



CHRIS CORTAZZO

THE 39-YEAR-OLD FORMER MODEL SOLD MORE THAN 42 HOMES, WORTH ABOUT \$216 MILLION, IN 2004. HIS CLIENTS INCLUDE CINDY CRAWFORD AND KELSEY GRAMMER.

trustworthy broker moves to the top of your wish list, even before a Bird Street address or an infinity pool. For Lawyer, this means carefully tailoring his approach to each client, right down to his physical appearance. "Younger people don't necessarily relate to a suit," he says, "but I'll turn up the volume for their business managers and attorneys."

But you don't have to go Prada-to-Prada with clients to succeed in real estate, as Chris Cortazzo can attest. A 39-year-old former model now known as the King of Malibu, Cortazzo confesses within five minutes that he's often told he looks like Richard Gere—who just happens to have been his first client. Cortazzo (who more closely resembles a rugged Dean Cain) plasters his picture around town

in ads—spending \$15,000 a month in newspapers and magazines—and generally enjoys la vida Hollywood. Oscar weekend found him first at agent Ed Limato's ultra-exclusive annual Friday-night party and later at Elton John's post-show party, where he mingled with Pamela Anderson, Paris Hilton, and the *Desperate Housewives*.

"The only celebrity I haven't met is Princess Diana," he says. Then, perhaps realizing this might sound offensive, he adds, "But I'm not star-struck—I look at people's spirit."

The payoff for all this spiritually motivated schmoozing is a high-rolling client roster—including Barry Diller, Cindy Crawford, Jon Bon Jovi, Kelsey Grammer, and Ron Meyer—and big num-

bers to match: In 2004, Cortazzo sold more than 40 homes, worth a whopping \$216 million (the average Realtor commission nationally is 5 percent).

"When it comes to real estate, I have no ego," he says. "I sold a mobile home last year for \$500,000, but I also have a \$65 million listing right now." With Malibu houses regularly doubling in value each year, there has never been a better time to specialize in this beachfront town. "When you look at magazines, everyone used to be photographed in St. Tropez," Cortazzo observes. "Now they're all being shot in Malibu."

So far, of all the telegenic brokers to base their shows on, the producers' favorite template for character development has been Richard Ehrlich, a 35-year-old former club doorman who has been in the house-hawking business for only five years. Ehrlich is well-known for his gift of glad-handing, on display almost daily at the Fountain Coffee Shop in the Beverly Hills Hotel, where he likes to breakfast on turkey burgers. Last year, Ehrlich sold homes worth more than \$50 million to buyers such as the Olsen twins, Sandra Bullock, Benny Medina, and reality-show producer Ben Silverman.

"I started off with just my friends as clients," Ehrlich says. "They referred other people and the snowball kept growing." Indeed, having Ehrlich as your broker is a status symbol in Hollywood akin to having a CL500 Mercedes, regular tables at Il Sole and Mr. Chow, and a fashion-designer girlfriend—all of which the broker himself has in hand.

In other cities, real-estate agents are seen as a necessary evil—motor-mouthed hucksters who push you to close so they can cash their commission. But in Hollywood, they have made the unlikely leap to equal footing with the famous names they serve.

Ehrlich's best friend is Jason Bateman, who sees his buddy as nothing less than a modern Hollywood paragon. "Richard floats in the crowd that ends up setting the trends in this town," says the *Arrested Development* star. "He organizes the parties that people want to go to, wears the clothes that everybody wants to wear, and lives in the houses that everybody wants to live in." Jonah Wilson has black-and-white photos on his office wall taken by his close friend Stephen Dorff. Lawyer makes a cameo in a spoofy behind-the-camera video Mel Gibson threw together. The layers of fame and reflected fame pile up so quickly you wonder if a mere television show could ever do them justice. What narrative conflict could possibly be concocted that would dramatize so ideal an existence?

"The tagline for our show," says one of *Westside's* producers, Steve Pearlman, "is, 'Can you sell the American dream without selling your soul?'" ■