

By Mary Andrews

KARLA ABAUNZA: REAL ESTATE'S PRINCESS CHARMING

The personification of unpretentious grace, broker Karla Abaunza proudly shows off the office suite of her newly formed company, Luxury Living Realty. With over seven years of award-winning experience working with the exclusive brokerage affiliate of Sotheby's, Karla feels more than ready. Bringing together a close-knit family team that includes her sister Valeria and mother Saddy along with a select group of realtor associates, Karla's new "boutique" real estate firm is the realization of a long-held dream.

"All my life experiences, even from early childhood, have prepared me for making a success of this business," Karla explained. "I was fortunate to have grown up in a supportive family with a very cosmopolitan outlook on life."

A devastating earthquake abruptly interrupted Karla's happy childhood in Nicaragua when she was at the impressionable age of seven. The quake's aftermath plus an oncoming threat of a Communist revolution prompted her family to emigrate to the U.S.

The Abaunzas rebuilt their life in Miami but kept the window to the world wide open. "Long before "globalism" became a popular concept, my parents strongly believed in a well rounded, international education," Karla acknowledges. "The opportunities they gave me have made an incredible difference in my life."

From the age of 11 to 17, summers for Karla meant stimulating culture and language camps in Switzerland followed by family tours, each year to a different, exciting destination. After completing a formal education in Europe she built an import/export business in international fashion with her family. Their wholesale business would take her frequently to the fashion capitals of the world. But after ten successful years, Karla was looking for new challenges.

"Many of my international friends and business contacts would ask me about buying real estate in Miami. We would connect when they came here looking for properties, usually for a vacation resort or for what is known as a *piéd-à-terre* – you know, a foot on land. I had so much fun entertaining while we looked at breathtaking properties, high-end real estate was a natural career move."

Now that 75% of her clients are international, Karla prizes her fluency in four languages – English, Spanish, French and Italian—and a cosmopolitan education. "I felt great satisfaction when I was able to show a Russian couple all the nearby places that cater to their culture," she says. "Having visited their homeland, I knew all the small things that would make a big difference in making them feel at home."

As a full-time professional agent and businesswoman, Karla feels she has another competitive edge. "While male buyers are impressed with my reputation for

Photo by Mary Andrews





Karla Abaunza

integrity and inside knowledge of the real-estate industry, it's very often the wife who is the decision maker. I find it very easy to relate to a woman's appreciation of details and create a vision for a lifestyle that appeals to the feminine perspective. In a typical showing I will spend a week with the wife before the husband joins us for a few days to finalize the sale."

Karla's favorite properties have become her specialties. She loves waterfront homes, especially luxury condominiums and estates on the bay or along the Intracoastal Waterway. She finds the architecture and lifestyle on Fisher Island especially appealing. You'll often see Karla zipping around this 216-acre private community in her personalized golf cart, either with a client or as a resident.

Karla was so taken with Fisher Island where she sold her first property, she bought her own *pied-à-terre* overlooking the island's sparkling marina. Convenient to her South Beach office and close to her listings, Karla prefers care-free condo living. "Fisher Island has all the amenities – spa, athletic facilities, a market center, restaurants, private school, security – but for me it's all about the people. If you feel like having some company, you can always count on running into a neighbor at any of the facilities; if you want solitude in a natural setting, there are these little beach hideaways where your privacy is respected."

Business-savvy Karla firmly believes that quality, high-end real estate properties

are always a solid investment, retaining value in downturns and dramatically increasing in value when real estate is in an up market. She also delights in hunting down bargains for clients, especially hidden gems that can be transformed into classic beauties.

For Karla, the client relationship goes far beyond the exchange of property. She makes a point of treating each client as a friend. "I thrive on social interaction – getting to know clients' likes and dislikes, showing them the kind of life they can enjoy. It's not just about the home. What I really sell is a lifestyle."

Karla's love for entertaining kicks in each time she shows a property or closes a sale. She is just as likely to whisk buyers off to neighborhood clubs or cafes or show what kind of education and healthcare is offered nearby as she is to locate the best sources for mortgage loans or home inspections. Ever the accomplished hostess, Karla will introduce buyers to their new neighbors. She's even been known for organizing a housewarming party or two. Nicknamed "Karla 911" by her clients, they feel free to call on her expertise years after they've settled into their new home. Her circle of friends is growing as steadily as her sales. And that's just the way she likes it.

To find out more about Karla and her company, check out her website www.luxurylivingrealty.net.

