

“Location, Quality, Potential”

Robert Ferfecki, partner at Fine Swiss Properties, on heritage-protected and other enthusiast properties

Residence: *You broker exclusive properties, including luxury villas and castles. How do you come by such properties?*

Robert Ferfecki: Our name is our product range: We broker fine Swiss properties in all price segments, from condos to single-family homes to estates. “Fine” denotes a certain quality. We try to avoid terms like “exclusive” or “luxurious”, because those conceal two kinds of risks: firstly, these terms are mostly used only to artificially drive up prices; and secondly, they play into the hands of financial institutions, which then offer less favourable financing terms because they no longer wish to finance luxury.

How is this market segment holding up? Who is your target audience for such properties?

Stately buildings can serve a wide variety of uses: as boutique hotels, day hospitals, museums, family offices, and of course residences. The circle of potential buyers is accordingly broad. Historical buildings are a hobby for the well-off, like an antique or a work of art. Sometimes they are more in vogue, other times less so. At the moment, they are perhaps somewhat undervalued, although most of them have been situated in the utmost best locations for centuries and offer an incomparable quality of life and living. But they do require care and responsibility, and we live in an “irresponsible” age, wherein often only a quick win is valued.

management as well as family offices and consulting. During his employment with Sotheby’s as divisional director for exclusive properties, he recognised a budding paradigm shift in the real estate industry and founded the company FSP, Fine Swiss Properties. Ferfecki runs the company, with its headquarters in Herrliberg, by Zurich, along with his partner, the architect Georg R. Spoerli. (dst.)

What does it take for a successful transaction in this segment?

These properties find their way to us because there are not many brokers who can point to enough experience handling heritage-protected properties. It takes modern marketing tools, persistence, and negotiating skills in multiple languages to work with the very demanding interested parties, as well as a great deal of discretion and patience and a considerable amount of good luck.

Such exclusive clientele often has specific wishes. What kind of extravagances have you had to grant interested parties?

Extravagances are a sign of overconfidence. A few years ago, when the markets and a certain class of consumers were still too overly confident, there was practically every extravagance you could imagine. This phenomenon has transformed into an awareness of quality. Today, when in doubt, the best is considered good enough and not that which dazzles with superficial luxury.

How does one ascertain the market value of a luxury property?

Today, all price segments have become very sensitive, particularly the luxury segment. So-called enthusiast surcharges belong to the past; today, we have returned to actual values, and for the most part one is able to calculate these rather exactly. But the consulting expense has risen severely. *What qualities and characteristics do extraordinary buildings exhibit?*

Instead of just “location, location, location”, I would say: “Location, quality, potential”. The location has to be right, but so do the architectural quality and, in particular, the expansion and modification potential, so that the property can continue to maintain its value in the changing market conditions in the future.

“We try to avoid terms like exclusive or luxurious”

You are experimenting with 360-degree visualisation of the properties for sale. Why?

We feel obligated to always provide our clients with state-of-the-art marketing tools, and the spherical panorama photograph is something that has really proven its worth. But that is only the beginning of a fundamental development: In the future, the battle of real estate marketing will be decided on the Internet. For, even today, the Internet offers fantastic opportunities, and it is surprising to me how little these are used by many brokers and the extent to which our industry still relies on ideas and technologies that are clearly outdated.

What is it that makes real estate in Switzerland so desirable and expensive?

In recent years, the location argument, which had significantly driven particularly the top segment, has become lost in Switzerland: bank secrecy, lump-sum taxation in some cantons, legal uncertainties regarding primary and secondary residences and the associated increase in immigration and even emigration by very wealthy foreigners. For these reasons, the prices in the top segment have also changed markedly in many locations. *Interview: David Strohm*

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Paradigm Shift



Robert Ferfecki completed his studies in Zurich and Los Angeles. His career has led him in many directions, including private banking and asset