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# THE RAP ON LINDA



As realtor to the stars,

**Linda Stein works hard for the money**

**BY MICHAEL GROSS**

**T**HAT FOUR-LETTER WORD STARTS FLYING out of Linda Stein's mouth the moment she walks into Coco Pazzo.

"Where have you been?" asks the maître d'.

"F--- you," says Stein.

Working the dining room from the minute she enters, Stein makes her first stop at the table where Bob Krasnow, the chairman of Elektra Entertainment, is sitting with Michael Klenfner, a powerful music consultant, and MTV CEO Tom Freston. "*Meine Yiddische mama*," Klenfner calls her. Linda glows. It's her kind of table.

Stein is known to tabloid readers as the "realtor to the stars" at Douglas Elliman and best friend of Sylvester Stallone's and Elton John's. But she used to be in the music business, and she recently returned part-time, managing a Danish rapper named Lucas. So Stein falls easily into in-crowd joking about an upcoming bash for the chairman of the MCA Music Entertainment Group. "Is this the Al Teller dinner?" she asks. "Thirty-five thousand dollars a table?"

"Twenty-eight thousand," Krasnow replies.

"I must have the wrong charity," says Stein, waving good-bye.

Moments later, Allen Grubman, the big-shot music-business lawyer, walks in to join yet another

record-company executive. "Grubman," Linda mutters darkly. She says that he's her only enemy. She'll tell me why—but only after this article is published.

Catching a wisp of the conversation at Krasnow's table, she can't help picking at the scab: "Grubman walks in, they use my line on him." A pause. "They stole my line." Another pause. "*Those f---ers*."

"Linda?" someone at our table suggests. "You say f--- a lot."

"When I see this many people in the record business in such a small radius, it's hard to stay a lady," Stein says.

"You should have heard her on the phone the other day," chimes in her sixteen-year-old daughter Mandy, who'd gotten stuck in East Hampton during Hurricane Bob a few weeks ago. "She goes, 'This is Linda. This is totally f---ed. It's a f---ing hurricane. Get the f--- out of there.'" Mandy sighs. "If she doesn't say f--- twenty times a day, she's repressed."

"So I say f---," Stein admits. "F---; I can't help it."

She truly *can't* help it. Diminutive, brassy, and caustic, Stein has a face as expressive as her truck driver's mouth. Everything about her is too much, from her too high Manolo Blahnik heels to her too



short Gianni Versace skirts. Yet somehow it all works for her. Without looks or money, through the sheer force of her often abrasive personality, the fortyish Linda Stein has become a player. She makes an imposing splash in the social swim.

She's a complicated woman, full of conflict and contradictions. One movie star who knows Stein well is said to have called her "Buddy Hackett with tits"—behind her back. Others refer to her "power envy," pushiness, and name-dropping. "She wants desperately to be in the thick of things," says one person who's watched her in action. But even Stein's detractors admit that they have a soft spot for her, that she's immensely human. If anything, she's too open about her problems. "Her nerve is beyond anything," one longtime observer says, laughing. "You can't help but admire her."

**N**ERVE MAY WELL BE A NECESSITY for survival now that the bubble has burst in the real-estate market. Last month, Stein finally made her first deal since March—and Elliman, which hired her in better times, may well expect more. Though her commissions are high, a percentage of nothing is nothing. And now, even though she says there is no connection, Stein has returned to where she started—the renegade music scene. Some think that may well be where she really belongs.

Stein was born Linda Adler, the daughter of a kosher caterer in Riverdale. For a while, she was a fifth-grade teacher, but that didn't last. She soon became Mrs. Seymour Stein, wife of a promotion man turned record mogul. Then she was best known for traveling the world with her

reer in real estate, working for society broker Edward Lee Cave, she's handled big-ticket properties in New York, Paris, Los Angeles, and even Pisa, Italy, for a lot of big-name, powerful people, especially actors, musicians, and entertainment executives. To be known as a "producer" or star broker like Stein, an agent needs to generate sales of at least \$10 million a year.

Some agents go about their business quietly. Cave, Stein's mentor, is known for his discretion. So is William B. May's Roger Erickson, who, like Stein, is a former record executive specializing in the hippest clients and most luxurious properties. Erickson is also Stein's closest competitor. Lately, he's surpassed her in gross sales. "I don't like to even acknowledge him," Stein says a tad defensively.

She would prefer to be compared to Alice Mason, the broker who's known for her dinner parties. But she's quick to say, "My clients are younger." Like Stein, Mason depends on the press. Though the media scare off some clients, they bring in listings. (A columnist publicizes the realtor's proximity to the known, the wealthy, and the swell in exchange for exclusive gossip tidbits.)

Aileen "Suzy" Mehle has long had the exclusive on Mason; though she's sometimes in Richard Johnson's column, Stein appears most often in that of Billy Norwich. Stein's clipping files include about 100 mentions since 1986, and Norwich, who just moved from the *News* to the *Post*, wrote most of them. Last year, he had twenty references to Stein; over the years, he's mentioned her partying with Blaine, Pat, and Calvin; her working vacations in Aspen and St. Bart's; her daughter Samantha's "sweet sixteen"; her dinners at hot restaurants and romances with very

"They are giving her credit for a power she doesn't wield," he says. "She is tempestuous, aggravating, irritating, and occasionally borders on violence; but she's not evil."

Stein herself will boast that daughter Mandy calls her Mrs. Grenville "because I love to be in the papers," but she gets heated up about these charges. "Columnists call me. Yes, they call me," she says. "I don't take it as seriously as other people do. There's more fire in [coop] board papers than in any gossip column. That's when I'm playing with fire."

**S**TEIN DOES TALK. Few brokers boast the way she does. In our very first conversation, in late August, she talked about working with Stallone (who was interested in renting an apartment in Beverly Hills), a member of the Cox clan, and graphic designer Fabien Baron, who is about to go to contract on a co-op.

Stallone has been a client—though not a buyer—for years. "You might know what to do with this person," Cave said as he handed Sly to Stein. She proved to be a natural at sheltering and caressing the famous—she found Andrew Lloyd Web-

ber a maid and Demi Moore an acupuncturist. "She understands us," says Joan Rivers. "She knows about security, what buildings will reject us. She's an incredible saleswoman. So enthused. So excited. You think, She's right. Who needs a view? Who needs running water? Linda is a good soul in a rough business."

But it's dangerous out there. Stein made the front page of the *New York Post*—and lost a client—when she was photographed showing co-ops to Madonna, who had

been rejected by the board at the San Remo. Stein got her revenge: She brokered a deal last year that put Bruce Willis and Demi Moore in a triplex in one of the San Remo's towers (they bought the apartment from Robert Stigwood).

Stein also sold Jann Wenner the Perry Ellis townhouse for \$4.2 million in 1987. She found Webber a Trump Tower duplex for about \$6 million in 1988 and, in 1989, sold Calvin Klein's bachelor pad to producer Keith Barish for \$4 million (but Barish backed out of the deal, and Klein got to keep his \$400,000 deposit). Stein



Without looks **POWER BROKER**  
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best buddy, Elton John. She also managed the Ramones, the band that inspired the British punk movement. "Stars and fifth-graders," she says. "It's all the same."

In 1979, after two daughters and several years on the road, Stein got divorced and discovered real estate. A few big deals later, paparazzo Patrick McMullan dubbed her the "realtor to the stars" in a photo caption in *New York Talk*. The description stuck, and Stein started being linked in the columns with everyone from Attila to Madonna.

In the years since Stein launched her ca-

young and handsome men. (For the record, Stein's 1990 clips also include eight appearances in "Page Six," two in *WWD*, two in *On the Avenue*, and one each in *Vogue*, the *New York Observer*, and *New York's "Intelligencer"* column.)

As a result, some say that Stein's an inveterate—and sometimes nasty—gossip who uses the columns to further her private agenda. "People are nice to her because they are afraid of her," claims one person who knows her.

Longtime friend Danny Fields, a music-industry veteran, dismisses such talk.





Clockwise from left: With Elton John; with daughters Samantha and Mandy; with two Ramones, David Bowie, Danny Fields, and others; with Sly Stallone.

got zilch. It was the same in 1990, when Stein brokered Klein's East Side townhouse for \$7.7 million, her buyer walked, and Klein kept \$770,000. Stein has, however, done more rewarding multiple deals with Sting, Billy Joel and Christie Brinkley, LaToya Jackson, and Paul Schrader and Mary Beth Hurt. Sometimes it's like musical chairs: Sting bought from Joel. Harrison Ford bought from Debra Winger. "They're chained," says Stein. "That's success in the real-estate business. When one thing leads to another."

**M**Y CLIENTS ARE MY NEIGHBORS, my old roommate, my friends," Stein says. "My business is a continuation of my life." Beginning with Elton John in the seventies, she's linked up a chain of introductions that connects twenty years of stars from rock-and-roll low-lives to social high-livers.

Today, Stein, who considers Blaine Trump one of her "real" girlfriends, bristles when people call her a groupie or a climber. She worships hip, she says. "Hip, hip, hip. I really don't care who anybody's grandfather is. I want to know their children." But in fact, she wants to know all sorts of people. "She has parlayed close relationships with powerful and famous people into a professional matrix," Fields says. "It's quite a modern way to work."

This year, though, it's been tough going. For five months, nothing moved. Stein blamed the war but admits, "You wonder, Is it me?" She put together her last big deal in March. Andy Warhol's home was long considered overpriced at \$8 million. Stein, who says she was haunted by the house, finally sold it for \$3 million to "some Spaniards nobody's heard of." But she still holds a grudge against the Warhol estate for denying her the exclusive, "which I thought was ironic, because Andy was a big fan of mine," she says, adding a dig: "They turned down \$5.5 million in 1987."

**S**TEIN LIVES IN THE KENILWORTH, on Central Park West, where her neighbors are Bill Moyers, Michael Douglas, and Ashton Hawkins. A jeroam of Moët sits in her hallway. The rooms are large and sparsely furnished. A suite of Empire furniture decorated with inlaid brass stars barely fills the sprawling living room, which overlooks the park. The emptiness is a reminder that, famous friends aside, Stein is, as Edward Cave once said, a not-atypical "divorced New York girl selling real estate" to make ends meet.

"In a very good year, I'll sell eleven apartments," Stein says. And in a bad year, like this one? "I've sold a lot of furniture. Sometimes a bracelet. I live on the edge too much." She doesn't save; she has

young boyfriends; and she and her ex-husband are engaged in what she calls "a chronic lawsuit" over divorce terms. "It's not pretty," she says. "It's hard to talk big numbers with a client while you're looking for a twenty in your wallet."

Still, she's managed to hold on to small collections of statuary fragments, antique glass pieces, and the Horst, Huene, and Beaton photographs that share the red-lacquered library with dozens of family pictures—of her daughters, Mandy and Samantha; David Bowie; Sly, Gianni, and the rest. "That's Boy George and Michael J. Fox in another world at Area," Stein says. "And there's Bruce Willis, Elton, and Herb Ritts in Hollywood. I was on Ecstasy, I think."

Her daughters' rooms are down a hall, both whitewashed and covered with graffiti like **DEBBIE GIBSON IS LAME** and **PETER IS A STUD**. "It'd be a hard sell, this apartment," Stein says, leading the way to her bedroom, with its Art Deco bed, a StairMaster, piles of Bob Dylan cassettes, and dozens of empty Chanel and Chloé perfume bottles lined up in rows like toy soldiers. Even in here, the famous names tumble out—there's the hat Versace gave her and the Paul McCartney flute that she bought at one charity auction and is now donating to another. "I saw Paul this weekend, and he loved that I was recycling. Linda gave me veggie burgers." She picks up a copy of the *Forbes* Four Hundred is-



sue. "My night-table reading," she says.

At noon, Stein heads downtown to meet Stallone and producer Keith Barish at a press conference for Planet Hollywood. Though she's detained at the door ("Who needs this s---?" she gripes. "I could be negotiating"), Barish quickly appears, scolding a sentry: "Linda doesn't wait." Later, inside a hotel suite, Stallone interrupts an interview to greet her. "Hi, angel face," he says. "Thanks for the flowers. I ate 'em."



**Stein says she has BIG DEAL enough time for real estate and her hot young rapper. "I love doing deals," she says. ■**

Stein beams as he comes closer to bend the bill of her Planet Hollywood gimme cap. "Only a schmuck wears a bill flat," Stallone says. "C'mon, get with the program." Stein tells Stallone she wants him to give a quote for her profile. "Linda Stein," he says, backing away. "America's conduit to the stars."

**S**TEIN MOVED FROM CAVE TO Douglas Elliman in March 1990, after the big brokerage house was shaken up and taken over by the Milstein family. Fellow brokers from Cave say there was no rift. At Cave, she would never rise above princess. The much larger Elliman firm offered her queenly status: a 65 percent share of commissions on sales (the standard split is 50-50)—plus a private office, a male assistant, and a chauffeured hunter-green BMW 525i with a phone. The appeal of her deal is clear from the amount of time she spends operating from her car, wheeling and dealing apartments and fielding calls from Lucas, whose album is going to be released next month. Stein figures that after he hits, she'll sell him and the record-company president apartments. She'd better. Her car-phone bills run to \$2,500 monthly.

Between calls, she stops at her office, which overlooks the intersection of Madison and 57th Street. "There's never a dull moment," says Tom Raffo, her assistant, as Stein walks around, stared at by the more typical brokers, blonde women of a certain age wearing pearls and discreet print dresses.

Stein moves from rap to real es-

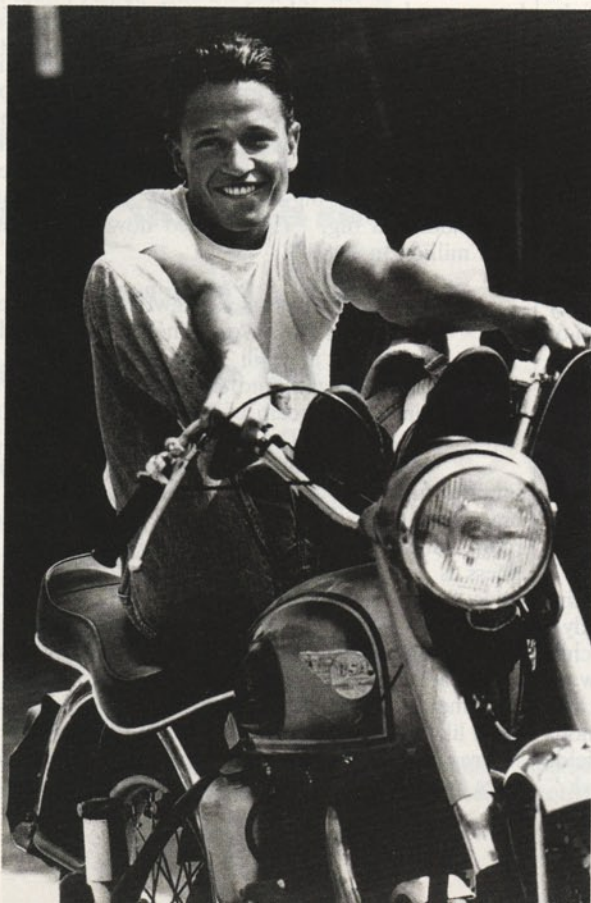
tate to real life as she and Tom field phone calls from her ex-husband's secretary; Blaine Trump ("She's such a nice girl"); an estate owner in Antigua ("Tell him to send a plane ticket"); a condominium buyer ("Cross your fingers—it's never in the bag"); and the agent for a Fifth Avenue apartment seller who wants Stein to reimburse him for the time his maid spent waiting for a "very big movie-star" client who never turned up.

"I'll pay the maid," Stein screams into

the phone, "but I won't bring [the very big movie star] to his apartment." She slams down the phone. "F--- them," she yells at it. A few hours later, the agent calls back to apologize. "I don't have to pay the maid," she cracks victoriously. "Good. Let's go to Tiffany."

But instead, she heads crosstown to Uptown Records, where she's meeting with president Andre Harrell about Lucas. As Harrell speaks to an enthusiastic record plugger on his speakerphone, Stein boogies in her chair, her extrashort Versace

*Stein now manages Lucas, a Danish rapper.*



skirt hiking up her thighs. Lucas's first single is called "Show Me Your Moves." Stein's aren't bad, either. "I've had this contract six weeks and I can already speak hip-hop," she confides as she leaves the building. "And I can make these boys laugh, too, 'cause I'm *crazy large*."

BORN IN MANHATTAN, LINDA ADLER GREW UP in Riverdale, a self-described "color-coordinated, obedient, B-plus public-school student." But her junior-prom date, Elliot Roberts, who now manages musicians like Tracy Chapman and Neil Young, remembers their days together hanging out in the parking lot at Jahn's ice-cream parlor. "She was a pushy teen, but very funny," he says. "She went with a quarter-back. She was a rebel, a wild little girl. We thought of her as Fast Linda." Asked for his prom memories, he laughs and says, "Cleveland. She had it. She showed it."

She loved dancing to rock and roll and won a spot gyrating on a fifties TV show. Even after she earned a master's degree in education and started teaching in the Bronx in the sixties, music remained in her blood. "I used Simon and Garfunkel in creative-writing class," she says, "and I used to go to Arthur every night and dance." In 1969, she went to Paris for a year, learned French, saw rock shows, and sold clothes in a boutique. Back in the Bronx, she met Seymour Stein, who'd recently founded Sire Records, on a blind date. Six weeks later, in San Francisco, where one of Sire's bands was playing, they met Reg Dwight, who would become famous as Elton John.

**B**Y THE MID-SEVENTIES, Stein was pregnant and working for Sire, and all of them—especially Elton—were rich beyond their dreams. "Seymour turned Elton on to buying valuable things, as opposed to boots," Stein says. "I did a lot of bidding at auctions for him. He became a major consumer. I had a very glamorous life." She was onstage when Elton played Dodger Stadium, at his side when he dined with Princess Margaret and Lord Snowdon at Kensington Palace. There were also "decadent moments," she says slyly. "We had a terrific time."

Two years later, Stein saw the Ramones at the suggestion of Fields, then a rock journalist and manager. They'd met when Fields was the editor of *16*. "I was told to get to Linda if I wanted to get to Elton," Fields says, chortling. "I had a picture of her with him, so I ran it with a caption that said





Everything about Stein is too much—from her too high heels to her too short skirts.

something like 'Unspeakably rich, immensely popular Linda Stein accompanies Elton John.' "Needless to say, Stein liked it, and the pair have been friends ever since. Fields was attracted by her "ferocious spirit and indomitable energy," he says, adding with another laugh, "There's more energy there than most people care to deal with and more honesty than most people care to confront. There's too much to deal with, perhaps. She's never opted for bland situations."

Certainly, the Ramones were anything but bland. Sire signed them, and when their first album was released, in 1976, Fields invited Stein to co-manage them. Soon after the birth of her second daughter, she hit the road with the band. "That's when my independence started and my marriage was very much falling apart," she says. "That period was a little wild." One night, Samantha Stein woke up to find Iggy Pop rolling joints on the living-room floor. And that was normal.

By the turn of the decade, the Steins had divorced, the Ramones had left for greener management, and Linda was doing the disco scene at Studio 54. Meanwhile, the girls were growing up, Stein says, "and I had to find something to do." She'd been free-lancing as a consultant in the music business, but her course was set when she earned a finder's fee for bringing her ex-husband's apartment to Edward Lee Cave, a former auctioneer then heading Sotheby's real-estate arm. "I saw that there was money to be made," she

says. When Cave set out on his own, Stein got a license and asked for a job.

"The next morning, I was in the office," she says. But not for long. She spent her first days as a broker walking the East Side, memorizing buildings and addresses. "The beginning was tough, and then it all seemed to come together. I made lists; I went out; I told people I sold real estate. It was awkward, and then it just started to snowball. I knew a lot of people when I started, and I kept getting referred and referred and referred. Deals bring deals." A corollary to that rule is that "press brings press," she adds. "I've cultivated it. I'm an invention of the press." But she hasn't bothered cultivating relationships with Manhattan's tougher co-op boards.

"My clients are my friends," she howls. "I won't walk into a lobby where they don't want people of my ethnic background, so why would I bring my friends there? We're of the same ilk. *Nobody* wants to be rejected."

**S**TEIN'S PART-TIME RETURN TO THE music industry coincided with the recent slump in the real-estate market. She insists she has time and energy enough for both jobs. Her daughters are rarely at home anymore. Samantha is starting college. Mandy is at boarding school. "My daughters, who mean more to me than anything in the world, need to be away from me more than they need to be with me; I need to be productive; I

don't want to feel like I'm lonely or like I'm losing something; and I'm loving what I'm doing," Stein says in one breathless sentence. "I love doing deals."

The entire day before, she had been on the phone making offers on an East Side condominium for *Women's Wear Daily* executive Patrick McCarthy. As she talks, she faces a wall decorated with clippings about herself. The most recent—only a few days old—is from *Women's Wear Daily*. McCarthy's phoned-in bids on the apartment inch up in \$5,000 increments all day long. "He's listening to a committee," Stein mutters darkly after failing to persuade him to make a bolder final bid. When she leaves the office for the day, she still doesn't know if she's got a deal.

It is almost noon the next day when Mandy Stein interrupts our interview to tell her McCarthy's bid has been accepted.

"Woooooowooooo," Stein cries. It is a long keening sound that makes my tape recorder's speaker crackle and sputter as I play it back. "Awwwwwwwwww." Linda runs around the room, kisses Mandy three times, and spins like a top. "Oooooomigod! Oooooomigod! You don't understand. It's beyond the money. It's the ego, too. You don't know what it is to not do a deal for a long time. I can't remember the last deal I did. Woooooowooooo."

She falls back on the couch, already reaching for the phone. "We got a deal," she tells McCarthy proudly. "We're rolling. Now what I think we're supposed to do is keep our big mouths shut." ■