

Career highlights

Former make-up artist enjoying first blush of real estate success

By MAGGIE HAWRYLUK

Former make-up artist Melanie L. Swanson has found a new highlight in her life — working as a real estate agent for Century 21 NY Metro.

She's traded a job making some of the world's most beautiful people just drop dead gorgeous to sell the city's wares to home buyers across the globe, all the while achieving a goal to work for the United Nations — well, almost.

Century 21 has offices in 45 countries around the globe and Swanson gets the chance to broker for them all. "My childhood dream was to work at the United Nations," said Swanson. "Being part of a multicultural brand like Century 21 is the closest I'll come to the UN."

Swanson's early pursuit of a UN career saw her flourish in a plethora of jobs that involved working with stars from around the world. She's done make-up for everyone from Budapest-born designer Adrienne Vittadini to super models who flock from all corners to New York Fashion Week.

But her segue into real estate was born in beauty, according to Swanson, who grew up in New York, the daughter of a chandelier-maker and home decorator.

Her father would often take her along to deliver the spectacular lights he created and, said Swanson, she had her mother's talents when it came to



MELANIE L. SWANSON

decorating. "I redecorated the bedroom I shared with my sister so many times over the years," she laughed.

She was recognized for her innate talent of understanding colors and blending shades more than 20 years ago when she attended a casting call for movie extras and a member of the crew commented on her makeup skills. The comment prompted Swanson to take her hobby seriously and transform it into a career.

"I was always drawing and doing hairstyles since I was 5, so it was in my blood," she said.

She got her start at a small modeling agency where she was not only responsible for makeup, but also book-keeping and office work. But during a time when most would be discouraged, working at an agency with a small budget and minimal supplies, Swanson flour-

ished.

"I became an expert at custom blending because they had such a small budget. It became my forte over the years."

Swanson said she originally honed her expert skills on her own skin, blending the perfect shade and keeping her face natural-looking. As a teen, she struggled with problem skin and learned first-hand how to cover flaws and accentuate assets.

She went onto work at cosmetics counters of such high-end brands as Bobbi Brown and Laura Mercier in Manhattan's major department stores and developed a thriving career as a freelance artist working for VH1, MTV, CBS, Fashion Week and clients in the music industry.

Most notably, Swanson has beautified the faces of Beyonce's backup dancers and a musical group Whitney Houston was working on launching.

And although she generally likes to be behind the scenes, Swanson has also been featured as a guest on the *Queen Latifah Show* three times. "I've loved having the opportunity to work with Queen Latifah and

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see how well she's doing now."

Though Swanson said she's never been star struck or intimidated by her high profile clients — she's done makeup for Tatum O'Neal and Roberta Flack, and has sold supplies to Natalie Cole — she recalled being particularly excited about meeting one client.

"I love Adrienne Vittadini," she said. "I was so excited to tell her that I've had a skirt of hers for 15 years that I still live in, and is such great quality."

But after years of seeing the interiors of some of her clients' luxurious homes, and missing the chance to have some time to herself, Swanson was looking



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for a change. "I definitely found my way back to real estate," she said. "Makeup interrupted — we might add — but I was looking to combine the two."

So while continuing to work fulltime as a makeup artist, she got her feet wet in the real estate business.

Though she was thrilled with her new adventure, Swanson admitted that the change didn't come easily.

"It was more painful than open heart surgery without anesthesia," she joked. "The first year was like running on a hamster wheel."

But Swanson persevered, joining Century 21 in November of 2006 from another Manhattan-based firm, deciding that, at the very least, she'd learn from the experience. And she's more than just learning, she's thriving. "2008 is 'the start of a banner year,'" she said.

Swanson has furthered her education in the field by recently completing courses in interior design from Parsons, which have helped her in advising clients on effective ways to stage their apartments.

And while she is still prepared to meet a client for a makeup session at the drop of a dime (Swanson has a large makeup case in her office), she looks forward to further making her mark in real estate.

"I love being trusted and developing relationships with clients that last longer than makeup sessions that end off at the end of the night."



Swanson has worked with some of the biggest names in the business, from left, Tatum O'Neal, Roberta Flack and Natalie Cole.