



The Independent

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST, CHAMPION OF SAG HARBOR REAL ESTATE

Simon Harrison

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Never has there been a more perfectly located real estate office. Anyone who has ever strolled through Sag Harbor has more likely than not passed by Simon Harrison Real Estate, which is directly across from the iconic windmill on Long Wharf. As a vocal opponent of pesticides and a hands-on champion to increase our local oyster populations, Simon Harrison balances life as an environmental activist as well as a leader-at-large of the Sag Harbor real estate market.

You now have 34 years of real estate experience. How did you get started in the industry?

The first 17 years were at Harbor Cove Realty with the late Carl Marino. Carl set an example of dedication to the business, and while there I learned about the vertical integration of construction enmeshed with year-round living, vacation and luxury housing... and all through critical investor lenses. I was recruited by Carl Jr. while I was bartending locally and they came in on occasion after a day's work "in the field."

My interest in architecture and engineering at Brooklyn Tech came back and mixed well with an Economics major at New York University. It's been a perfect match ever since; including those times when the market is difficult. Matching new house concepts with land of all kinds is daydreaming to most; but I get them packaged, sold, built and sold again sometimes. I've sold homes 3 and four times over the decades, and our agents and brokers are continuing the tradition to this day.

Are you a local?

My son was born here, so he has a good start at being a local. I was born in Cambridge, MA while my father was working at MIT before we moved to Bleecker St where my father taught at NYU for 34 years. Both of my parents are English, I moved to Southampton as a teenager and worked in restaurants and other trades — cleaning pools, landscaping, carpentry. I still split my own firewood and while I release a lot of fish now, I still know how to cook them too. It all comes together; Several of our agents are builders that can see through walls; landlords that have seen it all; entrepreneurs and investors and the average agent here has 20 years real estate experience. As a result, our clients and customers don't have to suffer much in the way of learning curve.

My local qualifications might be helped by my early, somewhat colorful history as a barman and the fact that I'm more local than any real estate franchise working out here... by decades. I've been helping many locals cash out of the area for a quarter century, and that's bittersweet, even though they're cashing well.

Are there any homes you've sold that you're particularly proud of?

Pointing at all the “castles,” “waterfront compounds,” and “important estates” we've sold would probably be the stock answer; and the cute answer is the one I'm going to show you this weekend, but a teacher came to me once and asked me if there was a house worth investing her entire retirement fund in, and I helped her find a pre-existing two family which she bought with me.

That teacher has since retired early and is globetrotting on a non-profit lecture circuit as a direct result of the rental income and the current value — five-times her initial investment. I'm proud of that one too, and the fact that it still enables her important work.

Do you personally favor any design or architectural style?

I react well to what mid-century modern furniture does to a space. Not all of it, but there are woods and colors specific to the era that are positive for me. I also like the architecture from the time, including common sense capes and ranches, as they're easily converted to lighter, brighter versions. The mid-century modern thinking fits in brand new transitional homes, Victorian homes, and almost everything in between.

What is some advice you would give sellers?

I would resist using the asking prices of listed houses as hard data. Much of what is listed isn't really for sale close to trade levels in a second-home market. As an example, a seller might say; "If I get X dollars above market then I'll sell." Asking prices aren't fully connected to the market where trades happen.

Also, sellers might speak to some brokers who simply "bid for the listing," meaning a broker might support a pie-in-the-sky valuation just to get the listing signed. This practice is still in play and could burn your market value, as well as turn off the best buyers, even when price is adjusted to market.

What about advice for buyers?

Because the home buying process meets at the intersection of the emotional and the transactional, some buyers think it's a war with winners and losers. Believe it or not, that's rarely true in successful transactions. There is disagreement and occasionally conflict in negotiations, but not actual battle elements, and there's an important distinction. Seasoned brokers regularly put together situations where everyone wins, and it is in those situations brokers generate long term good will and repeat business.

Do you have any trends our readers should know about?

Yes. Lifting houses; redoing houses instead of buying new; sometimes connecting them; and food gardens instead of lawns.

The current tax law changes deductibility over \$10,000, which incentivizes buyers to redo smaller resale houses. Also, I'm seeing investors (all buyers are investors) take this elevation guidance to another level. Literally. Not just older houses in the village (which are limited in their expansion capacity), but think about lifting the house to excavate a crumbly musty cramped basement to install a full, 10-foot lower level.

Tangentially, without being specific on how many I've seen, buying smaller houses in pairs, and fully connecting them or even linking accessory structures in secret.

I'm also really into food gardens instead of monoculture lawns. If the trend takes off fully, my hope is that this will clean all of our connected water, and connect kids to clean dirt that food grows in.

What do you do for fun when you're not working?

We had a zero-harvest oyster farming operation to clean the water and repopulate local waters for many years, with full support of our mayor and all

the trustees. Seeing the shrimp and small fish nurseries blossom around our oysters is nothing short of magical. Still is. Regulation risk curtailed our activities, but one day we will get back into it publicly so our kids can stay connected to clean water concepts in our tidal wetlands. The tidal reach is fully alive, unless homeowners keep using pesticides and fertilizer, and living, clean water is vital to real estate values.

Lately, our family has been going to high school sports, and watching men's and women's basketball as well as swimming has been fun, as most of our local teams are undefeated this year. There's incredible core strength in our year-round communities. I'm very grateful to live and work here.

To reach Simon Harrison Real Estate or inquire about their current book of properties, call 631-725-4357 or visit www.SimonTheBroker.com.

