

# Meet Raju Chhabria, the South Bay's top real estate agent

South Bay Realtor built real estate empire

By Muhammed El-Hasan, Staff Writer

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*Raju Chhabria of Shorewood Realtors is the South Bay's most successful realtor. He is seen with the Rancho Palos Verdes home he bought, renovated and sold for 7.5 million in 2008. (Robert Casillas/Staff Photographer)*



On the November day in 1984 when he received his real estate license, Raju Chhabria walked in on a couple having sex at a house he was showing to clients.

At the next home, he encountered the "meanest lady I ever met."

Despite those early setbacks, Chhabria was still able to land his first sale that day, finding his clients the home they wanted after showing them five Harbor City properties. Chhabria sent in his clients' bid, which was accepted that night.

"I sold (a) house before midnight on my license day," Chhabria said. "Those people still live in that house."

That sale was the first of many in an extraordinary career.

Today, Chhabria is the South Bay's top real estate agent, and ranked No. 7 nationwide by the National Association of Realtors.

He achieved those distinctions with his two Shorewood Realtors offices in Palos Verdes Estates and Manhattan Beach.

Sitting at his desk in his Palos Verdes Estates office, Chhabria, 52, comes across as

modest and low-key, a soft-spoken presence in an industry marked by often hard-charging salespeople.

Yet no Realtor has a higher profile in the South Bay than Chhabria.

Some of the area's most expensive homes have a for-sale sign in front with Chhabria's photo on it. The Palos Verdes Estates resident said his average home listing is worth about \$2.5 million.

He currently has about 90 residential listings - mostly on The Hill and in the beach

cities - and about 110 commercial properties for sale.

Chhabria noted that his name alone can help land a sale.

"It has a huge impact, not only with Realtors but with the public," Chhabria said.

Longtime local Realtor Adolph James met Chhabria about a decade ago when they worked together on a transaction in Redondo Beach.

"There's something about a guy like Raju. He's extremely successful, yet he's not taken with himself," said James, who works out of another Shorewood Realtors office in Manhattan Beach. "Raju is understated. He dresses to perfection and he moves softly and silently, but he gets a lot done."

And what is Chhabria's secret?

"There's not really a secret in real estate," Chhabria said. "Your process is the same. The difference is I'm naturally a people person. I build trust instantly. My (sale) closing ratio is 99 percent."

Chhabria also cited his work ethic. He works seven days a week, interrupted by short family vacations, tennis matches twice a week and a massage each Monday morning.

For example, in his first 45 days with a real estate license, Chhabria previewed 15 properties a day, he recalled.

As a result, he sold 21 homes in his first year as an agent, a torrid pace even for industry veterans.

"I was obsessed with work. I'm still a workaholic," he said. "This is how I built my business. It's not luck."

About six months after receiving his real estate license, Chhabria hired an assistant. Less than two years later, his wife Philo left her nursing job to join him in real estate.

The Chhabrias now employ eight people.

Around 1993, Raju Chhabria added development to his resume, hiring general contractors to construct homes he later sells. He has partners with developers on other construction projects.

Despite his understanding of the local real estate market, Chhabria started his life far from the South Bay.

He was born and raised in Bangalore, earning an accounting degree from the University of Bangalore.

At about age 20, Chhabria starting working for his uncle selling fabrics wholesale, while studying law in the early mornings.

By the time Chhabria left his uncle's business five years later, he had built the company from revenue of 7 million Indian rupees to 65 million rupees. He also had earned a law degree.

By then, Chhabria had married Philo and was preparing to move to California.

In Los Angeles, he tried his hand at the import-export business, selling Indian leather items wholesale.

After striking out early, Chhabria struggled to find a career. He settled on real estate a few months later.

Today, Chhabria sits atop a growing commercial real estate empire, apart from his residential sales business.

He owns about \$30 million in commercial real estate, with a goal of amassing about \$100 million worth of commercial property in the next five to seven years.

Chhabria also is considering starting a fund to allow the public to invest in his ventures.

After years of success, Chhabria continues to raise the bar for himself.

"Anything I promise to people, I follow through with it," he said. "Persistence, persistence, persistence."

Raju Chhabria

Business: Owner of two Shorewood Realtors offices

Age: 52

Residence: Palos Verdes Estates

Family: Wife, Philo, and sons Neil and Anand

Hobbies: Tennis and travel