

# The New York Times

In Print Sunday, October 16, 2011, RE-10 - Online Thursday, October 13 - By Vivian Marino

## SQUARE FEET

### The 30-Minute Interview/Joshua Stein

*Mr. Stein, 56, is a commercial real estate lawyer and the sole proprietor of the law firm that bears his name. Before starting the firm over a year ago, he was a partner in the Real Estate Practice Group in the New York office of Latham & Watkins.*

*Mr. Stein specializes in financing and land leases and has also written five books on commercial real estate.*

*Interview conducted and condensed by  
VIVIAN MARINO*



CHESTER HIGGINS JR./THE NEW YORK TIMES

**Q** *So it's been just over a year since you started your firm.*

**A** Aug. 1, 2010, was the first day of the new practice. The last day at the old firm was July 31, 2010. I jumped right into it.

**Q** *You were with Latham & Watkins for 23 years. Why did you leave?*

**A** It was a lot of things. I kind of had my run with a large firm. I wasn't sure, really, that the real estate practice that I've been doing at Latham — and that I'm doing now — was a good match for a big global law firm.

There were certain kinds of work that I couldn't really do there — like expert witness work, arbitration work, receivership, which just does not fit in with a large firm. I decided that my practice will probably work better with just me.

**Q** *How big is the firm?*

**A** I'm the principal, and the sole member. I have other attorneys working for me — it's been typically three — on an hourly basis. I have one guy working for me answering the phone, dealing with computers and mail.

**Q** *Have some of your old clients followed you to your new firm?*

**A** Yes, most of the clients I worked with. The clients who followed me tended to be the clients that I had brought to the firm almost entirely.

**Q** *Who are some of these clients?*

**A** AvalonBay is one; Crédit Agricole is another. I represent landlords, developers, lenders and retailers. The largest client right

now is a new client that came to me after I moved, for whom I've been doing a major development — a ground-up project in Queens.

**Q** *Can you tell me more about the project?*

**A** I cannot identify at this point the client or the transaction. There's a principle in real estate: if you know two or three pieces of information about a transaction, you can usually guess what it is.

I'm doing the financing, the acquisition, joint venture, leasing issues — the whole nine yards.

**Q** *Your specialty, though, is financing.*

**A** I'm identified primarily for financing, but also ground leases, hotels and then I also do joint ventures and space leases. If you look at all the books I've done, my biggest book — the thickest book — is called "Stein on New York Commercial Mortgage Transactions."

**Q** *Speaking of financing, how would you assess the lending markets these days?*

**A** They are loosening up very selectively. The New York market generally is doing better than all the other markets in the country.

If you have a 50 percent loan-to-value on a super-high-quality project in Midtown Manhattan, the lenders will be tripping over each other to finance that asset at very favorable rates. If you have the second- or third-tier shopping center in Wichita, Kan., or a lousy apartment building in one of the boroughs, you're not going to have as much interest.

**Q** *Are you still doing many loan*

*modifications or workouts?*

**A** It hasn't died out completely. I think what has happened in the world of loan modifications and workouts is the servicers by and large have adopted the strategy of kicking the can down the road — amend and extend and pretend — and largely that strategy has worked. So far. Now if we have another recession, that strategy could stop working.

**Q** *Are most clients in New York?*

**A** I guess mostly in New York.

**Q** *What are your goals for growing the firm?*

**A** I don't have any yet. My initial goal was to open the practice and bring in some good clients that I liked working for.

**Q** *You have five books published, along with dozens of articles on commercial real estate law. How do you find the time to write?*

**A** When I used to live in a distant suburb — in Goldens Bridge, near Katonah — I did almost all of my writing on the train. But since I moved into the city in '05, it's a little harder to write. I have to carve out time on the weekend.

**Q** *Do you ever do any other kind of writing?*

**A** My ex-wife and my daughters think that my next book should be about real estate fraud, and it should be a novel and spin together various things that I've seen.

It'll be interesting, but the problem is, it needs to have things like a plot and character development, and I've never really done that.