention, and a thoughtful purpose carefully tempered a sense of fullness. One might then start to wonder: how exactly are such choices made? What helps one decide if an object is truly essential or merely decorative? How do rooms evolve and get refined as they're brought to life? And why, in a time when

we're constantly bombarded by images, has a sense of elegant restraint become the very hallmark of true sophistication?

Your work is often described as both highly layered and carefully balanced — how do you think about restraint within a maximalist interior?

Restraint is what keeps maximalism from tipping into chaos. I love a layered room, but I'm equally interested in what's not there. Editing is everything. We want to make sure each element has a reason to exist. When layering is working, the room doesn't feel busy; it feels intentional. You notice one thing, then another, as the room reveals itself, instead of shouting at you all at once.

The firm carries forward the legacy of Jed Johnson. In what ways does that history continue to inform your approach today?

Jed had this incredible ability to trust his eye over any prescribed "look," which feels increasingly rare. He wasn't interested in signatures or formulas, and we aren't either. What carries through is a commitment to client collaboration, proportion, and a kind of quiet discipline. Also, a deep respect for craftsmanship. Jed worked incredibly closely with artisans, refining things until they felt exactly correct. That mindset is still very much how we approach a project today. It's not about creating something that looks designed; it's about creating something that feels like it existed all along.

At the same time, how have you adapted or reinterpreted that philosophy for a contemporary client?

People live more casually now, but the bigger shift has really come from the internet. Clients are seeing the same handful of interiors



over and over, so the visual vocabulary can start to feel a bit compressed. For younger clients, especially, who may not yet have a fully formed point of view, it's easy to default to what's familiar.

Part of our role is to gently expand that lens. We draw on a broad understanding of historical precedent, vintage furnishings, and architectural periods to introduce things that sit outside of the algorithm. In a way, we act as a bit of a counterbalance to prescribed aesthetics. It's less about steering someone away from what they like and more about showing them what else is possible. This is how the project becomes more personal and far more interesting.

Many of your interiors incorporate objects sourced globally. What distinguishes a piece that feels essential from one that is simply decorative?

You can feel it immediately. An essential piece has presence and holds the room a bit. It doesn't need a story to justify itself, even if it has one. Provenance is interesting, but it's not the point within our design philosophy. I'm much more interested in proportion, material, and how something sits with everything around it. Decorative pieces tend to fill space, but the right pieces define it. If you can remove something and the room doesn't change, it probably wasn't essential to begin with.

You've described your work as creating a kind of "background" for a client's life — how do you strike that balance between presence and restraint?

I think "background" can be misunderstood. To me, it means creating a setting that supports the way someone lives rather than competing with it. The balance comes from knowing where to push and where to pull back. We want our spaces to feel composed, not performative.

There's also a real practicality to that. Every piece of upholstery is meant to be sat in. Horizontal surfaces are there to be used, not just styled. Our clients live in their homes, and we design with that in mind. Where we tend to push is often in the layers around the functional piece, such as decorative lighting, rugs, and pattern play — the elements above and below. That allows the things people interact with every day to remain grounded and functional, while the room still has a point of view.

How do you approach editing in a room that is intentionally

full? What ultimately determines what stays and what goes?

I'm always looking at the hierarchy of the room, what's the lead, what's supporting, and what's just adding noise.

Our floor plans are developed at the beginning of a project, as an idea rather than a fixed solution. They're living frameworks that evolve as decisions unfold. Objects, scale, and materials start to inform one another, and the room takes shape in a kind of natural sequence. Editing happens along the way. We are continually refining rooms as they reveal what they need and what they don't.

In a design landscape that moves quickly, how do you define longevity or timelessness in your work?

Timelessness isn't about avoiding trends altogether — it's about not being driven by them. We're much more focused on proportion, material, and how things are put together. If those fundamentals are right, a space will hold up even as tastes shift. I also think restraint plays a role here. Rooms that try to do too much tend to date themselves quickly.

The homes that endure usually have a kind of clarity to them that doesn't announce when they were designed.

Looking back at your recent projects, is there a decision you made that felt like a departure — something that surprised even you?

There are always moments where we push something a bit further than we normally would, whether it's a color, a material, or a sense of scale. What's interesting is that those decisions rarely feel like departures once they're in place. If they're grounded in the same founding principles of the firm, proportion, balance, and instinct, they tend to settle in naturally.

What does surprise me is that, in every project, there's always one room I find myself fixating on a little more than the others. Not at the expense of anything else, but as a kind of creative focal point. It's the space where we might push just a bit further or refine just a bit longer. I never know which room it will go in, and it's not always the obvious one. It reveals itself along the way, and in the end, it often becomes the thread that elevates the whole project.



*Live
where
the
world
comes
to
play.*



 **Douglas Elliman**
REAL ESTATE

Beyond The Broker

Stacey Cohen On Where Design Meets Dealmaking With Heiberg Cummings

By Ty Wenzel

In the Hamptons, luxury is getting more showy — louder homes, faster timelines, bigger gestures. But Stacey Cohen and Heiberg Cummings work differently; they prefer a quieter approach. Their work relies on gut feeling, discretion, restraint, and a really good, shared understanding of what people want in a home these days.

Stacey Cohen, a power real estate agent with The Agency, doesn't just sell houses; she builds a story around them. Way before a house even goes up for sale, she's thinking about how it will make people feel. She looks at the land, figures out what works and doesn't with the building's design, perfects how it's shown, and makes sure the timing is just right.

Interior design company Heiberg Cummings, founded in 1990 by Bernt Heiberg and William Cummings, is known for its iconic design regionally. They believe design should start with how it feels, not what's trendy. They make spaces that feel warm but also have an elegant European touch. They mix antiques, eclectic pieces, and different textures to make rooms feel personal, not just put together. They've worked together with Stacey Cohen so much that they've created their own way of communicating creatively, which goes beyond what you'd expect from an agent and a designer.

Many of the homes that they work on, especially on Shelter Island, don't feel like

houses built just to sell. Instead, they feel like complete, lived-in places. People don't just walk through these homes; they connect with them. Here, Cohen and Heiberg Cummings talk about telling stories, understanding what buyers want, privacy, timing, and that special moment when a house just feels ideal for the East End lifestyle.

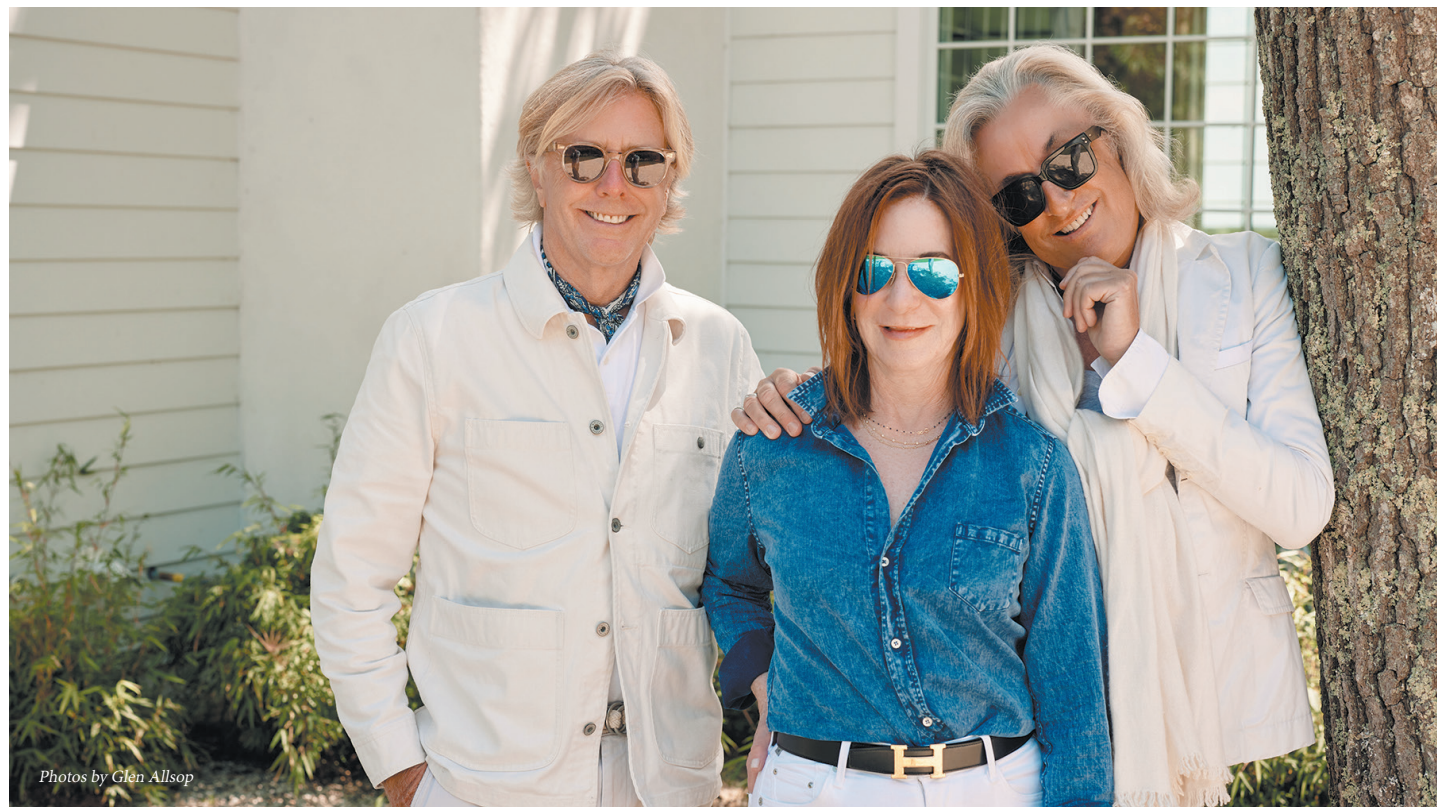
We asked both Cohen and the team at Heiberg Cummings to answer a few questions.

Stacey, you came from the world of fashion, where perception is everything. What did that teach you about desire that most real estate agents still don't understand?

Stacey Cohen: The most important thing is listening. Whether someone is buying or selling, understanding what they truly value is everything. Real estate is emotional, and every client communicates differently. My job is to read that carefully and guide them toward the best possible outcome and value for the deal.

I think many brokers focus too much on selling instead of understanding. People want to feel seen. They want confidence, honesty, and clarity.

When you walk into a property, what tells you instantly whether it will sell or sit?



SC: Usually, I can tell right away. It often comes down to positioning. A house may need editing, styling, or strategic pricing adjustments, but there's almost always a path to presenting it correctly. Sometimes it's about removing distractions. Sometimes it's about creating emotion. Buyers need to immediately understand the lifestyle the property offers.

Your work honors the original integrity of a structure. How do you decide what stays and what must go?

Heiberg Cummings: It always depends on the client, the architecture, and the emotional attachment to the home itself. We work very closely with each client and treat their opinions and direction as part of the creative process. For us, design is never about erasing character. It is about refining it and creating harmony within the overall vision of the project.

There's a quiet confidence to both of your work. How intentional is that restraint?

HC: Very intentional. Over the years, we've developed a broad network of unique sources and furnishings — mixing contemporary pieces with antiques and ideas that feel unexpected. We're not interested in excess. We want spaces to feel collected and personal.

SC: I think restraint creates longevity. In real estate, discretion and subtlety are often

more powerful than noise. I've always been very private with my clients and protective of their trust. I'm not overly performative — my focus is always the property itself and representing it properly.

Stacey, what do you not do that other brokers consistently get wrong?

SC: I don't simply put a home on the market and wait for it to sell. I tell a story around it. Buyers in the Hamptons are buying into a lifestyle as much as a house. This place has a kind of magic to it — the light, the water, the pace, the privacy. Every property has its own narrative, and buyers respond emotionally when that story is told correctly.

When designing homes that will ultimately be sold, how do you balance your style with universality?

HC: Every project responds to the architecture first. But the most important thing is always creating something personal and unique. People connect to authenticity. We never want a house to feel generic or overly calculated for resale. It should still feel soulful.

You approach listings almost like product launches. What are the non-negotiables before a property ever hits the market?

SC: Preparation is everything. I research every property carefully — what can and cannot be done with the home or land, zoning considerations, permits, certificates of occupancy. I want everything ready before we ever reach the closing table. It removes stress from the transaction and creates confidence for both sides. Knowledge is critical in this business.

What is the biggest mistake developers make when trying to "design for resale"?

HC: Too often, developers focus on surface-level luxury without creating something truly distinctive. Materials matter. Proportion matters. Atmosphere matters. A successful home needs personality and integrity, not just expensive finishes.

Your collaboration feels less like staging a beautiful house and more like authorship. What did you recognize in each other's work?

SC: Bernt and the team designed very thoughtfully. Most of the projects we work on are homes they've either renovated themselves or built from the ground up, and there's a level of intentionality you feel immediately. They understand the market instinctively, but they never design purely for the market. That's actually what makes the homes so desirable.

HC: Stacey understands the emotional side of design. We've collaborated for a long time, and there's tremendous respect between us. Every project feels personal rather than transactional. That relationship creates trust, and trust always leads to a stronger result.

When you first walk into a Heiberg Cummings home, what are buyers reacting to emotionally?

SC: There's an immediate warmth to the experience. People walk through smiling. The homes feel inviting, layered, and complete —

like someone has already imagined the best version of living there. Many of the homes sell fully furnished because buyers don't want to change anything. They want the entire experience exactly as it is.

Do you ever adjust design decisions based on Stacey's understanding of the market?

HC: Absolutely. We have a very close partnership and a clear understanding of each other's strengths. Stacey has an exceptional read on buyers and how people respond emotionally to a home. The collaboration allows us to create projects that feel both intelligent and deeply human.

What happens when design and deal strategy align perfectly?

HC: That's the ideal outcome — when both sides fully support each other's talents and instincts. Those are the projects that feel effortless to buyers because everything is aligned.

Shelter Island seems to allow for a different kind of expression than the traditional Hamptons market. Why?

HC: There's a different energy there. The access to the water, the privacy, the connection between the Hamptons and the North Fork — it creates a more relaxed and international atmosphere.

SC: Many of the Shelter Island projects we've worked on have been waterfront, and buyers respond very emotionally to that environment. The pace is quieter and more intimate.

Are buyers becoming more design literate, or are they still reacting emotionally first?

SC: Both are true. Buyers today are incredibly informed, but emotion still drives the decision. Most people know immediately whether a home feels right for them.

HC: That emotional connection is everything. A home can be visually beautiful, but if it doesn't create a feeling, people won't remember it.

Stacey, you're also an avid collector of modern art. How does that influence the way you see homes?

SC: I'm a very visual person. Beauty is important to me, and I think collecting art trains your eye to understand composition, proportion, and atmosphere. I'm often able to immediately envision the potential of a property — not just what it is, but what it could become.

Finally, when a buyer walks into one of your homes and instantly knows it's this one — what just happened in that moment?

SC: They stopped thinking logically and started feeling emotionally connected. That's when a house becomes a home.

HC: It becomes a meaningful experience. The house feels personal to them already, even before they own it.

Learn more about Cohen by visiting theagencyre.com and Heiberg Cummings by visiting hcd3.com.





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Real Estate Confab

The Quiet Cracks In The Hamptons Luxury Market

By Ty Wenzel

For years, the Hamptons luxury market had carried itself with a relentless drive, a momentum that felt almost impervious to outside forces. Prices continue to climb to unprecedented levels, homes move off the market with surprising speed, and a steady stream of eager buyers consistently materializes, prepared to embrace whatever the moment demands. Yet beneath that seemingly unyielding surface, a different, more subdued reality has formed.

Sellers are sometimes still operating under the assumptions of that golden age, their expectations firmly rooted in peak-era pricing and rapid sales. Meanwhile, those looking to buy have noticeably shifted their approach, now moving with a new sense of caution, often seeking to negotiate and displaying an uncommon patience. Beyond that, properties that appear flawless in their online listings often fail to make the same impression when viewed in person.

Moreover, a growing surge of new construction, each project proudly announced as “luxury,” has blurred into a kind of sameness, offering little to truly capture a buyer’s imagination or compel them to make a quick decision — if any decision at all.

It is against this backdrop that we asked a selection of leading Hamptons brokers and agents for their insights, spanning everything from how to approach pricing to the critical task of distinguishing one property from another. They reveal a market that, while still active, is no longer capable of pretending things haven’t fundamentally shifted.

We asked well-known Hamptons agents their thoughts on the question: What is quietly

not working in today’s Hamptons luxury market, and how are you adjusting your strategy because of it?

Matthew Breitenbach, Compass

Pricing is the obvious answer. Everyone says it. But you can price correctly and still see no activity. You can be right, and the house won’t trade. What’s defining the Hamptons market right now is patience. The more patient a seller is, the more they can push. The more they want speed, the more realistic they need to be. It’s not just price — it’s time horizon.

Some houses show great online and disappointment in person. Some are the opposite. There’s no science to it. A cottage can photograph beautifully, but at 1,500 square feet, it may not work. That’s the gap. You have to look at everything, not just the photos. We advise on lifestyle and what people actually need. I’ll do video calls with buyers before we ever schedule a showing. The goal is to narrow it down to homes that make sense.

The way you handle ultra-high-net-worth buyers hasn’t changed. The market around them has. Inventory is low, activity is high, and trades at the top have increased significantly. Ten to 20 [million] feels different than 20 and up. At that level, you have to show logistics — private and off-market inventory — and frame the market clearly on pricing.

With new development, storytelling matters. Developers get into trouble listing too early with renderings. It overexposes the property, days on market climb, and momentum fades — especially if they’re pioneering a new area.

A lot of builders copy each other. It’s a base

market with a lot of the same product. There are developers, and there are designer-developers — and far fewer of the latter. Land is more competitive than ever and harder to secure.

This is a powerful moment in the Hamptons. It’s evolving from a resort town into a country town. There are more year-round residents, more demand than ever. You have Florida-based New Yorkers coming back for the summer. It’s not without challenges, but there’s real energy across price points.

Our three-phase strategy reflects that. Phase one is Private Exclusive — testing pricing with targeted exposure. Phase two is Coming Soon. Phase three is Active on MLS. Each phase builds momentum. It lets sellers try a number, get feedback, and adjust without full market risk.

We find inventory on and off market using technology, process, and experience. We don’t believe in standardized approaches.

Stacey Cohen, The Agency

Looking at the Hamptons luxury market these days, I’ve noticed a few things. Some agents, it seems, tend to gloss over certain realities, perhaps because the old ways used to work. But ignoring these shifts can sometimes mean an agent loses a listing, or finds themselves in one of those difficult conversations nobody really enjoys having. These days, both sellers and buyers come to the table having done their homework. Buyers, for one, seem far less driven by emotion than they were years ago. Overpriced properties, as a result, often end up sitting on the market, gathering dust. That’s why it’s so important to set a strategic price right from the start.

Of course, pricing is always a critical piece of any listing. But just as crucial, I’d argue, is the story we choose to tell about that property. I always approach each listing with a clear plan and a distinct point of view. It seems to me agents need to start thinking of themselves more as a brand, rather than simply a listing agent. The luxury market, more than ever, demands precision.

Last year, the market certainly saw a significant surge in sales of properties priced at \$20 million and above, and 2026 began with a strong start as well. We’ve also seen quite a few new luxury builds come onto the market. It’ll be interesting to observe if these homes find buyers closer to their completion.

Luxury buyers, it seems, have become a touch more cautious, and they’re negotiating much harder these days. They know the market inside out. What they appear to be searching for is authenticity and a genuine architectural pedigree. Even simplicity, when executed flawlessly, seems to resonate well with them. In the luxury market today, it’s no longer just about competing on luxury itself; it’s about competing on precision.

Chris Ritchey, Compass

What’s quietly not working in the Hamptons luxury market right now is the assumption that we’re still in the 2021–2022 Covid-era frenzy. Many sellers remain anchored to peak pricing, while buyers have become far more disciplined and selective. There’s also an oversupply of new construction that lacks differentiation, many homes feel interchangeable and “cookie-cutter.”

At the same time, buyers don’t need to purchase second homes, so they’re approaching decisions with a much sharper lens on value, quality, and authenticity.

My strategy has adjusted accordingly: price accurately from day one, often using Compass Private Exclusives to test positioning; ensure the product truly delivers in person; focus on properties with real distinction; and underwrite deals with longer timelines and negotiation in mind. The market is still very active, but it’s far more strategic, and it rewards precision over optimism.

Dana Trotter, The Agency

What is quietly not working in today’s Hamptons luxury market is the gap between seller expectations and buyer reality.

Pricing is still strong for properties that are turnkey, well-located, and genuinely move-in-ready properties. But homes that require substantial work, a gut renovation, or a full rebuild are no longer trading at aspirational numbers simply because inventory is limited. That part of the market has changed.

Today’s luxury buyer wants ease. They want a finished product. With construction costs continuing to rise and renovation timelines still far from simple, there is much less appetite for taking on a project. End users do not want the burden of time, cost, and uncertainty, and developers remain disciplined. They will pay real value, not inflated pricing.

Buyers are also more measured than they were a few years ago. They are taking their time, negotiating more, and quickly losing interest when a property does not feel special in person or when negotiations stall because a seller will not budge on price. That is why pricing, presentation, and true differentiation matter more than ever.

My strategy has not changed much. I continue to be honest and direct from the outset. I am advising sellers to be realistic about condition, product, and positioning. If a home is not turnkey, the price has to reflect that. And if it is a new build, it has to stand apart, because buyers are no longer drawn to luxury that feels interchangeable.

Bridget Terry, Compass

Proper pricing is key in today’s market, and overpricing simply isn’t effective. The smart-

est strategy is to price just below market value, though that can be a tough decision to make. That’s where working with an experienced agent becomes essential... someone who knows the current inventory inside and out and has firsthand knowledge of recently sold properties.

When it comes to preparing your home for sale, selling “as-is” often leaves money on the table. Staging, small repairs, and a fresh coat of paint can make a significant difference without requiring a major investment. A good agent can connect you with trusted professionals to help with these updates.

As for digital staging? It’s not my favorite. It often feels artificial, and buyers can be disappointed when they view the property in person. Seeing a properly staged home, with real furniture, makes a world of difference, especially in spaces like the primary bedroom, where buyers want to visualize how a king-sized bed will fit. Real staging helps them truly understand the layout and potential of a space.

On a personal note, I have to say I’m ready to move beyond the all-white kitchen and bathroom trend. There’s something so refreshing about seeing builders and designers take a bold step, though not so bold that it feels overly specific or hard to personalize. Even a thoughtful touch of color can completely transform a space, adding warmth, character, and undeniable charm!

Wealthy buyers are very active, but they’re moving more thoughtfully. They’re focused on negotiating favorable terms and making confident, well-analyzed decisions. This means transactions may take longer, but buyers remain highly engaged when the right opportunity presents itself.

Edmund Zenuni, Saunders & Associates

What’s quietly not working right now is the assumption that demand alone will carry a deal. The Hamptons luxury market is very active, but buyers are asking more questions and are selective with their decisions.

At the same time, we’re seeing a saturation of “luxury” inventory that doesn’t truly separate itself. In this environment, being good is no longer enough — properties need to feel intentional and memorable.

As a result, my strategy has shifted toward control and precision. Pricing is about creating urgency, demand, and momentum. I am advising sellers to consider overall presentation from day one, so the property and home resonate immediately, and we cast the widest net possible in terms of potential customers.

Successful sales today come down to clarity, discipline, and how well a property connects with the buyer the moment they walk in.

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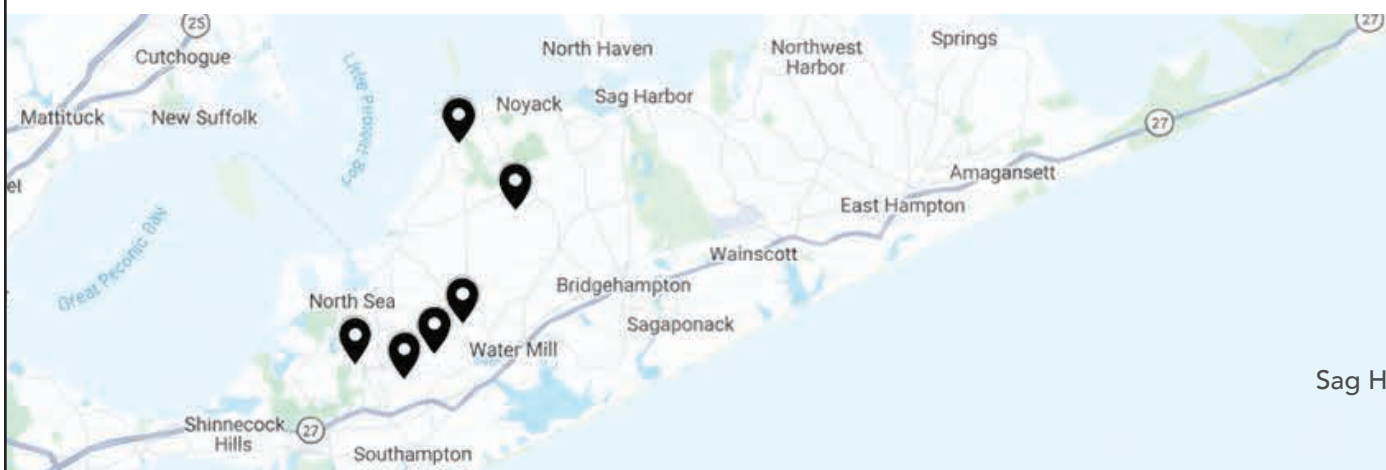
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