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# Suzanne Amaducci on big deals, Miami real estate and how the law has changed

■ The Bilzin Sumberg partner who leads the firm's real estate group says that no deal seems to be easy these days.

BY NICHOLAS NEHAMAS  
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Suzanne Amaducci works on the kind of complex land deals that give even other attorneys major headaches.

The Bilzin Sumberg partner leads the Brickell-based firm's real estate group, overseeing 33 attorneys. She has worked on transactions including the \$1.4 billion development of Miami's Design District; more than \$200 million worth of construction loans for Florida East Coast Industries on its Brightline passenger train that will

provide All Aboard Florida service between Miami and Orlando; the \$500 million purchase and development of Skyrise Miami; and the \$4 billion ongoing re-development of the old Biscayne Landing site in North Miami.

And New Jersey-born Amaducci says the law has changed for the better since she entered the profession more than two decades ago when, at her first closing, an older man asked her to make photocopies. She answered these questions from the Miami Herald via email.

**Q:** You've closed a wave of financing for commercial real estate deals in the past three months. Why this sudden surge of activity when observers believe

Miami's real estate market (especially on the residential side) is cooling down?

**A:** When are people going to realize that Miami's real estate market is much more diverse than condos? Arguably no other city in the country can boast as many high-pro-

file, game-changing developments as Miami right now, including the Design District, Miami Worldcenter, Swire's Brickell City Centre, All Aboard Florida's Brightline and Grass River's transit-oriented Metrorail project, just to name a few. These projects span asset classes and touch virtually all corners of Miami. Our law firm, Bilzin Sumberg, stands at the center of virtually every major real estate deal and development taking shape in South Florida. Since the beginning of 2016, our firm has closed more than \$2 billion in new commercial real estate loans across all sectors — multifamily, retail, hospitality, industrial, office, condominium and mixed-use and more than \$1 billion in construction loans alone.

**Q:** With available land near the waterfront a rare commodity, where and on what types of property do you think developers will look to build in the next cycle?

**A:** As the trend toward urbanization continues, we are going to see more and more developers look to infill opportunities near

urban centers, and build around existing transit infrastructure.

Virtually every project in the pipeline has some form of transit-oriented component because developers recognize the growing demand for greater accessibility and connectivity. At the same time, as more mature sub-markets reach saturation, we will see the continued revitalization of once-blighted areas, such as Flagler Street in Downtown, Overtown, North Miami Beach, Little Haiti, the Miami River District and the expansion of other areas across the county like Doral. Collectively, the next cycle should see the emergence of a more mature city with a more robust infrastructure that emphasizes distinctly different neighborhood environments with connectivity and walkability, and less dependence on suburban sprawl.

**Q:** How different is it being a woman in corporate law today than when you first started in the profession?

**A:** When I handled my first closing over 20 years ago, not only was I the only woman in the room, but the older gentleman who was the borrower asked me to make the photocopies. Since he was paying the lender's counsel fees, I quipped that I would be happy to, but it was probably not the best use of his money at \$200 per hour. There were a lot of laughs and a few very embarrassed people. From

then on, I took the fact that I was the only woman in the room with stride. Two key differences from then to now are 1) the number of women in the profession, and 2) the number of successful females who serve as role models.

Two of the three attorneys being considered for partnership at Bilzin Sumberg this year are women, both of whom came through our summer associate program. We hired seven attorneys this year in the real estate group, and four of them are women. The female attorneys were not hired because of their gender — they were simply the best candidates.

Role models are key as they demonstrate the possibility that hard work will pay off; each person needs to feel that he or she has a path to success. As for role models, Bilzin Sumberg

has several female equity partners with key leadership positions, and I sit on the firm's executive committee.

At the same time, the number of successful women in the real estate industry has grown significantly. Through my involvement in organizations like CREW-Miami (Commercial Real Estate Women), I am a part of a network of very successful women who are actively looking for ways to help each other. My female friends in the industry have been good to me, and I have been good to them. Through CREW, we've been able to build strong, mutually beneficial relationships — that's what business is all about.

**Q:** What's the most complex deal you've worked on recently and why?

**A:** No deal seems to be easy these days. I recently prepared and negotiated a build-to-suit lease for a hotel within the mixed-use Panorama Tower. It was like putting a puzzle together. Instead of being cut up and sold as condo units, the project was designed to stay together as a single building with one owner. All of the components (retail, high-end rental apartments and an operating hotel) were to be controlled and operated by the developer except for the hotel. Build-to-suit leases are typically for single-user, stand-alone buildings as opposed to mixed-use.

Everything from finishes, operating standards, building systems, construc-



## Suzanne Amaducci-Adams

Age: 48

Title: Partner, Bilzin Sumberg law firm  
(www.bilzin.com)

Hometown: Mountain Lakes, New Jersey.

Education: B.A., Vanderbilt University; J.D., University of Miami.

Family: Married to Shawn Adams; 11-year-old daughter Sophia.

Charitable activities: Orange Bowl Committee, adjunct professor at the University of Miami School of Law, CREW-Miami.

Hobbies: Sailing, sport fishing.

Notable clients: Christoph Family/RCI Group; CMC Group; Florida East Coast Industries; Grass River Development; Miami Dade College; Rilea Group; University of Miami.

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## Q&A

tion timelines, allocation of expenses and financing had to be addressed. Led by the experienced Hollo family development team, it took a conference room of professionals on both the landlord and tenant sides to collaborate together, identify and then solve the issues to ultimately finalize the lease. It was far from cookie-cutter; we all had to think outside the proverbial box.

The project is now almost finished, and I cannot wait to see the final results.

**Q: With so many hotels opening up in South Florida, how are operators trying to get an edge over each other?**

**A:** The hospitality business starts and ends with service. Most hotel guests want to feel special and that their personal needs and desires are being met, regardless of whether they are traveling for work or pleasure. A good hotel manager understands this and creates a unique and memorable experience for each hotel guest.

Growing up, I spent the summers working the front desk at a hotel in Cape Cod, and the fundamentals that I learned there were not so different than those

that guide my legal practice today. Both industries are about being prepared for the unexpected, applying a solution-oriented approach and being intensely focused on first-class client service.

The rise in Miami's new hotel inventory has resulted from an increase in demand from domestic and international travelers, who are visiting our booming Brickell and Downtown neighborhoods, our world-class beaches, or to experience our shopping, nightlife and restaurants and vibrant arts scene.

With these notable demand increases, it is not surprising that new domestic and international

brands and hotel owners and developers continue to flock to South Florida, too. While the Miami hospitality industry is experiencing a short-term reduction in revenue growth, its long-term future is incredibly bright.

**Q: Unlike some other law firms, Bilzin Sumberg keeps all its attorneys in one office. Why do you think that's an advantage?**

**A:** At a time when many of South Florida's top regional firms look to expand outward to new markets and many global firms vie to break in, Bilzin Sumberg has bucked the trend of geographic expansion in favor of betting big on

Miami's growth as a global city. By keeping all of our 100+ attorneys under the same roof in the heart of Miami's Brickell Financial District, we've been able to compete against even the largest national and global firms. Our single-office model gives us a unique ability and competitive edge in quickly assembling cross-disciplinary teams to address client needs and ensure better collaboration, coordination, access and consistency.

Everyone's under one roof, and I personally know every one of my partners. I know their expertise, and more importantly, I understand how they approach a given

problem or situation. This level of familiarity with each other is critical when putting together attorney teams for clients. By remaining focused on Miami and having our attorneys engrained in the city's culture, Bilzin Sumberg has established a reputation as the go-to firm for companies looking to invest in the Miami market. Miami is a unique community. It's not a one-size-fits-all market, and you can't just implant a business model that worked in New York, Los Angeles, Paris or London and expect it to work here. Local knowledge is key.