

Must Reads: Unmasking one of celebrity real estate's biggest mysteries: Who is behind Yolanda's Little Black Book?

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For years, Yolanda's Little Black Book has been one of the biggest mysteries in Los Angeles luxury real estate circles.

By gleefully revealing tightly guarded details of the latest multimillion-dollar celebrity housing transactions, the gossip anonymous blog has wreaked havoc among the city's elite real estate agents and their wealthy clients. But who is behind the website, whose writer goes by such aliases as Yolanda Yakketyyak, the Real Estate Yenta and Donald Frump?

"Does it bother us as agents? It certainly does," said real estate broker Marc Shevin, who has had nearly a dozen deals aired on the blog. "We would like to know who is providing this information to Yolanda's Little Black Book, as we would like it to stop."

There has been rampant speculation about Yolanda's identity. Is it an escrow manager? A real estate agent? The head of a brokerage?

Yolanda herself isn't saying.

"Underneath it all," according to the website, "Yolanda is a kind and gentle lass who would love nothing more than to pet flowers and sniff puppies all day."

The identity of the blog's author is more than just an idle guessing game for real estate insiders. Many of Yolanda's posts were published before a transaction had closed, and included personal information on the parties involved, the final sale price and other tidbits. Such details are typically kept under wraps at that time and available only to those closest to the deal, indicating a potential leaker from within a real estate brokerage.

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MARC SHEVIN, REAL ESTATE BROKER

Many have suspected Mark David Voss, who writes Variety's Dirt Column under the shortened byline Mark David. They cite similar colorful writing styles and frequent cross-linking, and note that Yolanda has long been credited by Voss as an anonymous source: Since 2012, Voss has referenced Yolanda in nearly 300 stories.

But digital clues point to someone else being involved.

A Times record search in May into the owner of yolandaslittleblackbook.com revealed Glendora resident Jim McClain as the registrant and administrator. The mailing address used to register the site matched that of a salesperson license for James Nathaniel McClain IV, according to records obtained through the California Department of Real Estate. The address and phone number used to register the website also matched McClain's voter registration record.

News of a sale involving the Bel-Air home of late Paramount chief Brad Grey first appeared on Yolanda's Little Black Book about a month before the sale closed.
(Berlyn Photography)

After The Times first tried to contact McClain in late June, Yolanda's Little Black Book was reregistered using a private domain service that hides the registrar's information.

Multiple phone calls and emails to McClain and his family members were not returned. A Times staffer attempted to reach McClain at his home in Glendora on Thursday but was unable to get past the gated community's entrance; intercom calls to the house went unanswered.

McClain, 28, was most recently employed as a finance manager for brokerage firm Compass, but was laid off the first week of April due to an internal restructuring, according to the company.

As a result of The Times' inquiries, Compass launched an internal audit into McClain's activities while he was an employee. A Compass spokeswoman said Thursday that the company's investigation had conclusively identified McClain as Yolanda, though she declined to provide details.

"This evening we discovered evidence suggesting that we were the victim of a malicious former employee, James McClain," spokeswoman Julie Binder said. "We will prosecute this individual to the fullest extent of the law."

When I sign an NDA, I won't even tell my family.

JORDAN COHEN, REAL ESTATE AGENT

Many media outlets cover celebrity real estate, including The Times' Hot Property section. But Hot Property stories are published with bylines, and journalists are not affiliated with a real estate company.

For Compass, one of the largest and fastest-growing brokerages in the country whose agents' clients include the Kardashians, Ashton Kutcher and Lucy Liu, an employee running a secret website revealing client information is a huge breach of trust.

Real estate agents for high-net-worth clients typically sign nondisclosure agreements that prohibit them from discussing transaction details. Repeat business and referrals are crucial in the industry, and breaking an NDA can be career-ending — especially when the clients are titans of industry, entertainment and sports.

“When I sign an NDA, I won't even tell my family,” real estate agent Jordan Cohen said. “The consequences can be severe: Not only are you going to lose clients, friends and future business, you are breaking an ethical code.”

Real estate licensees also have a fiduciary obligation to act in the best interest of their clients, said Wayne Bell, the most recent real estate commissioner for the California Department of Real Estate; he left his post earlier this month.

Yolanda's catty commentary has attracted a growing following of real estate professionals, insiders and looky-loos since the website launched in 2016. In June, the site attracted more than 300,000 page views, according to web traffic data and analytics provider Alexa Internet.

Like a trail of internet breadcrumbs, Yolanda left subtle clues:

- In December, an email sent from Yolanda's Gmail address to a Los Angeles Times real estate reporter was signed “James.”
- In one blog post, Yolanda complained about the dormitory conditions at USC: “Yolanda herself lived there about a million years ago and they are still mostly nasty.” McClain graduated from USC in 2011.
- In 2016, a publicist issued a news release announcing the launch of Yolanda's Little Black Book. The publicist, Lisa Inouye, and McClain attended USC at the same time and are Facebook friends.
- A screenshot uploaded to Yolanda's blog showed photos of celebrity homes — and bookmarks for online systems for Cardinal Health, where McClain used to work as a financial advisor.

McClain, in his role as finance manager at Compass, had access to all company transactions that took place in California, according to current and former Compass employees, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of being punished or sued by the company.

“He was the guy who cut all the checks; he’d know when everything was closing; he’d see the buyer and seller,” a Compass employee said. “He was in charge of all that.”

Although McClain didn’t work for the company as a Realtor, he was still bound by the company’s confidentiality pledge. And any employee snooping around company files is considered a big no-no within the industry.

“All of our employees have entered into nondisclosure agreements with the company that prohibit them from sharing any confidential information externally,” Binder said.

There have been many different brokerages’ deals revealed on Yolanda’s Little Black Book, but Compass has been a frequent subject: More than 40 home sales involving the company’s agents have been revealed on the website since McClain became an employee.

Yolanda’s posts have detailed Compass transactions involving musicians Kenny Chesney and Pink, billionaire Sidney Kimmel, and Megan Ellison, the film producer and daughter of Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison.

Yolanda revealed intimate details of a transaction involving reality television personality Kylie Jenner well before the sale closed in August.
(Realtor.com)

Even when Compass agents took special pains to avoid a leak, Yolanda prevailed.

One agent, who left Compass this year, recalled emailing the company’s entire office staff asking that they not share information relating to the agent’s celebrity client. A day after the email was sent, a story appeared on Yolanda’s Little Black Book.

“I had everyone sign a nondisclosure agreement, and the deal was done through an LLC,” the agent said. “The only people who had knowledge of that deal were me and the people at Compass.”

The Kardashian-Jenner clan has been another frequent topic. In a recent post about matriarch Kris Jenner’s new Hidden Hills home, Yolanda noted details such as a “glassy shower area that’s great for exhibitionists to flaunt their bodily goods, whether au naturale or surgically-enhanced.”

On a number of occasions, purchases and sales made by Jenner and her youngest daughter, 20-year-old Kylie, have appeared on the website days or even weeks before the properties officially closed sale. In each of those deals, Tomer Fridman, who last summer joined Compass’ Beverly Hills office, was the listing agent.

Fridman said that any agent with high-profile or high-net-worth clients will do everything in their power to keep transactions discreet.

“We take great pride in that,” he said.

My clients have no interest in being public figures.

WILL WHEATON, REAL ESTATE AGENT

The site has also become a headache for nonfamous people.

In one case, Yolanda documented the real estate purchases of a couple who had recently come into a large amount of money. That they became wealthy is a main reason why the couple tried to keep a low profile, according to their real estate agent, Will Wheaton.

“My clients have no interest in being public figures,” he said.

Several agents speaking on the condition of anonymity because their deals involved nondisclosure agreements were baffled not only by the timing of Yolanda’s posts, but the level of detail.

Yolanda had all the details shortly after the Stanley House, an L.A.-area home that featured the work of Lenny Kravitz’s design firm, sold in April for \$33 million.
(Simon Berlyn)

Sometimes Yolanda has revealed information that the seller’s agent didn’t even know: One was surprised to learn an entertainer had purchased their client’s listing, discovering the buyer’s identity on Yolanda’s site. The buyer had made the purchase through a trust.

In another story about a Sunset Strip home partly designed by Lenny Kravitz, Yolanda rattled off facts about the buyers, Merck heir Frank Binder and his partner, Alexandra Schuck, the daughter of Bradbury Mayor Edwin G. Schuck. Yolanda gossiped about Schuck’s travels, ambitions and her living situation after high school.

Again, there was an unexpected link to McClain: He and Schuck are roughly the same age, are both from the San Gabriel Valley and are friends on Facebook.

For real estate agents from around Los Angeles, Compass' findings about Yolanda were a relief after years of frustration.

"I'm still blown away," Wheaton said a few hours after The Times published its story Friday morning. "It's really sad that someone didn't catch it ahead of time and stop it. A lot of agents have taken a lot of heat unnecessarily due to what's been published on the website. I feel vindicated."

Hilton & Hyland agent Richard Maslan called the situation "beyond a no-no."

"It's absurd, to have someone jeopardize the agents like that," he said. "It's terrible. I don't know what else to say."

A gurl's gotta pay her damn bills somehow.

YOLANDA'S LITTLE BLACK BOOK

Bell, the former real estate commissioner, said if a Compass employee was behind Yolanda's Little Black Book, it opens up the possibility of civil litigation, particularly if a nondisclosure agreement was broken. The outcome of a civil case could then result in an investigation and potential judgment by the Department of Real Estate.

"It would depend on the facts, and the license," Bell said. "Did this person sell the information? Did they reap some monies through the sharing of this website?"

Yolanda's Little Black Book runs ads through Google's ad platform, although how much money is generated is unclear. In some cases, the targeted ads that appear on the website are for real estate agents and brokers, including some of Compass' own agents.

Despite drawing the ire of many of the city's most notable agents, Yolanda shows no signs of slowing down.

The blogger continues to post almost daily, alternating between subjects either famous or uber-rich. Last month's topics included Kelly Rowland's "pudgy abode," musician Grimes' just-purchased Pasadena house ("her music is not really our thing") and the Bradbury mansion of auto salesman Paul Rusnak ("This is what sellin' all those luxury rides to overextended Angelenos hath wrought.").

Even with a connection to McClain, there are many questions left unanswered: Are there other individuals involved? And what was it all for — notoriety? A cheap thrill? Or, as Yolanda herself hinted on the blog, money?

“A gurl’s gotta pay her damn bills somehow.”
