

Small Wonders

Giant brokerages aren't crushing the boutique firm—they're creating a new opportunity. BY S. JHOANNA ROBLED0

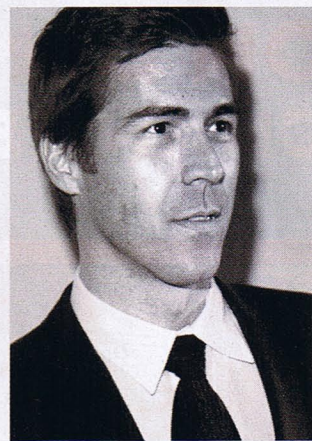
ROBERT DE NIRO, Kanye West, and Woody Allen went house-hunting this year, but not with agents at industry giants like Prudential Douglas Elliman or Corcoran. Instead, they turned to small boutique firms that seem quaint in the age of the megabrokerage. They're not alone—while thousand-agent outfits gobble up competitors, mom-and-pop throwbacks are capitalizing on the perception that the big guys are getting too big. "Bigger is in, but [it's] not better," declares Dominique Richard, daughter of the grande dame of boutique firms, Alice Mason, who employs just twelve brokers. At the larger agencies, "sometimes brokers never even see the apartments," says Laurie Cooper (pictured), an independent broker who recently helped De Niro buy Harvey Weinstein's Central Park West apartment. "I am personally involved."



So involved, in fact, that most boutique brokers engineer their social lives around deal-making. Michele Kleier, who works with about 40 brokers, says she often hears of soon-to-be-available apartments first "because either I or my daughters know [the sellers] socially." Patricia Burnham, whose clients include the Hearsts, says she's had parties where she's "sold most of the people their homes ... I was out with someone last night who said, 'I want to sell my property. I'm sure in my database there'll be a CEO or hedge-funder who'll want that.'"

Nevertheless, their outsize rivals don't lack for boldface clients. Former Mason broker Deborah Grubman wound up transferring her star-studded client roster to Corcoran, lured in part by the latter's multimillion-dollar marketing budgets and global reach. "If anyone wants to put their record up of how many \$10 million [plus] deals they've made, we're happy to do so," says Corcoran president Pam Liebman. Besides, she adds, many more buyers "can afford these superluxury apartments ... It's not just the Park Avenue crowd."

MOVERS



Good-bye To A Queer Eye

Bachelors who need an instant space makeover should check out **Kyan Douglas's** 1,250-square-foot, two-bedroom loft in the Gretch Building in Williamsburg, on the market for \$899,000. Whoever buys the apartment from Douglas, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy's* resident grooming expert, will inherit a high-style space. Not only did Douglas pick up designery touches from co-star Thom Filicia, but he also got **feng shui master Reiko Gomez** to help choose paint colors and arrange the furniture to maximize the apartment's flow of energy, or Chi in *feng shui* terms. As it was, the place didn't need much help: "The front door faces north, which is great for abundance," Douglas says. Better yet, "the bathroom's a grooming guru's fantasy. There's plenty of space for products." Douglas, who hired Corcoran's Debra Kavalier and Sharon Held to market the space, isn't leaving Williamsburg; he's moving into an apartment nearby with water views. S.J.R.

THE OPEN-HOUSE LOG



50 West 70th Street, Apartment 2

Two-bedroom, two-bath co-op with a den. **ASKING PRICE:** \$1.795 million. **MAINTENANCE:** \$1,467 per month. **BROKERS:** Karen Kelley and Deanna Kory, the Corcoran Group.

Who: Gordon Gray, actor.

What are you shopping for? I've been looking all over for three months. This is the second apartment I've seen on the Upper West Side.

What do you think? I like downtown a little better. [Still] it's nice and fresh. It's in good shape. I like the contrast of the prewar with the modern interiors.

Who: Gerald Tam, investment-management analyst, and Mike Goldenberg, business-development associate.

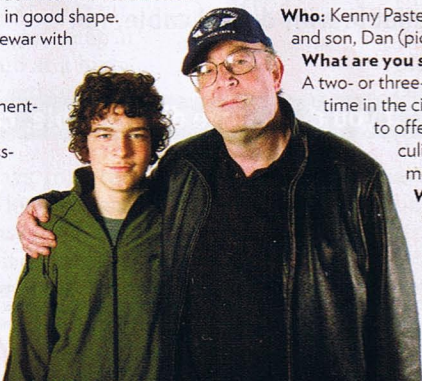
What are you shopping for? **GERALD:** We just wanted to see what it's like. We're not in the market.

What do you think? **MIKE:** It's really nice. We're in a high-rise now, but we like the whole nineteenth-century look: the moldings, the high ceilings, the brass door knocker. I want that door knocker.

Who: Kenny Pasternak, hedge-fund owner, and son, Dan (pictured).

What are you shopping for? **KENNY:** A two- or three-bedroom so we can spend time in the city and enjoy what it has to offer—artistically, culturally, culinarily, and, if my wife dumps me, the nightlife.

What do you think? **KENNY:** One floor up without an elevator is a tolerable compromise for light and fourteen-foot ceilings. S.J.R.



PHOTOGRAPHS: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT, JEREMY LIEBMAN FOR NEW YORK MAGAZINE; PATRICK MCMULLAN; DONALD BOWERS FOR NEW YORK MAGAZINE (2)