

Advocating for the Occupier

An Interview with David Goldstein, Vice Chairman, Savills North America

EDITORS' NOTE David Goldstein began his real estate career with Savills (then Studley) in New York City in 1990. To date, he has executed transactions valued in excess of \$3 billion dollars across the tri-state area and the United States. As vice chairman, branch manager of the New York City office, and a member of the Savills board of directors, Goldstein provides strategic direction and leadership and has helped the New York office become a premiere tenant representation practice for the entire region. He is also a member of Savills' national Law Firm Practice Group and serves on the firm's executive committee. He has represented clients including Ralph Lauren Corporation, Wilmer Hale LLP, Jones Day, Pillsbury Winthrop LLP, J. Crew, American Securities, The New York Public Library, The Government of Canada, Skidmore Owings & Merrill LLP, Burberry, Covington & Burling, Kirkland & Ellis LLP, Abercrombie & Fitch, John Wiley & Sons, Sprinklr, Pinebridge Investments, Freshfields, DKNY, United Healthcare and Tiffany & Co. He is an active member of the Real Estate Board of New York, the DWH Foundation for Leukemia Research, and the Special Olympics. Goldstein earned a BA in business administration, business, and commercial real estate from the University of Colorado at Boulder.



David Goldstein

FIRM BRIEF Established in 1855, Savills (savills.us) is one of the leading real estate advisors in the world. Savills helps organizations find the right real estate solutions that ensure employee success. With services in tenant representation, workforce and incentives strategy, workplace strategy and occupant experience, project management, and capital markets, Savills has elevated the potential of workplaces around the corner, and around the world, for 165 years and counting.

Will you discuss your role and key areas of focus?

I have been lucky enough to call Savills (formerly Studley) home for three decades now and have held several roles within the organization. Recently, in addition to my current, day-to-day responsibilities, I was named market leader for the New York

region – a role I am honored to have, especially considering how quickly the real estate industry is evolving, pandemic and otherwise. Overall, my approach remains the same. I pride myself on being a trusted advisor to my clients, but just as important to me is offering mentorship to our next generation of leaders across the key disciplines of our occupier-focused platform.

The pandemic has turbocharged disruption across all industries so navigating these new challenges and unlocking opportunities for our tenant clients is where I find myself spending most of my time. Organizations are embracing more dynamic ways of working and expect so much more today than the execution of a traditional real estate transaction. They have complex workplace and workforce needs, often across multiple locations and/or regions. They deserve to have the most up-to-date information and supporting analytics – and 24/7 access to true experts – to make the best real estate decisions for their respective organizations. We offer a diverse community of experts working together as one to solve problems and accelerate change.

Where do you see growth opportunities for Savills during this unprecedented time?

Nationally, we have made significant investments to our business – either via acquisitions, strategic partnerships with

third-party service providers and, of course, recruiting top-talent from across the industry. Our growth has been commensurate with the resources we've invested in, specifically the disciplines of workplace strategy, labor analytics, project management and, of course, technology.

The office is no longer the place where people come to and shut their door, turn on their computer, do their work and then go home. It is a much more dynamic environment geared towards learning, training, mentoring and, ultimately, idea creation. We are finding that companies are evaluating the best way to meet these needs, whether it be through remote work, hybrid work, in-person work or some elegant combination therein. The last 16 months have shown us that, if anything, nobody really “wants” an office. They want what an office can “deliver” to the organization – culturally, physically, financially. Real estate decisions are no longer confined to the C-suite – they now touch stakeholders across HR, IT, finance, etc. – so offering a “community of diverse thought” seems like the best approach.

How do you differentiate Savills from its competitors?

We are the only major player that is dedicated exclusively to the needs of the occupier and, as a result, we tend to think differently around all these topics. When it is in your DNA to advocate rather than to “arrange” transactions, we feel that it unlocks bigger ideas and broader thinking around modern-day occupancy concepts.

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We think of what we do, we think of how we do it and, most importantly, we think about the why of what we do – which is all about advocating for the occupier. It is exciting to have a platform for creating change and for hopefully creating something very special that becomes a lasting legacy for an organization because, ultimately, the real estate footprint is a canvas upon which all the artistic and creative work gets done – and being a part of that drives us more than anything. Executing complexity if you will.

How critical is it to have a diverse and inclusive workforce in order to bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the table when addressing client needs?

If we go back to 2017, we put an increased emphasis on building a more robust diversity and inclusion platform to address some of the disparities in the industry in general since this is an industry that has traditionally been dominated by male players. In 2018, we announced the Building Inclusion and Diversity (BID) board which was designed to build awareness and establish dialogue around these initiatives and programs to make sure that diversity was a priority and was happening across all parts of the organization. Since June 2020, we launched specific initiatives designed to address the lack of racial and gender diversity within commercial real estate. We created employee resource groups (ERGs), beginning with Black Excellence United (BEU) and the Women’s Initiatives Network (WIN). These employee-operated networks collaborate across all business groups,

locations and company levels on recruiting, retention, collaboration and advancement for diverse members.

In October 2020, we launched the Junior Broker Development Program (JBDDP) which is a 15-month rotational program aimed at providing candidates who have graduated from four-year institutions the opportunity to advance their respective commercial real estate careers. The inaugural class was comprised of eight young professionals in New York City and two in Washington D.C. and was 90 percent diverse. The associates were paid a full salary over the term. Once the term ended, 100 percent of the offers we made were accepted – a testament to the success of the program, but also to our inaugural class. We have expanded the program to Chicago, Los Angeles and Houston, and we welcomed our second class of junior brokers after Labor Day. This program reflects Savills’ commitment to offering a comprehensive education for the next generation of Savills associate brokers.

What are your views on New York City’s recovery and rebuilding from the pandemic?

The building blocks are in place as we are blessed to have the most educated and diverse workforce in the country – our talent is really our best currency. We also have a fighting spirit that is unique to New York, so I’d never bet against this great city. While there is robust ongoing debate over the long-term impact on offices and office space, the consensus is that there is a need to have a place for people to

unite, congregate and collaborate. I think that the key to recovery is restoring the confidence in the safety of New York so that the 24/7 vibrancy of the community can really shine, which has been the driver for young people from all over the country and all parts of the world to want to come to work and live in New York. People come to New York because they want a diverse and interesting workplace, but they also want to experience sports, theatre, music and culture in a thriving community that gives back.

Are you surprised to see the type of growth and development in different parts of New York and in the boroughs?

The traditional geographic boundaries have shifted to the west and the south when looking at the population growth of the young and educated in New York. This is also true with the growth that has occurred in Brooklyn and the New Jersey waterfront. The infrastructure and transportation enhancements have allowed access to different parts of the city and has activated the growth and redevelopment of these areas.

What advice do you offer to young people interested in building a career in the industry?

I tell them that there is not one play-book for success, and you need to put your own imprint on every opportunity to become an invaluable part of your organization. You must give as much as you take, and you must immerse yourself culturally in the mission of the organization. You cannot be afraid to bring ideas to the table that may get rejected because it is ideas that ultimately unlock opportunity. Learn every aspect of the business – i.e., leasing requires finance expertise, understanding of capital markets, underwriting skills, etc., so be well-rounded.

What has made the industry so special for you?

I value the mentorship that I have received throughout the years from those within the firm and the industry at large as I was growing my career. There are so many people that gave their time and expertise to help me unlock my potential and it is very rewarding to now be that person for some of the younger people in the industry. It is a privilege to be able to be a part of the growth and success of the next generation of leaders and to watch the impact that they are making for the organization and our clients. ●

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