

MANSION

Story Sampler

'A HOUSE TO DIE FOR'
By Vicki Doudera (2010)



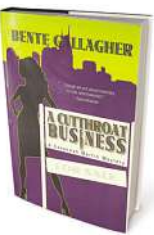
Red-hot real-estate agent Darby Farr reluctantly returns to her hometown in Maine to close a multimillion-dollar deal for her dying aunt. But what began as a simple transaction turns sinister as Darby uncovers dark secrets that reveal an ugly scandal and murder. As a brutal storm surges up the coast, Darby, assisted by handsome journalist Miles Porter, must salvage the deal, find the killer—and somehow stay alive.

'SEASON OF STRANGERS'
By Kat Martin (2008)



Real-estate agent Julie Ferris and her sister, Laura, fall asleep on a beach in Malibu, Calif., and wake up with no recollection of the hours that passed. Later they discover that they were abducted by aliens. Intertwined is a sci-fi romance between Julie and her handsome playboy boss, Patrick Donovan.

'A CUTTHROAT BUSINESS'
By Bente Gallagher (also under the pen name Jenna Bennett) (2010)



Newly minted real-estate agent Savannah Martin discovers the butchered body of her co-worker, Brenda Puckett, in an empty house alongside tall, dark and dangerous Rafe Collier. Now Savannah must solve the crime, make a success of her new career and avoid getting killed—or kissed—by Rafe, all before the money in her savings account runs out and she has to go back to selling makeup at the mall.

THE TRADE

In Real Estate, Truth in Fiction

Agents say the business provides the perfect plotlines for romance and mystery novels

BY SANETTE TANAKA

ONE REAL-ESTATE agent busted an illegal adoption ring. Another agent caught her co-worker's killer. And a third uncovered a con artist posing as a wealthy countess.

For a number of current and former brokers, real estate offers the perfect plotlines for murder, mystery and romance novels. They're drawn to writing for the same reasons they like real estate: flexible hours and the potential to sign a million-dollar deal.

A "ghastly" experience in real life inspired former real-estate agent Madge Walls about 17 years ago. Ms. Walls got involved in a deal with a for-sale-by-owner home in Maui, Hawaii, where the owner's roommate tried to "sabotage the sale in every possible way," Ms. Walls says. On one occasion, the roommate even threatened to kill Ms. Walls and her clients. On the day of closing, the roommate removed all the appliances, tore up the landscaping and uprooted a tree with her truck.

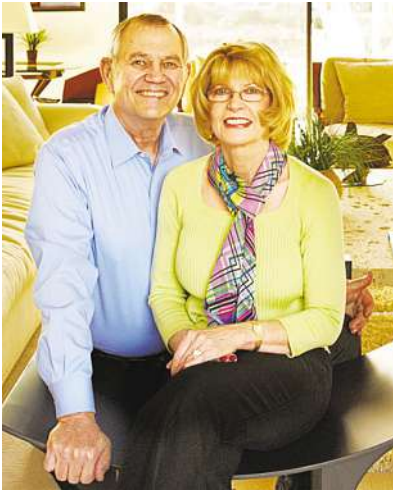
"I remember closing that file and thought, 'You've always wanted to write a novel. Now here's your plot,'" says Ms. Walls, who now lives in Wilsonville, Ore. Within a few weeks, she began writing her debut novel, "Paying the Price," featuring Maui agent Laura McDaniel, a 40-something divorcee. Since then, she says, she has sold roughly 4,000 copies and this month released the sequel, "Buyers Are Liars," as an e-book.

With 55 books to her name, best-selling romance author Kat Martin says she was attracted to the idea of high payoffs when she decided to make the leap from real estate to writing.

"I felt I was making as much as I'm going to make in real estate, but there's big money in writing if I could pull it off," says Ms. Martin, author of "Season of Strangers" starring real-estate agent Julie Ferris. The effort has paid off. Ms. Martin has homes in Missoula, Mont., and Ventura, Calif., with her husband,



GET IT IN WRITING Some of the dozens of real-estate titles, above, that have been written by current or former agents. Below, writers Kat and Larry Jay Martin at their Ventura, Calif., home.



Amara Friedman for The Wall Street Journal

Larry Jay Martin, also a writer and former real-estate agent.

Nina Wright, author of six mystery novels featuring real-estate agent and sleuth Whiskey Mattimoe, says she often embellishes absurd situations to suit her series. In real life, Ms. Wright, who lives in Oakland County, Mich., found out that one of her tenants was running an underground day-care service. In the fourth book, "Whiskey and Water," agent Matti-

moe discovers that her tenant is operating an illegal adoption ring.

"There are so many things that can go wrong in real estate," says Ms. Wright. "I've bought and sold a lot of properties, but I haven't seen a single transaction where there aren't colossal screw-ups."

Bente Gallagher, author of a mystery series featuring real-estate agent Savannah Martin, says entering empty foreclosure houses alone as an agent prompted her imagination to run wild. "Anything could be in there," says Ms. Gallagher, who lives in Nashville and writes under the pen name Jenna Bennett for her Savannah Martin books. "There are dead mice and dead birds. It isn't too much of a stretch to imagine a dead human."

In the first book in the series, "A Cutthroat Business," Savannah Martin tries to figure out who killed her co-worker Brenda Puckett—a plotline inspired by Ms. Gallagher's finding a kitchen cleaver on the floor of a recently foreclosed house.

The mother-and-daughters real-estate trio Michele Kleier, Sabrina Kleier-Morgenstern and Samantha Kleier-Forbes of Manhattan-based

Kleier Residential fictionalized their real-estate careers for their 2011 novel "Hot Property," featuring Elizabeth Chase and her daughters Kate and Isabel of Chase Residential.

The Kleiers, stars of HGTV's "Selling New York," drew largely on their own experiences in crafting their characters. Allison Silverman-Cole—one of Kate Chase's problematic clients, who has extreme allergies to dust, paint, even avocados—is based on an actual client. To assuage her allergy fears, "she made me call every broker before we saw an apartment," Ms. Kleier-Forbes says.

A fictionalized version of a client who asked for sexual favors in return for buying an apartment and a con artist who pretended to be a wealthy countess also made it into the book, she adds. The novel, though fiction, sports known names in New York real estate, including Jared Seligman of Prudential Douglas Elliman, Barbara Fox of Fox Residential Group and Mary Beth Flynn of Brown Harris Stevens. "We had an insider's voice. A lot of people wanted their real names in there," Ms. Kleier says.

Some agents write, but not all are willing to leave real estate completely. The Kleiers say they don't plan on penning another novel as long as they're tied up with real estate.

Author Vicki Doudera of Camden, Maine, considers herself a dual agent. "I am a writer and real estate is my profession. A lot of writers are introverts, but I really enjoy meeting new people and negotiating real estate. I love the whole yin and yang of it," says Ms. Doudera, a real-estate agent with Camden Real Estate Co. and author of the Darby Farr mystery series.

Many of her characters are inspired by her practice, like a man who kept a pet turtle in a kiddie pool in his basement for 30 years or an elderly woman who suspected a house deal was part of a conspiracy theory. "My real-estate world is always informing my fiction world," she adds.

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