



The Commercial Observer

February 7, 2012

POWER BROKER

Aliza Avital of Eastern Consolidated

Locked and Loaded

Former child gymnast, personal trainer for the Israeli Defense Force, multitalented broker Aliza Avital does it all

BY DANIEL EDWARD ROSEN

The broker in the canary-yellow Dolce & Gabbana overcoat—a festive and vernal touch that was perfectly suitable for this year’s bipolar winter—may be better dressed than most of the commercial brokerage industry, and could certainly lay claim to being one of the toughest in the business as well.

Aliza Avital, thin and towering and striking like a modern-day skyscraper, sat in the conference room in the offices of Eastern Consolidated, where she had just been promoted to senior director.

The Israeli native explained to *The Commercial Observer* how her background—first as an accomplished child gymnast, then as a personal trainer for the Israeli Defense Force, and then as a dancer with Broadway dreams that were never actualized—helped instill in her the patience and wherewithal to see even the simplest of building transactions through.

One such building was 10 Fifth Avenue, a mixed-use property that had been on the market for two years. The sellers were the Manieri Group, according to public records.

“It was a very difficult, complex deal,” said Ms. Avital. “It took 24/7 [communication] on the phone. It was very hard.”

Complicating matters further was her client’s lack of access, from the firm’s Italian location to its unfamiliarity with the English language. Ms. Avital had to use Mario, a family friend of the sellers, as a middleman between them.

“I wouldn’t have minded going to Rome to meet the guy, but I couldn’t even get information about that. We couldn’t even get his phone number,” she said.

Then there were the seller’s expectations: The \$15 million asking price had left the property languishing on the market for two years.

“The smaller deals are much more difficult to do,” she said.

Ms. Avital, along with Eastern Consolidated colleague Nancy Tran, eventually sold the property



to Benchmark Real Estate LLC for \$9.21 million in April 2011.

The countless false starts, the endless negotiations through a middleman named Mario, all of it was tough for Ms. Avital to deal with. But she is no stranger to dealing with difficulty.

“My business, the communication with people, it’s very, very difficult,” she said. To help keep her head above water, Ms. Avital abides by a simple acronym.

“I have my three A’s,” she said, adding three more A’s to her alliterative name. “Availability, Ability, Affability.” That’s my triple A.”

Those three A’s have suited her well, way back to her childhood in Israel, where she came from a humble background in Kiryat HaYovel, a neighborhood in southwestern Jerusalem. As a child, she was a talented rhythmic gymnast and believed she was on the path to eventually making Israel’s Olympic team.

But a knee injury as a teen cut

her career short.

Later in life, Ms. Avital did her compulsory military service for the IDF, where the grueling training runs helped foster the mental toughness and patience she says she carries to this day.

“I was in a four-month course to be a personal trainer. That was the most difficult, athletic level that I’ve ever seen,” she said.

Running through training obstacles, including running on a beach and then up a mountain, all while holding an Uzi and other military equipment, wore on the young Ms. Avital.

“I finished by crawling [across] the line, but I got that degree and that made me a stronger and tougher person,” she said.

In 1999, shortly after finishing her military service, she moved to New York City, armed only with two suitcases and \$1,000, to pursue her dream.

“I wanted to be a dancer on Broadway,” she said. “But I didn’t

realize they had so many talented [dancers].”

After a slew of failed auditions started to take its toll, Ms. Avital, then 21 and living in a basement apartment in Forest Hills, said the great distance away from her family and her struggles achieving her dream started to add up.

She found herself in a restaurant, drawing up a list of reasons why she should stay in New York City versus returning to Israel.

“I was ready to go back home, because I figured I’m not going to make it here,” she recalled.

On a whim, she took a bartending course and, upon getting her license, worked as a bartender at hotspots like Tao and 212 Restaurant and Bar.

“Do you know ‘Coyote Ugly’? That’s how I was,” she said. Despite being a self-professed teetotaler, working as a bartender brought her money and fun.

“I was so good at that,” she said. “I loved every minute of it.”

It also brought her face to face with a customer who instantly recognized in her the potential to have a long career in real estate.

“He said, ‘You have to understand, you’re not going to make money for 12 to 18 months,’” she recalled. Through that contact, she met Debrah Lee Charatan, who asked Ms. Avital why she should bring her on as an apprentice.

“I’m struggling all my life,” she recalled telling Ms. Charatan. “I want to make a lot of money and I like nice things.”

Ten months into working with Ms. Charatan, she made her first real estate deal, a building sale on West 86th Street that drew an \$8,000 commission. Ms. Avital, a noted clotheshorse, spent \$2,000 of it on a Prada purse.

“That was my cheapest purse,” she said with a laugh.

She joined Eastern Consolidated in 2003, and since then has worked on over 25 deals valued over \$650 million.

She helped sell a residential building at 330 East 63rd Street to Stonehenge Partners for \$39 million in 2007, and another residential building on 120 West 21st Street for \$138 million last year.

Last year was perhaps her hardest, she said. Ms. Avital, who is married to an OB/GYN and lives in an apartment by the U.N. Plaza, was asked if she had children. She said no.

“I had a tragedy last year,” she added. “I’m working on it, hopefully one day.”

The Commercial Observer apologized for bringing up the matter, which Ms. Avital kindly brushed aside.

As she had mentioned earlier in the conversation:

“When I was a child and I was a gymnast and I got rejected because I was not good enough to go to the Olympics, because I got hurt. That killed me,” she said. “A lot of the times I work on the deal so hard and they don’t happen, it kills me,” she said.

“But I don’t give up,”
drosen@observer.com