



# TOWARD THE TIPPING POINT

IT TAKES MORE WOMEN BEING VISIBLE IN COMMERCIAL PROPERTY TO ATTRACT OTHERS INTO WHAT HAS BEEN AN INDUSTRY TRADITIONALLY DOMINATED BY MEN. TOTAL PROPERTY TALKS TO SOME SUCCESSFUL WOMEN IN THE SECTOR ABOUT WHAT DRIVES THEM.

MOMENTUM IS BUILDING WHEN IT comes to diversity in commercial real estate.

While more and more women have flocked to roles in residential sales and management over the past several decades, the commercial sector has been slower to evolve.

The dial is shifting, with Bayleys leading the charge through some key appointments and a dedicated focus on not just recruiting more women into sales and management roles, but supporting them to success with initiatives like the networking and mentoring group BCREW (Bayleys Commercial Real Estate Women).

*Total Property* asked some of the industry's successful women about how they've found their success, the

challenges they've faced and what they love about working in the commercial real estate sector.

## PAULA BENNETT

**Bayleys national director of customer engagement and advisory**

"I wanted to work with Bayleys. I loved that New Zealand success story," Bennett says of her career choice following her retirement from national politics in 2020.

Her role with Bayleys sees her using her unique experience to work with clients - often the company's high net worth or private wealth investors - helping them navigate advisory and compliance issues or advocacy. "I love it because the people are interesting and it's about giving them that really personalised service.



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PAULA BENNETT, BAYLEYS NATIONAL  
DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER  
ENGAGEMENT AND ADVISORY

"I really love it if something gets a little bit complicated. The market has changed a lot recently, but I like that too. Change doesn't worry me. It makes you roll up your sleeves and think quite differently about how you approach things."

Bayleys has also charged Bennett with driving its vision to bring more women into its commercial division. "Bayleys has really given me a lot of scope to work in that area. In the last 18 months, we have doubled the number of women brokers we have. But it's not just about attracting them, it's about retaining them. So, we're constantly looking at ways to make this a place that women choose to come and work."

To that end Bennett has been behind the launch of BCREW, ensuring there is a network for women in the business to mentor and support each other.

"We also look at things like how we keep women connected to the business who need to take time out for family commitments, because that can look quite different in a commission-based organisation."



**"IT'S SUCH A CONFIDENCE BOOSTER NOW THAT PEOPLE RING AND ASK FOR ME SPECIFICALLY TO SELL THEIR PROPERTY."**

BHAKTI MISTRY,  
BAYLEYS WELLINGTON  
COMMERCIAL BROKER

## BHAKTI MISTRY

**Bayleys Wellington commercial broker**

When Bhakti Mistry was studying for a degree in visual communication design, she found she was much more drawn to the marketing aspects of her study, than the design elements.

After working in marketing roles for a luxury car sales brand and another real estate company, Mistry took the leap to get her real estate licence. She considered a more senior marketing role in residential but was soon drawn to the commercial sector.

"I like the fact that there is no emotive attachment in commercial sales. It's really just a numbers game, and it's about building relationships and having the confidence to go out there and work the deals."

Mistry adds that she likes the challenges of being one of only a few women in her team. "I feel like I added a different dimension to the team when I started, that the team could leverage.

"It's such a confidence booster now that people ring and ask for me specifically to sell their property."

She says seeing women succeed in commercial property is the best way to keep attracting other women into the sector. "The other reason it's increasingly important to have more women in commercial sales is that there are more and more women in every aspect of what we do, whether it's on boards, in business or among investors. It's good to have those different perspectives on both sides of a deal."

## LEONIE FREEMAN

**Property Council New Zealand chief executive**

Few people know the New Zealand real estate industry - and the value of

getting good advice - better than Leonie Freeman.

Freeman studied for a property degree on the advice of a forward-thinking school career advisor who was trying to encourage more females into male-dominated industries. That led to her first job as a property valuer in Christchurch, the first female valuer in private practice.

"That was the early days of computers being put into offices too. I could see this huge potential for property and valuing in what you could do with automating and analysing. Then the internet came in and I could really see how that could disrupt real estate."

That vision led Leonie eventually to come up with the concept of what is now realestate.co.nz. "In the early days I got laughed out of rooms and got told 'nobody will buy property this way' but then you reach the tipping point where it just becomes normal.

"I think it's taken getting a bit older to realise how people think and work, and how they react differently to new things." Being an early adopter and one of only a few women working in real estate at the start of her career has required Leonie to be resilient at times. "Sometimes you get feedback on being female but just as often you would get comments for being young and entrepreneurial, but how it affects you comes back to what your purpose is.

"If you're trying to create genuine disruptive change, that frightens some people so you have to look at the feedback you're getting and ask yourself if it is genuine feedback or someone's response to changes they don't want."



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LEONIE FREEMAN, PROPERTY  
COUNCIL NEW ZEALAND CEO





**“MY ADVICE TO OTHER WOMEN COMING INTO THE SECTOR IS JUST DON’T TAKE ANY BULLSHIT. YOU HAVE JUST AS MUCH RIGHT TO BE THERE.”**

GILL IRELAND, BAYLEYS NELSON  
COMMERCIAL BROKER

## GILL IRELAND

### **Bayleys Nelson commercial broker**

Gill Ireland “eased into” her career as a very successful commercial broker after several years in commercial property management. Before that though, her career was international and included everything from managing property for the Duke of Westminster to working in the bond markets, hedge funds and stock broking.

“With all that, the commercial sector seemed to be the natural progression for me, rather than residential. There is something new every day.”

Ireland arrived in Christchurch about 10 years ago with her son - needing to find a job and somewhere to live. With the city still largely under construction she headed north to Nelson and Bayleys.

“We just found our way. And when it came to working in property Bayleys was the strongest and best brand. For me, there was no one else to consider.”

As a newcomer to the region and commercial selling Ireland says there have been some challenges making inroads, but it is extremely satisfying to see that early hard work pay off.

“Now people come to me. It took a lot of hard work, determination and a bit of stubbornness at times to get me there, but that is a big achievement to me.

“My advice to other women coming into the sector is just don’t take any bullshit. You have just as much right to be there. Some doors might close, but you just have to move on to the next door.

“It is great to see Bayleys being so proactive about getting more women into the industry. That has really been championed by Mike Bayley and Ryan Johnson and it is paying dividends.

“I’ve seen it before when I worked at the City of London. When I started there

it was predominantly male and then women started coming in. They brought with them a whole different set of skills and they really proved themselves.”

## JEN BAIRD

### **Real Estate Institute of New Zealand (REINZ) chief executive**

Baird’s background as marketing manager for an Auckland real estate company is where she first learned the ins and outs of the sector. That knowledge and passion was reinforced during her time at Hamilton City Council as general manager, city growth, responsible for planning the long-term future of a large metropolitan city.

“My role at REINZ is a mix of those two experiences, leveraging a decade of real estate experience with the influencing and leadership skills I learned growing a city and working with politicians.

“I am committed to championing a world-class real estate profession. My goal for REINZ is that we are a high-performing team, helping to build an enduring profession. To me, this means being future-focused and helping our members understand the changes — social, technological or regulatory — that are coming our way. It means being the preferred data partner for members and delivering high-quality digital services that raise the bar for everyone. And it means supporting the learning and development across the profession.

“What I love most about real estate is the people. Anyone can get started in and be successful in real estate if they put in the hard yards. I love how upfront our members are — not shy to tell us when we need to improve, but also generous with praise when we have got it right.”

When it comes to bringing more women into the commercial property sector Baird says the advantages are a “no brainer”.



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JEN BAIRD, REINZ CEO

“Study after study shows that greater diversity equals greater innovation, growth and profitability. That alone should make this open and shut.”

## EOS LI

### **Bayleys Insights and Data analyst**

Li joined Bayleys in 2019 as part of the property services team - after graduating with a Bachelor of Property from Auckland University with the highest grades in her class and was named the Property Institute of New Zealand Student of the Year 2018.

While working for property services, Li kept up her studies in a range of topics from computer software to financial analysis. At the start of 2022, she made the move into the newly formed Data, Insights and Consulting team at Bayleys where she loves the challenge of contributing to key decisions in the business.



**“IT’S IMPORTANT TO HAVE MORE WOMEN IN ALL PARTS OF INDUSTRY, SO YOU GET DIVERSITY IN OPINIONS AND VIEWS.”**

EOS LI, BAYLEYS INSIGHTS  
AND DATA ANALYST

“As one example, earlier this year we used the GIS mapping tool to map out Bayleys’ market share listings to see which areas the company could develop a stronger presence in. We opened a new branch based on that analysis.

“Externally, we also put together market updates and analysis so people know what is happening in the market.”

Li’s interest in commercial property formed when she was working as a French interpreter for a large construction company in Algeria, after leaving her homeland China and before moving to Auckland to study.

Her next goal within Bayleys is to keep looking at ways new technology can be combined with traditional practices to create more value for the company and the industry.

“That work is really satisfying.”

She is also pleased to see more women in the commercial sector, and takes pride in shaking up some outdated attitudes towards women in technology.



A recent BCREW (Bayleys Commercial Real Estate Women) event at Bayleys House in Auckland.

“I think I am proof that women are just as good at things like technology and financial analysis, where sometimes people might have thought that’s not true. It’s important to have more women in all parts of industry, so you get diversity in opinions and views.”

## ANDREA WONG

### **Bayleys Property Services Auckland regional manager**

“Property is in my blood,” says Andrea Wong who comes from a family of real estate experts as well as architects and town planners. With a bachelor’s degree in property and a masters in planning practice under her belt, she launched her career in property management.

“You do have to be flexible and develop a bit of a thick skin. The challenge is always finding the balance between happy tenants and maximising the income for the owners.

“I do love that property management is all about dealing with people. You have to adapt to suit different clients’ expectations, as well as tenant expectations and other parties that assist in keeping properties compliant. I like being the middle person between those parties and having to quickly adapt to different personalities and expectations. No two days are the same.”

Career progression is something else Wong is proud of, particularly her move to being Auckland regional manager overseeing a team of 10.

“Bayleys is really good at supporting career progression, but it’s also good to create opportunities. When this role presented itself I approached the general manager at the time and let him know I was ready to spread my wings and tackle this exciting opportunity.”

She’s also thrilled to see more women succeeding within Bayleys. “I went to a



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ANDREA WONG,  
BAYLEYS PROPERTY SERVICES  
AUCKLAND REGIONAL MANAGER

recent women in property BCREW session and that was really inspiring to see more women in top roles.

“I think what I’d like to achieve next is to start mentoring other women to help them have a voice in this industry and have the confidence to take the next steps in their career.”

## JORDAN BROWN

### **Bayleys South Auckland commercial broker**

Brown has been a commercial broker for over three years, having started her career as an administrator for the Bayleys Central West Auckland commercial and industrial team in 2016. With a deep passion for property and a desire for professional growth, Brown made the leap to get her licence, having admired the handful of women then working in the commercial sector.

“I watched those ladies push the boundaries of an industry that was very stuck in its ways. I wanted to take on the challenge and pave the way for others like me.

“I felt the commercial and industrial sector was best suited to me and I haven’t looked back. It can be tough at times but I push passed it because I love what I do.”

Brown says her biggest challenge has been navigating the rapidly changing market since she started as a broker, just a year before COVID-19 upended everything.

“I’ve had to reflect and re-evaluate which has been challenging, but I take pride in providing comfort and finding answers despite what we go through. If I can get through this, I can get through it all.

“My goal is to be a trusted advisor in Central Auckland, build my market knowledge and continue to create a strong rapport with clients and networks within the property sector.”



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