



Betty Graham at her home in Beverly Hills

Agent to the Stars



Betty Graham, President and COO of Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage Greater Los Angeles Company, ensures that her star brokers have everything they need to continue the successful grand traditions of the country's longest running real estate company.

By Stephanie Wilson

Photography by Laura Wagner

Just like an agent to a Hollywood star, Betty Graham's busy days are spent ensuring that the talent she represents is highlighted in the best possible light. Although those she represents may not be lighting up the big screens, the skills they possess are worthy of "two-thumbs up!" praise, and the properties in their portfolios surely garner countless "must see!" reviews.

And although some naysayers may not see real estate agents as worthy of such praise, Graham is staunchly opposed to such chatter. "Real estate agents are the unsung heroes of the business world," she says in her sweet southern drawl. Graham's role as head of the Los Angeles branch of Coldwell Banker is to make them a little less unsung, a calling that, she explains, takes 24 hours a day.

"My job [as president and COO of Coldwell Banker Real Estate Greater Los Angeles] is to have the company work for the agent when the agent is asleep,

when the client is asleep." As head of the nation's oldest real estate company, she has her work cut out for her, but hard work is not out of her realm.

Graham grew up on a cotton farm outside of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, spending the days of her youth in the fields alongside her seven brothers and sisters. "Parents on a cotton farm have to raise the help," she laughs. After her family relocated to the San Joaquin Valley in California in the early 1950s, Graham was drawn south, although, "it was a very attractive south compared to the South that I was used to." After completing her studies in photojournalism at UCLA, she went to work at CBS as an assistant to football star Tom Harmon. It didn't take long for the studio to recognize her winning personality, and she was transferred to be personal assistant to Johnny Carson, who was doing a local variety show at KNXT in Hollywood. The pair bonded almost instantly. "He was a very loyal person," Graham recalls. "He was a very private human being and he held very



Westlake Village home
 listed by **Luzette Vidal** for
\$20,000,000

close to the people he chose to be close to." Graham was lucky enough to be a part of the circle of those near and dear to Carson, and when he was offered a position in New York, he asked Graham to join him as his assistant, but a relationship obligation made her decline the opportunity.

A few years later, when her marriage ended, she turned to Carson for advice. "I was living in Malibu and got a divorce," she explains, "and I did what women who got a divorce did in 1976: I got my real estate license." Carson helped springboard her career into the successful enterprise she is running today.

She began her real estate ventures in Malibu, quickly climbing the ranks to become a top-producing agent. After honing her managerial skills with her own company—Coast and Canyon Realtors—she joined Jon Douglas Company in 1982. Within two years, Graham was serving as branch manager. It was under her watchful eye that Jon Douglas Company opened branches in San Francisco, and she was soon appointed to regional manager and vice president. By the time Jon Douglas merged with NRT to become Coldwell Banker Residential

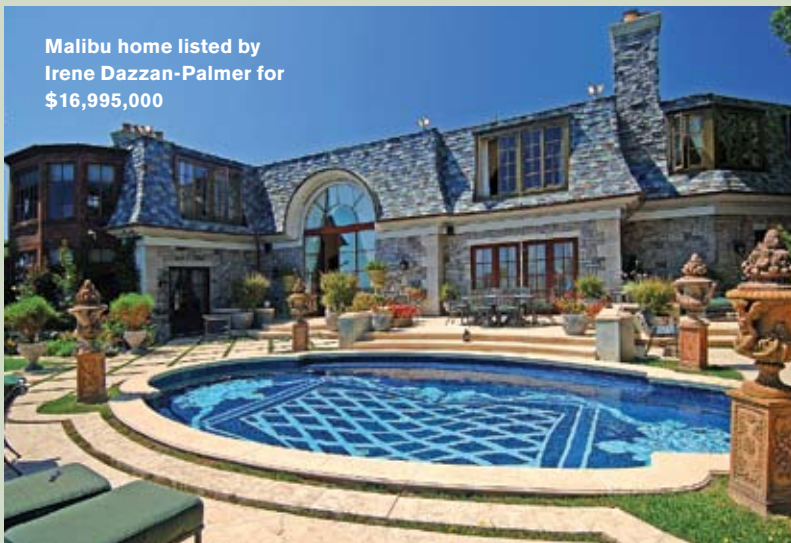
Brokerage in 1997, Graham had certainly amassed the leadership skills needed to run such a venerable brand.

With more than 30 years of real estate experience under her belt, Graham has a handle on the ups and downs of the real estate world "You don't depend on the market going up. You don't depend on the market going down. You are there to serve wherever the market is," she quips. It is a world that still excites her. "I think it's the most wonderful business for a person. It's more fun than the entertainment business," she explains, "because you are dealing with people when they are making the largest investment of their lives, typically. Money and emotions run hand-in-hand, and you get to ride that wave with them."

It is this emotion and heart-felt desire to make a positive impact on people's lives that seems to drive Graham's leadership strategy at Coldwell Banker. "I will do everything I can to keep my company intimate," she explains, which she accomplishes by always being accessible and by catering to her



Pacific Palisades
home listed by Joyce
Rey for \$23,000,000



Malibu home listed by
Irene Dazzan-Palmer for
\$16,995,000



Beverly Hills home
listed by Jade Mills for
\$24,000,950



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—BETTY GRAHAM

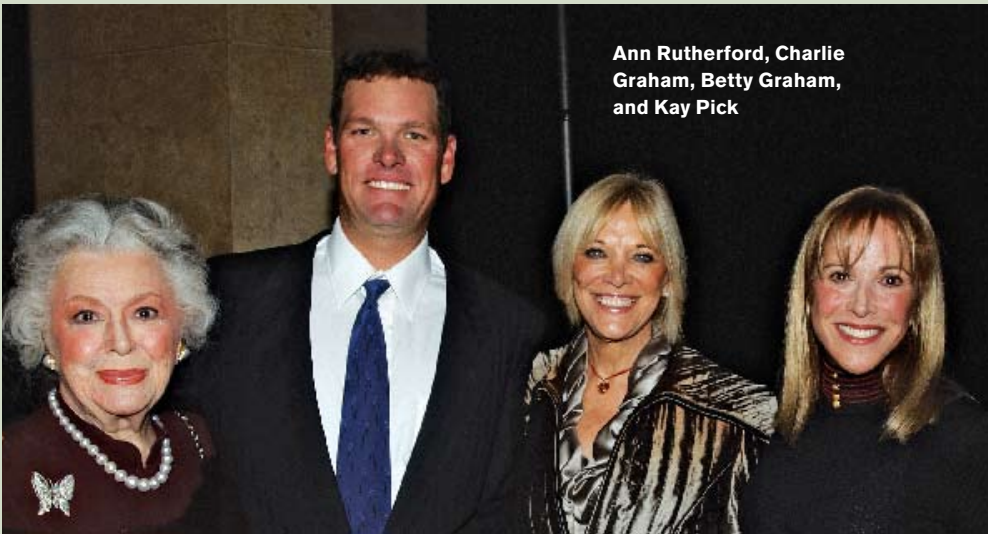
Betty Graham sits with a picture of her mentor, Johnny Carson



Jess Separa of Equity Title, Betty Graham and John Winther, President of CLAW



Donald Trump, Betty Graham, Tom Gilmore, and Ronna Brand



Ann Rutherford, Charlie Graham, Betty Graham, and Kay Pick



Steve Manavi, Betty Graham, and Bob Foster

agents' needs, going so far as to get the company involved in charities the agents care about.

Such innovative tactics result in happy agents, which result in happy clients and increased sales. But it takes more than being available and personable to ensure success. Lucky for her, she has the Coldwell Banker brand behind her, making failure almost an impossibility. Coldwell Banker was founded in 1906 in San Francisco, and opened their first Los Angeles-based office in 1924, and was operating seven offices in Southern California by 1937. Today, Coldwell Banker holds on to the majority share of the luxury market thanks to the resources afforded to them by their history, experience, and earned capital. "What start-up company can afford to put \$45 million into a technology strategy and then maintain it year after year?" she asks, rhetorically, obviously. It would be nearly impossible for any new company to even begin to compete with the likes of Coldwell Banker, and Graham certainly has cashed in on this fact.

With such a successful history, clients flock to her offices. "The clients are interested in [working with] an agent who has substance," she puts forth, and substance Graham has. "Clients are interested in an agent who has a proven track record, and [are interested in working with] a company that has proved itself. Coldwell Banker is a 100-year-old company, and one might think that

would make us stodgy and traditional, but that is not true. We're a very elegant company and a very progressive company."

The results speak for themselves. In the past 12 months, Coldwell Banker's top 10 sales have all garnered more than \$24 million, a first in the company's illustrious history. With almost two out of every three homes sold in Southern California coming from Coldwell Banker's extensive portfolio of upscale homes, Graham is quick to, once again, pass the credit. "The agents are the people who drive the business," she says. "They spend their time, their money, and their energy never knowing if they are going to [sell the property and] get paid." But they consistently do so, thanks to her outstanding leadership skills, which have been honored repeatedly (Graham was given the Beverly Hills Chamber's Women of Achievement Award in 1999 and the President's Award in 2000), these realtors have little to worry about. Last year alone, Coldwell Banker Los Angeles sold close to \$19 billion worth of real estate.

With such a successful brand standing behind her every step of the way, and a team of 3,000 successful agents spread amongst 44 sales offices, Graham is able to focus on ensuring that Coldwell Banker Los Angeles continues to dominate the luxury market. Thanks to her Southern charm and unfailing loyalty to her agents (and to the breathtaking properties they represent), Coldwell Banker is well on the way to becoming the top luxury real estate agency in history. 🏡