

Donna Evers

The Renaissance Touch

At first glance, one would assume Donna Evers is a writer and academic scholar. With a Masters in English, she is currently conducting a private study of Earnest Hemingway's life and works while continuing to act as an avid contributor to *Washington Life Magazine* and *The Georgetown*. She has also begun to consider compiling her material into a book that will examine the history of Washington, D.C. from a unique angle.

On second thought, perhaps she is instead a historian by trade. She has, after all, given many talks on the subject of Washington history and continues to receive invitations to do so. In our attempts to label Ms. Evers, however, our efforts are further confounded by the fact that she and her husband own Twin Oaks Tavern Winery in Bluemont, Virginia, and have just recently begun to bottle and sell their own wine.

With proficiencies that span such a wide range of whimsical categories, augmented by the fact that she is also a painter who loves to spend time in the Paris apartment she shares with her husband, one would assume that Donna's career lies somewhere within the realm of right-brained partialities—a profession that is predominantly intuitive, artistic, and creative. How surprising, then, to discover that she is in fact the proud founder and owner of Evers & Co. Real Estate Inc., a group of eighty agents committed to excellence in the sale of real estate in the D.C. Metro area.

"Real estate pricing is not a science," says Donna of her industry. "You need all the input you can get to do it." In dealing with real people and their most intimate environment—the home—her inclinations in the more creative aspects of life set her boutique-style firm apart from its competition in ways that are as natural as they are compelling. As such, when Donna walks into a room, she doesn't just see a piece of property—she

sees stories, history, art, and potential, which all contribute to her ability to match the right homes with the right people.

Evers & Co. was founded in 1985 in Chevy Chase, in Northwest Washington, D.C., and has remained an independent entity ever since. "Washington is a thinking person's city filled with people that truly reflect on their consumer choices," Donna observes. "There's a lot of competition in this region, but people here are not necessarily going to fall for a franchise name. They're very discerning and want to deal with someone who's going to be answerable to them." That's exactly the kind of accountability and innovation Donna has ingrained in her business, and its success reflects this effort. Accomplishing \$310 million in sales last year, Evers and Co. is on track to increase that number in 2010.



Donna had been an agent for ten years prior to opening her company's doors, and her experience lent her sufficient ammunition to cope with the rollercoaster that ensued. Evers & Co. enjoyed the boom market that lasted from its inception until 1989, when a crash in 1990 heralded eight years of poor market conditions. The climate finally leveled out in 1998, allowing the company to gain ground and hit another peak in 2005. "We're very subject to business cycles, so we've got to be prepared for that," says Donna. Riding the waves and taking things as they came, she decided to grow the business in 2005—then a company of thirty-five agents. The expansion initiative wasn't implemented until 2006, when they opened a second office downtown. This became their third office in addition to their locations in Chevy Chase and Bluemont, Virginia, which had opened in 1988. "You have to watch what's going on in the industry and strategize for how you're going to maximize success through that," she reflects now.

Donna first became a real estate agent because of her natural affinity with houses, architecture, and renovations. After marrying in 1963, she and her husband began purchasing homes in great locations and fixing them up. To date, they have redone twenty-three properties, two of which are in Europe. The pair began renovating and reselling houses because they moved around so much when they were younger, so it worked out well that something she did for fun would sometimes turn out to be profitable as well.

As an agent, Donna felt as though her skills improved every year. An agent is, after all, an entrepreneur at heart, as they're required to grow their business and spread their own word. Taking these requirements, Donna used her own natural inclinations and skills to make a good career great. With an eye and ear for aesthetic charm, historical significance, and high quality, finding the right homes for the right clients was second nature for her. "Figuring out how to market a piece of property so it will sell is a creative challenge, and it's wonderful to be able to help people solve their problems with your skill and expertise," Donna explains. "It's what I liked most about being an agent."

Though her broad spectrum of interests is truly unique, she is far from alone in her creativity at Evers & Co. "The thing about truly creative people is that they aren't stingy with their ideas," she says. "They share freely because there's always more where that came from. Our agents are smart, creative, outgoing, and always out there learning new things." The company is thus a highly collaborative atmosphere, engaging in weekly pricing exercises in which people share a broad consensus of views on how to maximize the price and stability of a property. "We all help each other. We're like one big family," Donna says. "I've aimed to engender a great, friendly, cooperative atmosphere from day one."

This strong emphasis on community and creativity perhaps stems from her childhood growing up in Hermansville, Michigan, a close-knit town of only 530 people. "It was Earnest Hemingway country," she remembers. One of her schoolteachers set up a small one-room library in the basement of the community building where the town's basketball games were held, and she devoured books voraciously. At age ten, she moved to a town of two thousand, which seemed

mammoth in comparison.

Donna received her undergraduate degree at the University of Michigan and then moved to California to teach school. While there, she met and married her husband, Bob, and pursued her Masters degree at the University of California at Irvine between the births of her first and second children. She then took an eight-year hiatus from her career while raising her young family but decided to get her real estate license after her third child, John, started first grade. After moving to the DC metro area, her husband was always very supportive of her career and business. In fact, they were always somewhat like accomplices in the process. He had done work in small business consulting while in California and worked for Gerald Ford followed by the Counsel for International Economic Policy after coming to Washington, but he was never too busy to maintain a lets-do-it attitude when it came to purchasing, renovating, and moving on.

With this perpetual, almost ritualistic flux, one might think that Donna would seek stability through having a long-term plan. Aside from having early revenue goals, however, she largely abstains from such practices. Instead, her philosophy is of a more reactive and immediate nature. "If you're always thinking and always looking, you will know what to do when the time comes to make a big change," she explains. Her spontaneous personality compels her to seize opportunities when she sees them, which stands in considerable contrast to the nature of her husband, who is more mathematical and systematic in his planning. Though she values his opinion, she generally sticks to her own philosophies in running Evers & Co. "I make decisions very quickly, but I take into account how people will react before I do so. I don't mess around," she says, reflecting on her consensus style of management.

If Donna were to advise a young entrepreneur today, her most urgent instruction would be to take action. "Figure out what you want to do and go do it, for heaven's sakes!" she says. "People waste their whole lives worrying that it might rain tomorrow and they don't do all the things they might want to do." According to Donna, planning ahead is almost detrimental in the fact that one can start to worry about all the things that might go wrong instead of embracing the momentum of the present. "You really can't

worry about it, just do it!" she emphasizes. It is precisely this attitude that has allowed Donna to pursue such a vast array of interests, attaining excellence in a variety of fields and using her well-rounded nature to inform her work.

When considering herself in the context of contemporary society, however, Donna sees herself as a departure from the norm. "This is not a time for Renaissance people," she comments somewhat wistfully. "This is a time where people respect specialization, when one person can do a particular thing that nobody else can do. I am not that." A better conceptualization, rather, is that she is not *only* that. As a woman business owner poised at the helm of an extremely successful real estate firm serving the nation's capital and surrounding areas, she has certainly mastered one thing with a firm hand. What makes Donna's story so compelling is that she made the time to embrace other aspects of life as well, viewing the world not as a compartmentalized building but as an open plain. She dared to be a Renaissance woman in an age where such specimens are

growing few and far between, and the choice has enriched both her business and her life, building an expertise in her industry that is all her own and leaving no room unexplored.

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President and founder of Bernhardt Wealth Management and author of Profiles in Success: Inspiration from Executive Leaders in the Washington D.C. Area, Gordon provides financial planning and wealth management services to affluent individuals, families and business-owners throughout the Washington, DC area. Since establishing his firm in 1994, he and his team have been focused on providing high-quality service and independent financial advice to help clients make informed decisions about their money. For more information, visit www.BernhardtWealth.com and [Gordon's Blog](#).

