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Selling luxury real estate takes time, but patience pays

by Suzanne Wintrob
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Riz Dhanji, vice-president Sales and Marketing Canderel Residential Inc.

Darren Calabrese

Are you among the world's ultra-rich? If so, expect royal treatment when shopping for that perfect multi-million-dollar Toronto address.

In pockets of the city with a hot real estate market, it's not unusual for houses and condominiums to attract fervent bidding wars and sell within days. But for properties with hefty price tags, it's a much longer sell and requires special attention.

Post Homes spoke to two hands-on real estate experts to see how they interact with potential buyers considering the city's highest-priced properties. Here are their stories:

Whoever decides to dish out \$18-million for Aura at College Park's 11,370-square-foot penthouse will certainly be able to brag that they are living Canada's high life.

At 78 storeys, Aura in downtown Toronto is being touted as the country's tallest residential condominium tower. The top-floor penthouse has five bedrooms, six bathrooms and private elevator access into a grand arrival hall. Given the soaring height, the residence promises breathtaking 360-degree panoramic views of the city. Aura also has two smaller penthouses for sale one floor below — a 5,200-sq.-ft. unit at \$7.14-million and a 5,550-sq.-ft. unit for \$7.875-million.

Naturally, it's not just anyone who can afford this luxurious property. As such, the folks at Canderel Residential travel the world to woo buyers and then make a point of fawning over them as they pass through Toronto for a peek.

"It's the top 1% of people around the world who can afford something of this calibre," says Riz Dhanji, Canderel's vice-president of sales and marketing. "We really roll out the red carpet for them when they come here."

Most of the interest is coming from people who are looking to move to Toronto permanently or simply want a pied-à-terre for their children who are studying here. That's why Canderel is marketing the penthouse through agents based in Asia and the Middle East who have their own network of wealthy clientele. Mr. Dhanji and others on the Canderel team routinely jet off for one-on-one presentations with interested buyers. They also advertise the property in high-end magazines.

"It's the top 1% of people around the world who can afford something of this calibre" Things move into high gear once a potential buyer comes to town. Since it's usually a businessman on a tight schedule, Mr. Dhanji has to work quickly to show off the property as well as the city. Sometimes a couple will arrive together, though often the husband will make several return visits when he's in town on business.

"We had a client who came over recently and we hired limousines for them, took them to Niagara Falls, entertained them for a few days at various high-end Toronto dining establishments, and toured them around the [neighbourhood]," he explains. "We completed two units of that size and so were able to show them the level of finishes and quality that we're noted for. We went through the floor plan and they took that back [home] with them. We're constantly communicating with them or their lawyers or their representatives to fine-tune the details of the suite so it's customized to their liking."

Discretion is also taken seriously, with meetings and showings kept under wraps.

“A lot of these people don’t want others to know that they’re purchasing in the building so, we make sure that none of their other family members or friends are aware of it,” Mr. Dhanji says.

Although construction of Aura is at the 58th floor and the penthouse has been on the market for six months, it’s not unusual it hasn’t yet sold. Properties of this stature often take time, especially when overseas buyers are considering it.

“Their decision-making process is slower because they are so consumed in their own work and their own lives,” he says. “They want to be here to look through floor plans and finishes, so it may take four or five times for them to come here and to actually be happy with what they have before they make a final decision. ... We let them dictate the time. It eventually gets done.”



Elise Kalles, a realtor to the wealthy who deals exclusively in expensive homes, poses for a portrait at her home in Toronto. Tyler Anderson/National Post

Elise Kalles specializes in high-end listings in Forest Hill, Rosedale and the Bridle Path. Her affluent clients consist primarily of businesspeople and celebrities living in Toronto or abroad, all of whom have plenty of money but little time. They crave special attention during their search and are prepared to wait months — or even years — until the right property comes along.

“It’s 0.1 of 1% that can afford homes of over \$5-million,” says Ms. Kalles, a broker at Harvey Kalles Real Estate with 36 years on the job. “They’re usually referred. They have very, very limited time.”

Many of those buying into Toronto hail from London, Germany, the Far East, Dubai and India. To reach them, Ms. Kalles and her team market homes through worldwide affiliations including the Board of Regents and Who’s Who in Luxury Real Estate. She also advertises in the International Property & Travel magazine situated in airport lounges.

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It may take months before a client comes to town to view select properties, but once they do, Ms. Kalles and her team spring into action. Sometimes the client is willing to meet for a meal before setting out, though more often they eat in the car en route to showings. Out-of-towners are usually businessmen checking out the possibilities before sending over their wives, but if it’s a local buyer then Ms. Kalles usually accompanies the wife for the first few visits.

Since most of her business comes from referrals, Ms. Kalles stays in touch well after she closes a sale to help them settle in. She recently sold five homes in Forest Hill and then hosted a luncheon at her house to introduce the neighbours to each other. Since many buy into certain neighbourhoods to be near prestigious private schools, she follows up to see if the children have been accepted.

Ms. Kalles says it can take a year or two for people at this price point to close a deal. But throughout the process, she lets patience prevail.

“Sometimes it takes a year, sometimes it takes two years, but that’s what it’s about — having a relationship with clients, that they know you’re not just out there to make a sale,” she says.