



Karen Shunick of Kismet Construction: The new queen of construction cleans up the condos

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Karen Shunick, president of Kismet Construction, Inc. is developing a branch of her business that conforms to her passion for the industry and is meeting a growing need in New York - completing the construction work in the scores of new and converted condominium projects that have sprouted all over the five boroughs.

"The condominium is a unique construction project," said Shunick, "because the end of the job is just the beginning of a new one in many ways. After months of being 'the client,' all of a sudden the developer is thrust into the role of service provider to all of the purchasers. State law requires that the developer deliver specific items to each purchaser and those items vary widely from unit to unit. It takes a special type of firm to be able to handle the (often significant) work that remains to be completed, and keep things moving smoothly with the various trades, and keep the project budget and schedule intact, and deal pro-actively with every new unit owner. We're doing that at Kismet."

"My first experience as head of my own construction practice was in the close-out of a 30-unit condominium conversion in Tribeca. As a part of the development management team that assumed control of the project at its initial construction, I participated in the logistics of reorganizing the development, from retaining new professionals to re-filing with the attorney general's office and handling the day-to-day issues of utility payments and permits. When the developer terminated his relationship with the general contractor and needed a replacement firm to close out the project, they hired Kismet Construction. We managed the completion of the remaining base building work and handled the close out of the project for all the residential units."

Kismet Construction is a partner on the construction management team handling the completion of a 250-unit condominium building in Long Island City, where again the developer terminated its relationship with the initial contractor. The developer or sponsor's focus is to get the project to the point where it can gain the necessary approvals to allow closings of units to happen. In a condominium project, a year or more can be spent constructing a new building or rehabbing an existing one and then more time working through individual condo unit punch list items. "The typical contractor wants to build, wrap up and move on." Shunick adds, "What few developers or contractors realize is that each of the purchasers of those condominium units sees their individual apartment as his or her own particular project." Suddenly, the incomplete or sub-par components of the individual apartments that seemed minor during construction - missing cabinet hardware, out of plumb doors, faulty appliances or HVAC - become big issues for the new owners of those apartments.

Neither developers nor contractors are really equipped to deal with these concerns. This is management-intensive work. "In our current project, while recognizing our allegiance to the developer, we must personally address the concerns of over 100 individual 'clients,' with more

coming on board every week as closings proceed. The base building work is needed throughout the facility, and punch list work must be completed around residents' schedules, with full clean-up every day so people can come home and eat and sleep there, in addition to meeting with each unit owner to review the status of their work. It not only takes a lot of time and manpower, it requires an awareness of both sides of the issues, an ability to speak as a peer with the new purchasers, and the finesse to keep all parties satisfied."

Shunick also notes that not just anyone can do this work. "Working in occupied residential units requires us to be a licensed New York City Home Improvement Contractor." Shunick notes that, while general contractors are not required to be licensed for core-and-shell and commercial construction, this license is mandated for work in occupied residential buildings. Kismet Construction is also certified as a Woman-owned Business Enterprise (WBE) by both NYC and New York State, and is a member of the General Building Contractors of N.Y.

The respect Kismet is gaining in the construction industry is evident. As an industry partner of the Institute of Real Estate Management (IREM), Kismet Construction has emerged as a preferred provider of quality services to not only developers, but property managers as well. As Shunick says, "We deliver a product no one else can - a completed project! That's construction as it was meant to be. That's Kismet."

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