



Robert Vecsler

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to joining SPI, Robert Vecsler was CEO of Miami's Hyperion Group. Earlier in his career, Vecsler held positions in New York as Vice President, Investment Banking at JPMorgan, and as an associate at Kelley Drye & Warren.

COMPANY BRIEF Silverstein Properties, Inc. (silversteinproperties.com), is a full service real estate development and investment firm that has developed, owned, and managed over 40 million square feet of office, residential, and retail space. The firm, based in Manhattan, has \$10 billion worth of development activity in the pipeline.

Will you talk about what excited you about taking on this role?

I had been running my own firm, acquiring and developing large scale, mixed-use condo towers, mostly in Miami. Being a New Yorker, I was always excited to develop in New York.

I was working on development deals, meeting potential partners and investors. I sat with Marty (Burger, CEO) and the conversation turned to me and doing what I now do at Silverstein.

I knew how much Larry (Silverstein, Chairman) did for Downtown and the World Trade Center, and that the firm was growing. Marty laid out an exciting vision about how the firm was making a push into residential and other areas. There were several mixed use condo projects in the pipeline including a crown jewel, Four Seasons 30 Park Place – and there was more to come.

I was presented with the opportunity to play a leading role in Silverstein's residential platform including acquiring new deals, and I didn't hesitate.

I joined as Executive Vice President with those responsibilities in mind, and I was appointed President more recently. I also head the Acquisitions group and am a member of the firm's Investment Committee.

Will you talk about the growth within residential development?

Larry was a pioneer on the far West Side, developing River Place and Silver Towers. Those were rental buildings that were tremendous successes, and they continue to be today.

Silverstein's Residential Platform

An Interview with Robert Vecsler, President-Residential Development, Silverstein Properties

Our first experience with condominiums was with 30 Park Place and my background, together with Marty's experience, allowed us to be a great team and position us for the future. We also have One West End on West 59th, we are in development on a massive site on West 41st Street, and there are always new things in the works.

Will you talk about how 30 Park Place has evolved?

We launched in May of 2014 and had a tremendous reception from the market in our pre-opening phase. We gained acceptance at all our unit sizes and price points from a wide range of the market with a mix of international and U.S. buyers.

People are really excited about the prospect of having a building designed by Robert A.M. Stern with 1930s architecture and Four Seasons white glove service. The promise is to deliver a lifestyle experience like none other Downtown.

We always anticipated that when the building was ready and we opened the hotel so that people could go in and see what we are delivering, we would experience another level of excitement and acceptance.

We opened the hotel in September and we also began closing on our condos. Now the building is a living, breathing entity and people can see the spectacular finishes and what is happening Downtown.

We have seen a phenomenal response and the condominium is 80 percent sold. Since the building opened, we sold more than \$100 million of new condos, many of them the larger ones. Four of them are \$20-million-plus, and we're incredibly proud to be experiencing this kind of success.

How do you describe what Downtown has become?

A long time ago, Larry predicted this would happen. That probably means everyone should have seen it.

Our project is self-actualizing. Just by virtue of it being Four Seasons Downtown, that is another flag in the ground saying that Downtown has experienced a true resurgence, a renaissance. Many new media companies are taking residence in the offices at World Trade Center. We've seen a new vibrancy and dynamic Downtown with new restaurants and shops. Westfield opened in August and, all around us, there is an energy that Larry envisioned. While it might have been hard for some to see, we always believed this would be the case, and those who bought in at 30 Park Place are going to be the beneficiaries.

Do you anticipate a slowdown in the city with all of the supply that has come into the market?

We have to be aware of those dynamics whether planning new projects or in the market. That's part of the cycles that happen in real estate in New York and, time after time, it has been shown that, over time, New York wins – the real estate gets absorbed.

As far as the current state of the market, I can speak to two of the projects we have now. From the perspective of 30 Park Place, what we're offering is something that is differentiated from the rest of the market for condominiums because it carries the Four Seasons brand that people know worldwide and understand. They understand the lifestyle that comes along with that. When someone is in the market for a condo, we have something unique and different to offer and we stand out.

To this point, we have managed to continue having success with our sales and we expect that to keep going.

Another great project is One West End, where we have 246 condos on West 59th Street, an area that is exploding with activity on the far West Side. It's a Pelli Clarke Pelli designed building, and award-winning Jeffrey Beers with his hospitality background designed the interiors, including the most beautiful kitchens and finishes. We have great amenities including a huge swimming pool, access to parks, and fantastic retail. We've enjoyed amazing success and are already 70 percent sold, with opening coming this Spring.

Will you talk about the talent you assembled at SPI?

We have really impressive talent throughout this organization – it defines "best in class." It starts at the top with Larry and Marty's leadership, and we have strong leaders on our Investment Committee and Management Committee.

I oversee a team of development/acquisition professionals that handles new deals and acquisitions, an incredible group of very talented vice presidents and analysts. We all work together to identify and underwrite new opportunities.

Will SPI's growth be primarily focused in New York?

We would prefer to do deals here but we have skill sets and experience that we readily deploy in other markets. We have a Four Seasons hotel in Orlando and are actively exploring deals in D.C. and Boston. Our philosophy generally is always to be seeking out and delivering impactful projects. ●