



Tag, she's it

Associate District Director of PropNex's Luxury Team, Stella Thio, a former stockbroker and civil servant, shares what it's like to be an award-winning tagger for high-end developments

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When developers have a new luxury property to promote, they mobilise expert taggers like Stella Thio to work their magic at showflat viewings. A treasure trove of information, taggers are the voice of the developer who can advise home buyers, investors and real estate agents on everything to do with that property.

"It is impossible for agents to know everything. As taggers, it's our job to educate and orientate them about the property — not just on the metrics, location and price, but also architectural aspects such as materials and fittings, and market dynamics. I will also be the one to handle objections and any questions that you may have, and basically try to close the deal on behalf of my colleagues," explains Thio.

Although she does not get to enjoy the commission, Thio receives a tagger fee which is typically 10% of what the closing agent receives. Not much by comparison, but as a senior member of PropNex's Luxury Team and Project Chief for over 10 luxury developments in Singapore, Thio receives fees from project sales, as well as from overriding her team of over 20 producers. "My team may be relatively small, but they are very productive as shown in their sales performance. I train them on a regular basis," she shares.

Unlike most taggers who typically handle a dozen or less developments at a time, Thio juggles about 40 projects, some of which she is not the project chief of. Many projects under her purview as a project chief have also been successfully sold out, such as Martin Modern and South Beach Residences.

To her credit, Thio has maintained top spot as PropNex's Champion Lux Tagger for three years straight since the inaugural awards in 2019. In addition, she achieved PropNex Millionaire status in 2020 and 2021 where her own commissions hit the million-dollar mark. "Hopefully, this year, I can get another millionaire award and then I'm happy to retire from tagging!" she quips.

She may be pushing 60, but Thio shows no signs of stopping as her 12-year run with PropNex is only at its precipice. She has worked with several large developers who respect her wisdom and knowledge — amassed from over a decade as a former senior dealing director for Singapore's largest stockbroking firm — plus her keen understanding of property market dynamics and macroeconomics, both local and global. More than that, they find Thio's calm composure and sage-like disposition essential when dealing with high-net-worth clients.

Specialising in high-end luxury properties, Thio not only has in-depth knowledge of past and present developments, but also possesses deep insights into market performance when it comes to investment opportunities in Singapore. Other than assisting her clients to re-assess their portfolio, Thio also provides consultation on their plans for wealth accumulation through real estate, as part of her overall service.

Thio is also the chairwoman for PropNex's newly-formed "union" called the RES (Real Estate Salespersons) Chapter, where she has been tasked to work closely with SISEU (Singapore Industrial and Services Employees' Union) to discuss ways to protect agents against unfair practices.

In this interview, Thio shares her colourful rise to success.

How did you jump from stockbroking to real estate?

I graduated from NUS (the National University of Singapore) with a degree in Economics and Statistics, so stockbroking seemed the natural progression for me. I was making good money with still enough time to raise a family of three children, but when the industry started to see a lot of changes and commissions were drastically reduced, I was ready to leave that life for something less stressful.

I chose real estate because I enjoy commission-based work and it gives me work-life balance. There must be good mileage in whatever I spend my time on. I personally love buying and selling properties. I purchased my first home — a unit at Eastern Lagoon II — at 22 with all the money I earned from tutoring O- and A-level students in English, Maths and Economics. We bought a three-bedroom unit for \$325,000 in 1986, but it's probably worth \$2 million now.

Was it an easy transition for you?

Although I was very new to real estate, I am pretty good with charts, numbers and interpretation of data. How I read the information and what story I want to convey is something that gives me an edge over the rest. When I joined PropNex in 2010, I was brokering landed properties in the east, and subsequently I joined the newly-formed PropNex Luxury Team in 2015, where we manage only high-end properties. In the first month, I sold a Good Class Bungalow. To me, the luxury market is all about market knowledge and how you connect with the client ... You cannot cajole them or hard-sell; they get very turned off by that.

Can you share a memorable experience as a project chief?

The very first project we took on was in 2015 for OUE Twin Peaks, a completed project, where we scored 70% of the sales. As resale agents, our specialty was selling completed projects, but in 2017, we were given the all-new Martin Modern to manage ... We looked so out-of-body and didn't even know what we were supposed to do during the launch.

There was even a bet among the developers that we'd come in last after our joint marketing agencies. But guess what — on launch day, we sold 50% of the units! That was a historical first for us and the company, and that was when developers really sat up and noticed us.

What's next for you?

My long-term plan is to retire from tagging work to do direct client sales. And when I have more time on my hands, I hope to grow my division to over 100 people and focus on team-building. I'm proud to say that I have such a talented team of producers, including my daughter and son-in-law who together have logged in sales of close to \$900,000 last year. I hope they can let me retire at 65! **E**



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