

Why Women's Voices Are Needed In Homebuilding

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By Carrie Rossenfeld



ALISO VIEJO, CA—Women are the primary decision makers when it comes to home purchases, so the idea of women being more involved in product design makes sense, Joan Marcus-Colvin tells GlobeSt.com. Marcus-Colvin is chief marketing officer for the New Home Co., was Building Industry Association—Orange County Chapter's 2015 president and is currently and committee chair for the chapter's upcoming second-annual Women

in Home Building Conference. The conference, entitled "Build Your Own Story," will take place at Soka Performing Arts Center here on April 22nd and will be a leadership conference open to men and women. For more information on the conference, [click here](#).

We spoke exclusively with Marcus-Colvin and Julie Brinkerhoff-Jacobs, president of Lifescapes International and a panelist at the conference, about the challenges women in real estate face today and where there are growth opportunities for women in the industry. GlobeSt.com was unable to reach panelist Steve Churm, chief communications officer of FivePoint Communities and a panelist at the conference, prior to deadline for the men's perspective on these issues, but will follow up with his comments at a later date as we receive them.

GlobeSt.com: What are the most pressing challenges women in real estate face today?

Marcus-Colvin: I think our industry leadership is made up of older whiter males. This inherently can mean challenges such as only supporting women's career growth in what can be considered "female-friendly" disciplines, i.e. sales, marketing, purchasing and human resources. We need to make sure career paths are open and encouraged in areas such as project management, finance and land acquisition.

Brinkerhoff-Jacobs: Women in this industry are challenged to find places where they can go to learn about the business and meet the right people who can help them achieve success. As is true for all facets of any profession in which a person wishes to excel, finding qualified mentors (men and women) as soon as you can will give you an added advantage over others who do not.

Julie Brinkerhoff-Jacobs

Brinkerhoff-Jacobs: "It's all about passion, staying focused, gumption and commitment.

GlobeSt.com: Where are there untapped opportunities for women in this industry?

Marcus-Colvin: I see young women entering the architectural and landscape fields, and I couldn't be happier. I often tell the story about working with a well-known female architect and how

exciting the process was for the women on our design team. We see spaces and preferences differently, and what transpired in the end was a perception that our voices were heard. We know that women are the primary decision makers when it comes to home purchases, so the idea of women more involved in product design sure makes sense.

Brinkerhoff-Jacobs: I would venture to say that there may not be too many untapped opportunities in real estate for women these days. I have clients that have women in all areas of leadership—senior management, owners, general contractors, accountants, lawyers and so many more. I would say that focusing on education (business, accounting practices, design-architecture, landscape architecture, construction, sales and marketing) would offer women an advantage these days.

GlobeSt.com: How far have women come in the industry over the past several decades?

Marcus-Colvin: I'm going on my third decade in this industry, and the changes are significant. We rarely saw women in project management, land or finance, and as we know, it takes expertise in people, product and land to make successful leaders. I'd still like to figure out how to get more women in our boardrooms, but the numbers are moving in the right direction.

Brinkerhoff-Jacobs: My career so far is four decades, and I have no plans to retire ever. When I started out, at 24 in 1976, I originally wanted to continue my college education (degrees in English and theater) and become an attorney focused on women's and children's rights. But, I became a single mom with a 1½-year-old and had to postpone law school to find a job to take care of my family of two.

There are now many more educational programs available to women that didn't exist when I was struggling to learn about our industry. Now, offerings in real estate are common in most colleges and universities. There are more professionals, it seems to me, that are willing to mentor and share their stories with others so that they can learn from our successes as well as our "failures" or challenges.

More women have their own companies today than they did in 1976. Women in all aspects of the real estate world can thrive and be successful. So many more opportunities. More women have joined organizations such as ULI (when I joined, women represented less than 1%, and now we are noticeably present and active with upwards of 14%).

GlobeSt.com: Where do you see women's future within the industry?

Marcus-Colvin: The good news is that the future is bright for women in home building and real estate. We work in such a vibrant, creative and fulfilling business, one where we get to design and build neighborhoods and communities where people raise their families and where women greatly influence the buying decision—I can't think of a better place for us.

Brinkerhoff-Jacobs: The future looks bright—very bright. It's all about passion, staying focused, gumption and commitment. I love this industry. I also love the tenacity and spirit of women today. The fight has been forged, and more women are starting their own companies and joining the leadership of more and more companies in the real estate industry. There are organizations specifically to serve women in various industries too—CREW, for example. There wouldn't be an organization such as this without the members to make it happen. If I were a young woman starting out today, I would certainly focus on education, industry involvement, leadership in your industry or area of specialty as soon as you are qualified to do so and get to know the movers and shakers that can enrich both your professional and personal development. The advantage women

today have over someone like me? There are lots more opportunities to sidestep secretarial positions as a starting point.

GlobeSt.com: What advice would you give women who are either in real estate or thinking about entering the industry today?

Brinkerhoff-Jacobs: First, find a good mentor. Next, I always believe that without passion, you will not be as successful (if successful at all) as you need to be. Also, get an education that focuses on what you will need to know. For example, understanding the real estate process, how to structure financial deals and the construction process is exceedingly helpful. Pay attention to real estate trends—these are vital to your professional “tool kit.” Get involved in professional organizations early. You will have the opportunity to meet many people of like interests. You will become known by the movers and shakers who know what’s going on in the industry. Organizations such as the Building Industry Association (both local and national), Urban Land Institute (which is a regional, national and international organization devoted to proper land development in all areas of real estate), International Council of Shopping Centers and whatever associations exist that can help you gain knowledge, contacts, opportunities and jobs. Check out Vistage, too—I have been a member for 20 years. Above all else, stay focused. Don’t give up. Become knowledgeable. Keep your eyes open for opportunities. Align yourself with professionals you admire and respect. Never stop learning. Be prepared.

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