

## Shvo Revs Up Pace, Again

*Go-Go Manhattan Broker Re-Emerges as Developer*

By [JOSH BARBANEL](#)



*Keith Bedford for The Wall Street Journal* \_ Michael Shvo stands on the High Line overlooking a Getty gas station where he and others plan to develop luxury condominiums.

During the real-estate boom years in Manhattan, Michael Shvo was the most visible of the go-go brokers, a brash 30-something squiring customers in his limousine, a cellphone in each ear, hosting celebrity parties and creating ever-more extravagant sales campaigns for new condominiums.

But five years ago as the condo boom slowed down, Mr. Shvo shrank his business and eventually disappeared from the New York real-estate scene. An answering machine picked up calls in his 7,000-square-foot office on Fifth Avenue facing Trump Tower.

Now—at a time when brokers say New York luxury condos may be entering a new golden age—Mr. Shvo is back, this time as a luxury condo developer, he said, rather than a broker. He turned 40 years old in December.

Teaming with an established developer, Victor Homes, Mr. Shvo said he outbid a score of competitors to buy the site of a gas station on 10th Avenue and West 24th Street, in the burgeoning art district, overlooking the High Line park.

The gas-station sale set a record price per square foot for a development site in Chelsea. It was listed for \$18.95 million, but sold for far more, \$23.5 million, or close to \$800 per buildable square foot, according to Ran Korolik of Victor Homes. He said negotiations are under way over additional air rights.

Brock Emmetsberger, a broker at Massey Knakal Realty Services, said the previous record in Chelsea was set in 2007 at more than \$500 a square foot. Mr. Emmetsberger and James Nelson also of Massey Knakal had the listing.

Several developers said that the price for the gas-station property was extremely high even for West Chelsea, but Mr. Shvo was unperturbed. He said that for "this specific site," it is "inexpensive."

"The vision for this property relies on the game-changing real-estate mind-set that I believed in and acted on previously," he said. "It is not just walls and a kitchen and a bathroom, it is about creating a true luxury brand, at once authentic, unique and self-defining when encountered," he said.

Mr. Shvo, who was born in Israel, worked his way up to be a top-selling broker at what is now Douglas Elliman before founding his own brokerage, SHVO, in 2004. The firm's slogan turned Shvo into a verb, as in "Let's Shvo."

He was admired by many brokers for his marketing panache, but some in the industry complained that he was difficult to work with.

After Mr. Shvo left Douglas Elliman, Howard Lorber, the company chairman, told New York Magazine that Mr. Shvo had left behind 2,500 happy people at the brokerage.

Mr. Lorber declined to discuss Mr. Shvo's return. "What is there to talk about," he said. "The market is booming, it is going to bring players in. We are very busy."

But Mr. Shvo's fans credit him with creating some marketing ideas that are now common in the industry, even though a number of his projects were later taken over by other brokers.

"He brought a brand new approach to branding and marketing," said Esther Muller, an Elliman broker who runs an industry continuing-education seminar series for about 500 brokers a year. "He took properties and turned them into celebrities." But she said that the steep downturn tripped up some of Mr. Shvo's marketing. "He has done a lot of great and wonderful things, and he messed up on a number of great and wonderful things," she said.

At a conversion of a large office building to condos in the Financial District, he brought in the home design arm of Armani to design and brand condos, known as "20 Pine: the Collection."

To create some buzz, he created a 24-hour-a-day sales office that remained open for months, he said, so that every potential buyer could get an appointment the same day they wanted one. A lounge with a bar was created in the sales office for the W Downtown, along with a curved wall with high-tech displays.

At another conversion of a 19th-century building at 650 Fifth Avenue, he created all white boxes, with white oak floors, white counters and backsplashes, and touted them as "white box gallery living," the perfect place for an art collect. His show room doubled as an art galler.

During the real-estate downturn, sales froze and many buyers focused on basic value rather than frothy marketing, brokers said. Mr. Shvo said he decided to scale back even earlier, at the end of 2007, when he realized the market "couldn't sustain" the excess of if real-estate investment.

At 650 Fifth Ave., brokers who were hired after Mr. Shvo rejected his ideas. The building was renamed the Cammeyer, after an 1890s shoe store there, and celebrated its neo-Renaissance arched windows and 19th-century cast-iron columns.

After leaving the New York market, Mr. Shvo said he remained active in real estate in Dubai and elsewhere and also was involved in property and private-equity investments. In recent years, he said that he and his wife, Seren, have devoted their time to assembling an extensive modern and contemporary art collection.

Mr. Shvo said he hoped to turn the gas-station property, at 239 10th Ave., into an art-themed, mixed-use condo and retail development that would connect to many of the galleries nearby. In addition, he said he is actively bidding on other development sites.

"We are working on the concept," he said. "Something that will combine art, luxury residential, design and architecture," he said. "We will have river views and we will be looking over the High Line."