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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The downside of bundled services

Re: \$64 million real estate kickback question (Feb. 28)

Dear Editor:

As an escrow practitioner of over 20 years, I take my fiduciary responsibility very seriously. I do not engage in kickbacks of any kind. In my opinion, HUD's encouragement of "bundling of services" encourages kickbacks and fee splitting. RESPA regulations currently require that all settlement fees and the payees of those fees be shown on the settlement statement. Bundling will disguise the true payee of many of the settlement charges and will limit competition. This is clearly a disservice to the consumer

Joette Joseph
2003 President
Escrow Association of

Real Estate Articles from Inman News

Real estate architect fuses form and function

What's a 'real estate architect'? Ask top Beverly Hills broker Erik Lerner

Tuesday, March 01, 2005

By Chris Taylor
Inman News



Erik Lerner, Beverly Hills Realtors Mossler Deasy & Doe

Look at any real estate listing on the market, and buildings are broken down into their most basic elements: Number of bedrooms, square footage, kitchen appliances.

But talk to Erik Lerner, and you soon realize that real estate can be so much more than those prosaic factoids. If architecture is "frozen music," as the German philosopher Schelling put it, Lerner is someone who looks at a home and listens to the notes being played.

As a broker with Beverly Hills Realtors Mossler Deasy & Doe, Lerner calls himself a "real estate architect," and runs their sub-practice, Realestatearchitects.com. It's basically a fusion of his design sensibilities - he was a practicing architect for 20 years - with his function as a broker. A Realtor for those with a true passion for architecture, linking buyers with the space that's exactly right for them.

It's a true niche, since only about 3 percent of homes on the market have actually been designed by an architect. But it's a perfect fit for Lerner, who also squeezes in a role as a director of the Beverly Hills/Greater Los Angeles Association of Realtors. After all, he gets to work with homes designed by the likes of Rudolf Schindler and Edgardo Contini, instead of the mass-produced dreck that peppers much of the landscape. "Every time I show one of these wonderful places, it's a pleasure," he says.

It's not surprising that Lerner ended up in the milieu, given that he spent his high school years in Manhattan, a virtual petri dish of fantastic buildings. He used to "get off the Fifth Avenue bus on the way home from school and wander through the Met Museum," he remembers, walking the halls and admiring the neoclassical design. He also shelved books at a branch of the NYC Public Library that was right across from the Museum of Modern Art, whose exhibits he soaked up as well.

Lerner eventually studied architecture both at St. Louis' Washington University and UCLA's grad school, subsequently practicing out West at many companies and in many capacities. "The Southern California landscape is dotted with homes of my design, and with corporate interiors I did over the years," he laughs.

But when he was sitting before a drawing board or hunched in front of a computer,

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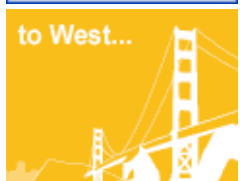


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Dear Editor:

Over the past week I have read a lot of stories dealing with the "reinsurance" topic that has been in the headlines of most real estate industry online publications. It appears that all are ready to convict the title industry before there has been full investigation or even clear understanding as to what has taken place. I am the owner of a small title agency in western Ohio and the president of my state trade association. The activities outlined in the press all appear to involve the top title insurance underwriters or insurers. All are multimillion-dollar corporations with market presence across the country, not the agents that make a modest living through serving the consumer and looking out for the best interest of the homeowner. The vast majority of us would long be out of business if involved in the activity outlined in the recent stories.

However, the pressure placed on the title industry by lenders, builders and Realtors is tremendous and often overwhelming. Yet I don't hear any of the media jumping to our defense and offering conviction of those who are applying the pressure and so willing to accept the so called kickback.

Most of what has happened to the title industry you will find is legal. Joint Ventures, and Affiliated Business Arrangements are

Lerner felt that there was more he could do with his talents. While most architects live in a "rarefied" bubble, working on particular projects that few people will ever encounter, real estate agents deal with different homes and buyers and sellers on a daily basis. That concept appealed to Lerner, that he could somehow bring his knowledge and skills to a broader audience.

And so Lerner pursued his real estate license in 1997, and signed up with Mossler Deasy & Doe, an independent firm that long had a reputation for its highly developed aesthetic sense. There he's managed to marry his two professions, helping buyers get a sense of what a particular home represents architecturally, or what it could still become. In fact Lerner sees himself as a problem-solver above all; just as a software architect designs code, he "designs" the ideal real-estate deal, matching people to their perfect space.

That practical philosophy seems to derive from his school days. One of his favorite architecture professors in St. Louis, Leslie Lasky, taught that architecture is all about making connections: Between materials on a physical level, and ideas on a metaphysical level. The real art is in managing to bring all those competing elements together successfully.

Of course not everyone can live in a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home, since even modest California properties are now outrageously expensive. So Lerner applies his skills to less-than-architecturally-pristine locales, as well. About half his clientele come from the architecture business, folks who tend to be overworked and underpaid. And so Lerner also has to be supremely creative, and scout out "ordinary homes, and envision their real potential," he says.

The proof of his architectural savvy: Lerner lives in a home of his own design with his family in West Hollywood. And he has no regrets at all about getting out from behind the plans and the drawing boards, and showing off the end products of architectural brilliance.

"I get to experience the pleasures of architecture in ways that practicing architects might not get to do," he says. "As a real estate broker, I spend my life in a great many wonderful spaces."

What's your opinion? Send your Letter to the Editor to opinion@inman.com.

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