



The tiles in the master bathroom are imported Austrian glass.

pure gold



STAFF PHOTOS BY SHAWN ROCCO

Luxury home specialist Desiree Goldman finds her niche in high-end real estate market.

Desiree Goldman, a Realtor with Prudential Carolinas Realty, was the first certified luxury home marketing specialist in the Chapel Hill area

BY MARK DEREWICZ
CORRESPONDENT

Not every teenager gets hands-on training at a yacht brokerage, an art gallery and a consulting and seminar business. Few teenagers would want to.

But because her family needed her, Desiree Goldman had to learn the value of hard work out of necessity during her teen years in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Couple life experience with luxury items like art and yachts, and it is easy to see how Goldman wound up selling million-dollar homes in Chapel Hill's booming market.

"My father was an excellent manager and knew how to get people to perform," she said. "He was a perfectionist, and there was no choice but to get the job done. ... It was painful and hard, but it was the best training you could get."

In 1996, she moved to Carrboro and soon decided her work history translated well into real estate. Since she understood what it took to sell a yacht, she chose the luxury home market.

Goldman, a broker for Prudential Carolinas Realty, was the first of three certified luxury home marketing specialists in the Chapel Hill area, which means she only sells homes in the top 10 percent of the market (valued at \$800,000 or more). She received certification from the Institute for Luxury Home Marketing, a Dallas-based firm that conducts training sessions for real estate agents around the world. The institute has more than 2,500 members on four continents.

To be certified, agents must attend a two-day training program and sell two upper-tier listings in a 12-month period.

It costs \$495 for a training session, which includes a one-year membership. Annual membership dues are \$150. Member benefits include training, a personal listing on The Wall Street



The master bathroom offers a rain shower feature in a house in Cross Creek.

Journal's Real Estate Web site, access to available research on the luxury market, including affluent buyers and sellers, a free subscription to the on-line Luxury Home Marketing Magazine and advertisement discounts in major luxury home publications.

"The training was an affirmation," said Goldman, who had been selling luxury homes for five years before joining the institute in 2004.

The market in Chapel Hill for high-end houses has picked up in recent years. In 2004, 50 houses valued at more than \$800,000 were sold in Chapel Hill. Thirty-one have been sold this year, with 16 contracts pending. Statistics do not include luxury town homes, a growing market or homes sold

by the homeowner.

The luxury home certification designation has not yet been endorsed by the National Association of Realtors, which endorses such designations as GRI (Graduate Realtor Institute) for Realtors with at least 90 hours of classroom education on various topics.

"There are lots of designations available out there from companies that create them, not that this isn't a good one," said Myra Zollinger, president of the N.C. Educational Foundation. "Many of the larger real estate firms have training available and luxury home designations."

Goldman has one of those, too — she's a Prudential fine home specialist.

"If I believe in knowing or learning something, then I'll find out about it," she said.

When Goldman entered the real estate business in 1998, she delved into national trends in home building and learned the need to go beyond industry standards when building such expensive homes.

"My clients are business people," she said. "They don't need a friend; they need a level of competence. I have to take clients through the entire process from start to finish, including surveys, home inspection, attorney fees, everything."

William and Betty Yount called Goldman when they decided to sell their Franklin Hills home.

"She's a real hard worker," Betty Yount said. "She's energetic, enthusiastic and she delivers. You can count on her to do what she says she'll do."

Goldman said that straight-up honesty has served her better than just selling a bunch of houses.

"I know what I'm good at and what I'm not," she said. "All the brochures, ads, graphic designing and

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PURE GOLD

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web stuff I have a graphic designer take care of. I can't stand that stuff so I outsource it."

She also said that past experience has served her better than any certification process. At age 14, she learned about contracts while working as a receptionist for her father's yacht brokerage. At age 16, she took over the role of mother for her younger siblings because her mother had died of cancer. A year later, her stepmother died in a car accident. During her junior year, she framed paintings, did inventory and generally worked behind the scenes at her father's art gallery. Once, while her father ran an errand, Goldman greeted a buyer and sold a painting before her father returned.

"That began my move to salesperson," she said. "I loved art and spent a lot of time learning about different artists. I learned that I love selling something I'm excited about."

Her expertise, enthusiasm and income became so indispensable to the family that her father wouldn't let her attend college. She eventually received a bachelor's degree in business administration.

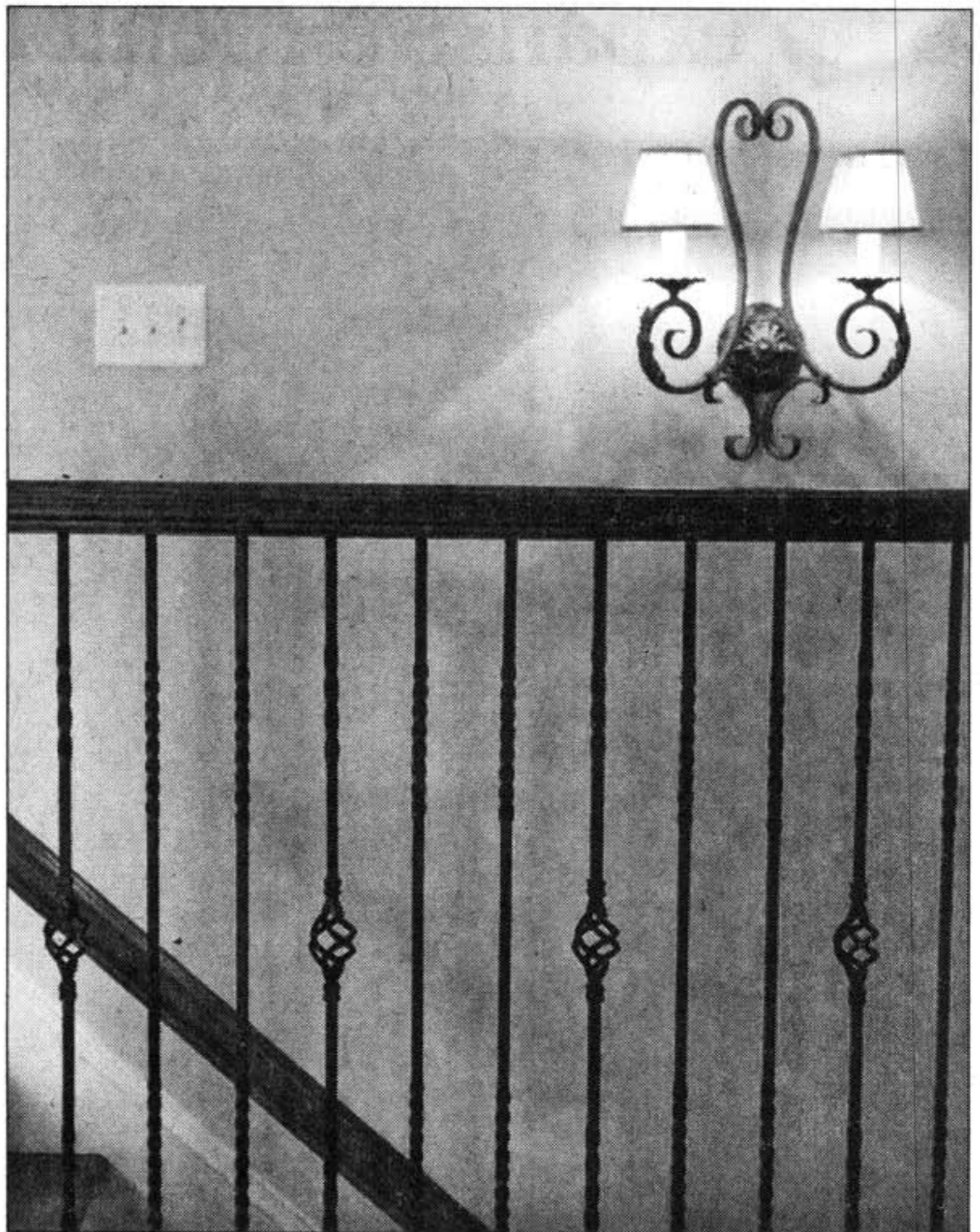
"I found it quite boring, and realized I was learning more at work than at school," she said.

Goldman began scheduling and planning seminars for her father. She was at a consulting seminar in Santa Cruz, Calif., when she met her future husband, Stan, who ran a consulting business in Oakland. The two were married and lived in the Bay Area, where they helped manage projects for Bay Area companies before moving to Carrboro.

Working with her father and earning a second-degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do have helped prepare Goldman for her work with sometimes difficult clients.

"This clientele demands to be taken care of," she said. "And I'm committed to excellence. So I actually like working things out. Most people don't like conflicts or problems, but I think they make things interesting instead of doing the same thing over and over."

Her current project involves marketing and selling five homes under construction at Cross Creek, a new



STAFF PHOTO BY SHAWN ROCCO

Ornamental sconces light the way from the second floor to the third floor bonus room in a house in Cross Creek.

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Realtor

17-home development off Weaver Dairy Road. All houses, except four set aside due to Chapel Hill's affordable housing ordinance, are priced above \$800,000. Two of the five on Goldman's watch have been sold. All five are being built by Chapel Hill builder Jim Melville.

Goldman and Melville share a common vision that high-end real estate is

about more than square footage, location or even top-of-the-line kitchen ware.

"Desiree knows the importance of going to that extra level, using better materials 20 to 30 percent past requirements," said Melville, who has built homes in the area for 21 years. "And I have to sleep at night. I want to drive past these places in 10 years and be proud to say 'I built that.'"