

Showtime: This broker taps into his theater background to close apartment deals

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Buck Ennis

Hernandez is developing his acting career while closing real estate deals in New York.

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For Compass broker Cody Hernandez, show business is a lot like the real estate business. “It’s a common track for an actor to also practice real estate,” Hernandez said. “The hustle of both is very similar. You have to put in a lot of work to get the return.”

He moved to the city from Ohio in 2014 to be a theater actor, singer, dancer and comedian.

“I had a really good real estate agent when I moved here. We had a \$1,600 budget for a two-bedroom apartment,” he said. “My parents as my graduation gift said they’d pay for the moving truck but that’s it.”

While living in a fourth-floor walkup in Harlem, Hernandez was booking acting work in and around the city and also held day jobs at the original Ralph’s Coffee on 55th Street and the Polo Bar. He grew tired of the restaurant service industry and took the advice of a fellow actor who suggested working in real estate.

“I signed up for class, got my license and started swinging rentals,” he said. Now, he also closes million-dollar deals and helps first-time homebuyers find an apartment in the city.

What’s your secret sauce for getting clients?

Just because I may not like an apartment for myself doesn’t mean it’s not the perfect apartment for someone else. Every apartment has a person that’s a correct fit. I work with people who are buying multimillion-dollar homes and people who have \$1,500 for a small studio.

I also use my comedic skills. I have a video on my Instagram of the differences between renting and buying, using RuPaul as a buyer and Beyonce as a renter. I try to make things feel attainable, funny, and I try to just lift the veil on so much.

What’s the strangest apartment you’ve ever been in?

I’ve seen a lot of bathtubs in kitchens. That’s a classic New York apartment joke.

My client did not rent this, to be clear, but it’s the smallest apartment I’ve ever been inside of. It’s on the Upper West Side in the West 70s, so it’s a great location. But the apartment was part of the hallway, where they had extra hallway space and built around it.

It had a hotplate and a minifridge and the whole apartment was 5 feet by 7 feet. You could not fit a twin-size bed in this apartment and still have space to walk, basically.

We walked in and I was, like, “Well, this is not going to work.”

What’s the strangest apartment you’ve ever rented?

I was reluctant to show it to the client, but they wanted a big one and were not flexible on their price.

I showed them this basement unit. It was massive, at about 1,200 square feet. It had a bonus room, and they had a band, so they wanted to be able to practice music. It was very dark, but I wouldn’t say it was ugly.

I had a pretty extensive punch list I gave the landlord to fix things. I believe to this day they still live there and love it.

Tell us about your first deal.

I was working at Bohemia Realty Group at the time. It was also my first showing—which is very unusual to close your first showing.

It was with the same landlord I was living with but in a different building. It was a friend of mine and her two roommates, who were also actors. Putting together the building application took me 24 hours, and now it takes me 20 minutes on the train.

The learning curve is very steep, and so the first six months was a lot of hustle. I did nothing but eat Subway and walk up six flights to show apartments to people while I was learning the ropes.

What do you do when you're not brokering deals?

I sing, dance and act, and I'm also a comedian. I do stand-up. I've performed at the Greenwich Village Comedy Club, the West Side Comedy Club and Broadway Comedy Club.

I've done some off-Broadway shows. I was in *Urinetown*. I was in a Yiddish operetta called *The Golden Bride*. I had to learn enough Yiddish to play Motel, one of the bride's suitors.

When I booked it, I didn't think it was going to be the most successful thing, but we did it and it was great. It was a *New York Times* critic's pick. I dipped my toe into TV and film, but most of the stuff I've booked is musical theater.

I'm about to be much more in the theater space for a little while. During the pandemic there was no theater, and all I was doing was real estate. One of my best years in real estate was 2020, believe it or not. I did almost exclusively sales at that point.

Are acting and selling real estate similar?

The knowledge of human emotion is very similar, it's a very transferable skill. Being an actor is being able to portray human emotion, and knowing where a person is emotionally when they're moving is important to help guide them.

Moving is one of the most stressful things a person does in their life. Renting is very stressful, but the stakes are a little lower than buying. Renting feels fast and dirty.

I'm an actor, but I will say I won't fake it. If I'm asked my opinion on something I will be honest. I've shown apartments I would kill to live in, and the client hated it.

The comment I've gotten from most of my clients is that they appreciate that I'm very candid.