

A Relationship Business

An Interview with Diane M. Ramirez,
Chief Executive Officer, Halstead Property, LLC

EDITORS' NOTE In 1973, Diane Ramirez began her real estate career and she has worked for Halstead Property since founding the firm with Clark Halstead in 1984. In 1987, she was named Director of Sales and Executive Director of Sales in 1993. Promoted to President in 1999, she was named Chief Executive Officer in 2013.



COMPANY BRIEF Halstead Property (halstead.com) is one of the largest and most innovative residential real estate brokerage firms in the New York metropolitan area. The firm has 1,300 sales and rental agents throughout Manhattan; Brooklyn; Riverdale; the Hamptons; Hudson Valley; New Jersey; and Fairfield County, Connecticut. In 2001, Halstead joined the distinguished family of real estate-related companies owned by Terra Holdings.

How strong and sustainable is the New York City real estate market?

The market is very strong and there are a number of reasons for that. At the very high end, when someone is going to put down a large sum of money, they're doing it with very well-thought-out, fantastic product.

As opposed to what we were seeing in 2007 and 2008, the right product is now being developed by the right developers, which makes this market sustainable.

In terms of other price points, those are sustainable because of our inventory crunch.

Additional outside factors include financing. Even though we're probably on an upward trajectory for interest rates, it's very slow. At the higher end, there is a lot of cash, and this is still a factor that people look to regarding the strength of market.

The last but most important aspect is the desirability of not only Manhattan but also the outer boroughs now, which we're deeply involved in. More people are moving into New York City at all levels and we see strength for the foreseeable future.

Is the high-end buyer mainly foreign or is that shifting?

It has never been mainly foreigners. We might have more foreigners in the condo market for obvious reasons, but I would venture

to say the percentage of foreigners buying across the board is probably around 20 percent.

It's the local buyer, the Tri-State buyer, the person who wants a piece of New York that makes it sustainable. We see buyers from other countries coming and going. We're starting to get expensive for Europeans, but that might help inventory because now they're going to see such a great return on their money.

For some, every price point still seems high end. Is there a concern that the diversity New York is known for is going to be lost?

There is affordable housing. New York is still primarily a rental town so that allows for more affordable product. Someone who doesn't have the money to buy can still live in New York.

Our co-op market is still undervalued and is at a lower price point. Of course, one must have some wealth to get through the co-op board but the word "wealth" is relative.

I see plenty of diversity going forward in New York City. People are going to look at affordability and diversity in the city as more than just Manhattan, but there is diversity in Manhattan as well.

What do you tell a first-time buyer searching for a home?

Everybody wants it to be a good investment, but the main factor has to be that it's a "home," so location is important.

What is the role of the agent and what is the ideal relationship between Halstead and its agents?

Our agents are our lifeblood – our first point of contact. Our role is to keep our chins up, looking forward. We also evaluate what tools and reach they need, so we belong to a number of global networks. We stay active as directors and managers of the company. We stay in touch with organizations that have an enormous reach.

We need to have the tools and resources to make our agents' lives as easy as possible, so we launched a new app that is already being well received by the public.

We offer nonstop training at all levels. In addition, some of our senior people provide training and they hone their skills that way.

Has technology reduced the role of the agent?

Technology enhances the role of the Halstead Agent and attracts the consumer to us. Our sellers want to work with us not only because we have an agent they have confidence in, but it's also based on our reach and the tools that will attract the consumer to their property. We have fabulous professional photography, for instance, and we're the most innovative firm in the Tri-State area. For example, if a customer wants to stand in the property, we have 3D cameras where the person can literally be in the room. This makes our site attractive to sellers, and the buyers follow, because we have something to excite them.

How do you grow into additional markets while maintaining control over the business?

We do it by making certain we do our homework, and we continue to do it strategically. Much of our strategic expansion comes from finding like-minded firms.

Once we find like-minded people, we make sure they know who they are connected with, so we do empowerment sessions for anyone coming in. We make certain they realize that Halstead has a culture of caring.

Is a certain size and scale required to compete in this space?

Yes and no. I'd rather be a boutique in a town where the quality is there than to just be the "biggest," even though we're the third-largest firm in New York.

We don't focus on being the biggest; we focus on being the best, but we need a certain degree of penetration to have a hold on the marketplace.

Is the message about how dynamic this industry is well understood today?

It's often thought that the younger agent will put the more seasoned out of business because the seasoned agents can't move that fast. But it's still a relationship business. What customers need and want is our expertise and our guidance.

Do you still get excited by this business?

In what other business can I walk the streets knowing almost every building and having the great thrill of guiding someone to their home or investment? I do this through my 1,300 agents every day. I love watching how the industry has grown. ●