

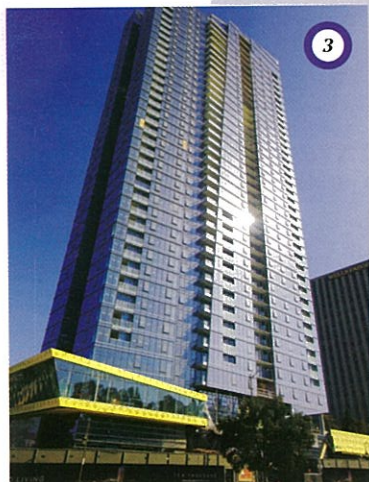
# After the Marriage Stories, L.A.'s Go-To Divorce Buildings

Noah Baumbach's Oscar-nominated film strikes a nerve among brokers and family lawyers, who reveal the property games that separating spouses play

By Peter Kiefer

For **Michael and Jennifer Winestone**, a Los Angeles couple uniquely steeped in the entwined worlds of real estate and divorce proceedings, watching **Noah Baumbach's** *Marriage Story* just once was never really an option. "The second time we watched it, we really studied it," says Michael, a Compass real estate agent who has carved out a niche as one of L.A.'s go-to realtors for divorce listings. "Basically, I'm surrounded by divorce," he says. His wife, Jennifer, is a family law attorney and mediator who teaches at USC Gould Law School. She was so struck by the film about a collapsing relationship that she's incorporated it into her syllabus.

In real estate, particularly Los Angeles, divorce is good business: Last year, Michael cleared \$20 million in sales volume, 80 percent of which he estimates came via referrals from his sprawling network of divorce attorneys who regularly enlist him to help sell homes at the center of dissolving marriages.



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The national divorce industry is worth \$50 billion each year, according to estimates, and a sizable chunk of that figure is tied to real estate. And while the divorce rate in the U.S. has dropped over the past decade, there is scant evidence that it has slowed within the entertainment industry (the divorce rate among star actors has traditionally been nearly twice the national average), which has allowed for a divorce-related cottage industry to flourish.



Winestone

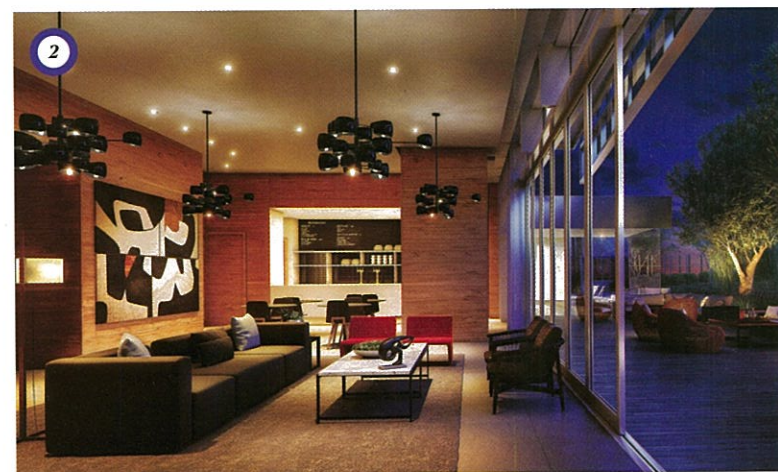
Against the backdrop of L.A.'s current real estate boom, *THR* asked prominent family attorneys, mediators and brokers about the real estate aspect of divorce, including where couples tend to live after a split and how property can be used as peace offerings in best-case scenarios or as bludgeons in the worst.

All the experts agree that it's generally better for one person to move out during divorce proceedings and avoid "nesting," which is when a couple with children remains for a period of time under the same roof. "It's more complicated. It often ends in problems," says attorney **Kristina Royce**, a partner at Blank Rome. While historically husbands have moved out, in recent years, a growing number of women find new addresses.

Undergirding all the various housing scenarios is the liquidity of one or both of the spouses. High-profile attorney **Laura Wasser** (see sidebar, page 86), whose clients have included **Ryan**



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1 The pool at The Resort, the activity club at Playa Vista's residential complex, which brokers say is popular with people who are getting divorced.  
2 A lounge at the luxury tower Ten Thousand in Century City.  
3 Exterior of the Ten Thousand. "A ton of my clients have gone there," says a divorce attorney.

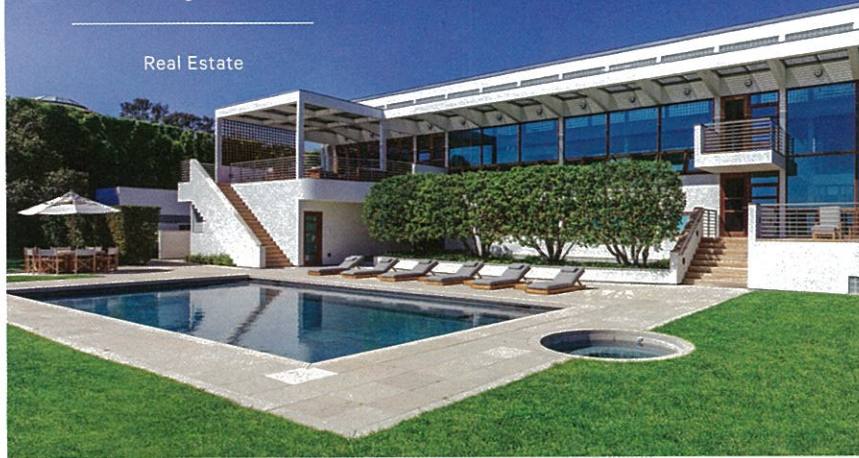
**Reynolds, Heidi Klum and Johnny Depp**, says she's seen clients work out all sorts of custody-related living arrangements. "A lot of people are nesting, and the kids are staying in the house and the parents rotate in and out based on the custody agreement. Where the parents go depends on the amount of money they have. Either one person lives in the guest house, or they each get their own separate place, or they have one place they both share when they aren't in the main house." Adds divorce attorney **Joe Mannis** of Hersh Mannis, "I've seen people buy houses next door to each other and knock down the fence so their kids could go back and forth. I wouldn't recommend it because it only works until someone else is in one of their lives."

In L.A., a few luxury rental buildings seem to attract high-net-worth divorcees. Royce says one of the most popular landing

spots for a wealthy divorced man or woman is the 283-unit, 40-story Ten Thousand building at 10000 Santa Monica Boulevard in Century City. "A ton of my clients have gone there," says Royce, who notes how the building's over-the-top amenities — which include robot butlers, a Rolls-Royce valet service, a massive gym and a game room with a wet bar — attract people eager for wrap-around services and enough common space to allow for some mingling. Current residents include **Demi Lovato** and recently indicted attorney **Michael Avenatti**, who is locked in a very public divorce battle with former wife **Lisa Storie-Avenatti**. Rents at Ten Thousand start at \$10,000 a month and go up to \$65,000 for the terraced penthouse. Says Royce: "They have a pool, tennis court and an area where kids can run around. But it's definitely not cheap."

## Style

Real Estate



Above: The former residence in Malibu of Ron and Kelly Meyer, which sold for \$100 million last year after the couple separated. Left: An exterior of the resident-only club called The Resort at Playa Vista.

Around the corner from there is the Wilshire Corridor, which Mannis says remains desirable for an older set (50-plus) of divorcés. Coincidentally, three of his clients, though, have ended up on Malibu's Zuma Road in the past year.

While Marina del Rey has had a reputation as a desirable ZIP code for divorcés since the 1970s, that torch has been passed to the sprawling Playa Vista complex nearby. Also home to Google's new offices in the Spruce Goose Hangar, the development includes 6,046 homes, the most upscale of which run in the \$2 million to \$3 million range. Los Angeles Lakers owner **Jeanie Buss**, who was briefly married to volleyball player **Steve Timmons** and later was engaged to former Lakers coach **Phil Jackson** before they announced they were splitting, owns two units at Playa Vista.

**Alison Girard**, director of marketing at Brookfield Residential, which has built many of the luxury homes at Playa Vista, says it offers extensive resident programming — wine and running clubs, yoga classes, dog parks and open-air concerts — that appeals to people eyeing their next chapter.

"If you're looking for that connection and engagement, it's a really great place," says Girard.

Over Mannis' 40-year career, he's worked with everyone from **Dennis Hopper** to **Kirk Kerkorian**, and by now, nothing surprises him. He often sees cases of spouses retaliating in any way possible. Southern California geography can be a useful weapon. He recalls the ex-wife of one of his clients moving from Calabasas to Manhattan Beach simply to impose a brutal commute on his client. For his part, Winestone says he regularly turns down 20 to 30 percent of the listings he's offered because he can tell from one consultation whether the couple is in the headspace required to actually sell the house — there are too



Buss



Avenatti

many ways that one or both can jam up the sale process.

Mannis says almost all second marriages involve prenups, and they usually include provisions that, in the event of dissolution, one person has to either move to a second house or vacate the primary home in a set period of time or risk loss of financial support. He does, however, fondly recall one client who bought a second house in the flats of Beverly Hills and agreed to never impose a custody agreement. Instead, the ex-couple let their three sons come and go at both houses for years with no set parameters. "It was a nice thing to see," he says, "but it takes people who can put aside their anger and grievances." **TVTR**

## OFFICE SPACE

### Hollywood's Divorce Lawyer Inspiration: 'Are You Laura Dern?'

Celebrity family-law attorney Laura Wasser sees the fashion and design similarities between her and the actress' Oscar-nominated character

By Ashley Cullins

Maybe it was the similar Christian Louboutin pumps or the posh Century City office. But almost immediately after *Marriage Story* was released, celebrity divorce lawyer **Laura Wasser** of Wasser, Cooperman and Mandles was flooded with calls and emails from people who noticed likenesses to **Laura Dern's** take-no-prisoners divorce lawyer character, which garnered her an Oscar nom. "People were asking, 'Are you Laura Dern?'" recalls Wasser.

The similarities were not by chance. Wasser represented *Marriage Story* director **Noah Baumbach** in his 2010 divorce from actress **Jennifer Jason Leigh**, so he had seen the lawyer in action. And, a few years later, Wasser and Baumbach each had a son enrolled at the same Los Angeles private school. The director approached Wasser to see if his production designer could scout her Century City law offices, and he ended up shooting in the building as well.

Wasser also represented Dern in her 2013 divorce from **Ben Harper**. Before *Marriage Story* came out, the lawyer says the actress gave her a heads up about the resemblances, cautioning that she shouldn't take the characterization personally as it was an amalgamation of a few family lawyers. "She's disingenuous and she's aggressive," is how Wasser describes Dern in the film.

She notes that before the onscreen split of Nicole and Charlie Barber (**Scarlett Johansson** and **Adam Driver**) got ugly, the pair hadn't wanted to use lawyers — and that's something Wasser encourages. "My entire career is based on problem solving, not crushing my opponent. One of the reasons I created an online dispute resolution tool, 'It's Over Easy,' is to make it easier for people to be masters of their own destiny rather than bankrupting themselves at the hands of attorneys who make money from prolonged conflict."

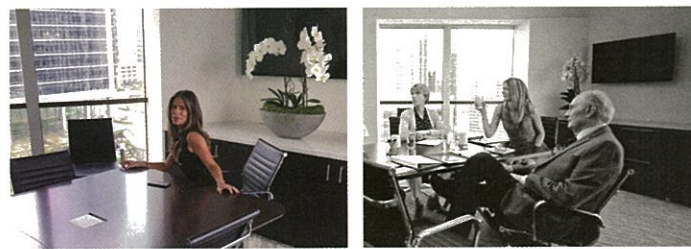
## Work Look



Laura Dern (above) and Laura Wasser's look-alike wardrobes, which included Louboutins. Says Wasser, "I can't recall popping off [my heels] to sit on the couch and snuggle with a client [as Dern does], but those red bottoms did feel like home."

## Conference Room

*Marriage Story* shot scenes (including one, right, with Scarlett Johansson, Dern and Alan Alda) in the Century City building where Wasser's offices are located, in a nearly identical conference room on a higher floor (left). Note the large white orchid in both spaces.



## Behind the Desk

To create Dern's office (right), the film's set designer, Jade Healy, put in touches that resembled the look of Wasser's space (left), down to the pair of lamps with rectangular white shades, a long credenza and (not shown) Diptyque Baies candles on a side table.

