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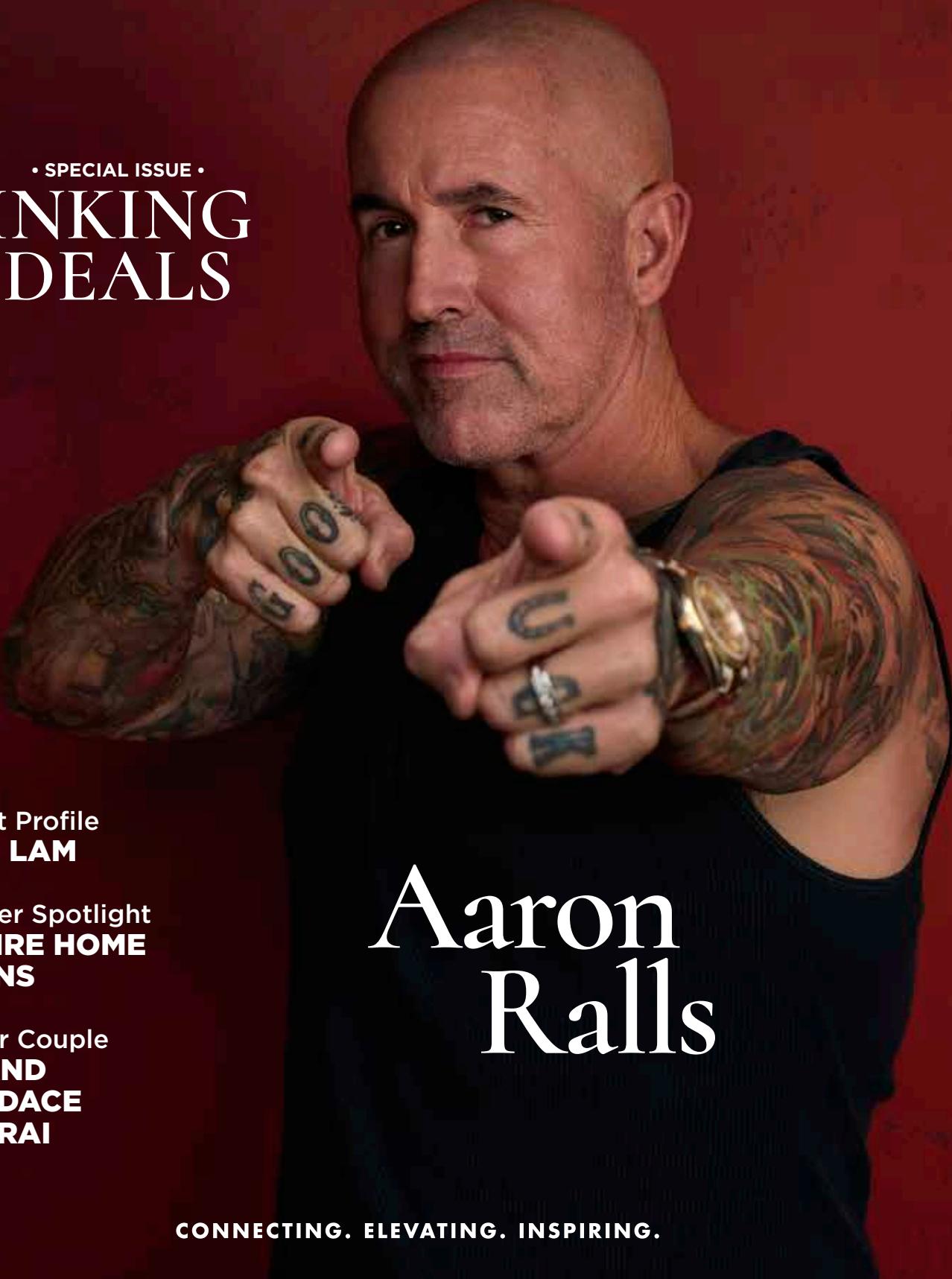
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Agent Profile
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Partner Spotlight
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Trilogy
Bickford

Contents

Aaron
Ralls **64**
COVER STORY

PROFILES



28 Power Couple: AJ and Candace Samrai



40 Agent Profile:
Eric Lam

IN THIS ISSUE

- 12** Preferred Partners
- 20** Meet the Team
- 28** Power Couple: AJ and Candace Samrai
- 40** Agent Profile: Eric Lam
- 52** Partner Spotlight: Empire Home Loans
- 64** Cover Story: Aaron Ralls



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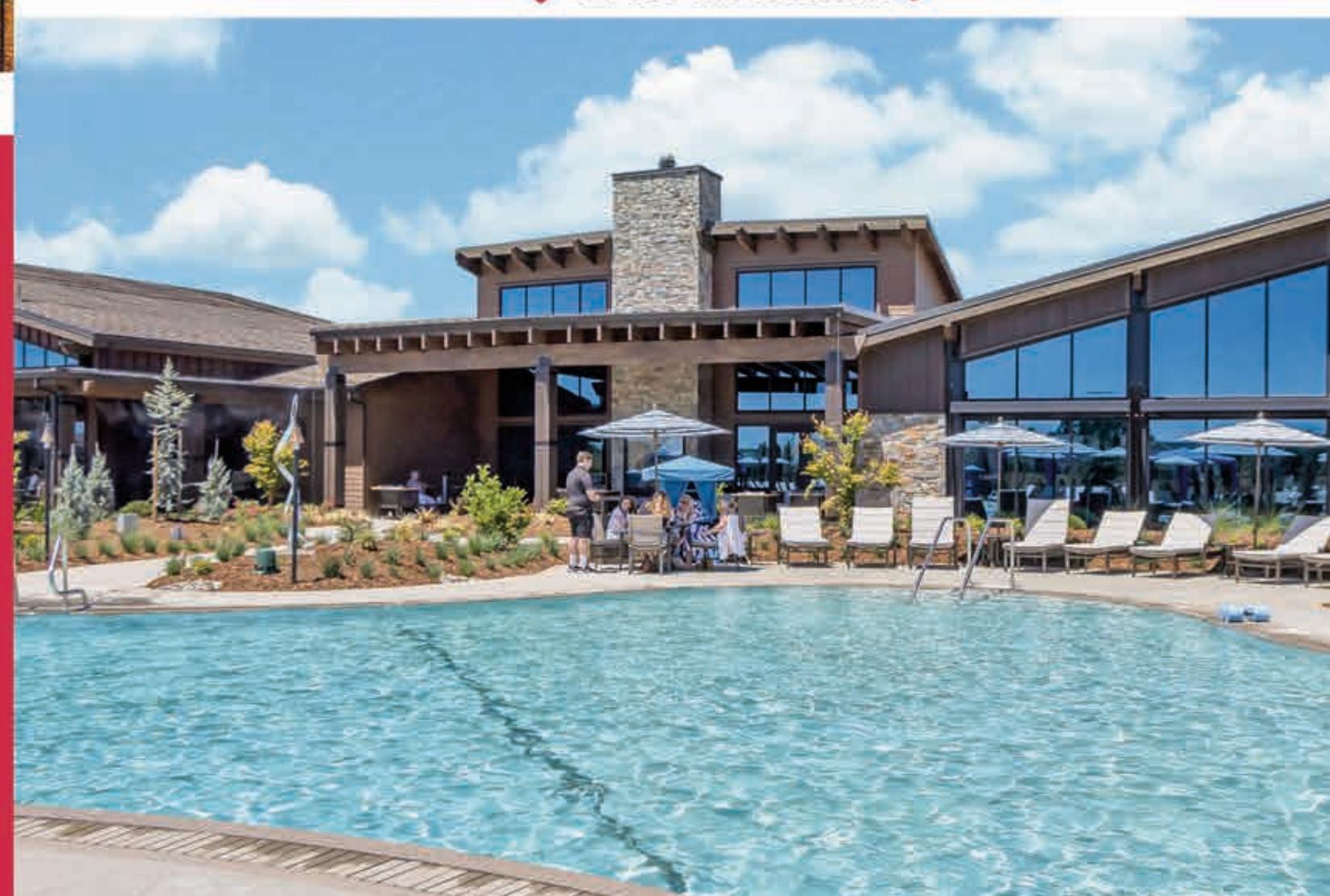
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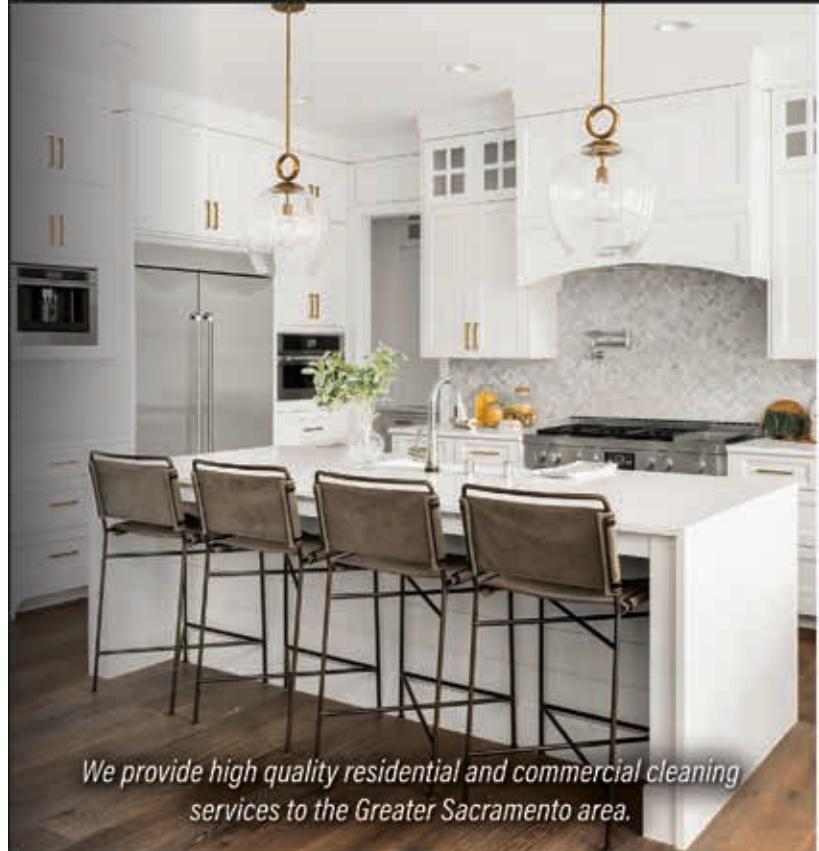
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Some couples meet by chance and create a meaningful love story. AJ and Candace Samrai met by chance and built something far greater. Their shared drive and vision have evolved into one of Sacramento's fastest-rising luxury real estate brands, blending their individual strengths into a unified approach that is bold, thoughtful, and client-centered.

Where Art, Faith, and Ambition Meet

Their tattoos speak before they do.

AJ's full sleeves, angel wings, and a detailed portrait of Candace are more than ink. They are reminders of loyalty, devotion, and the life they are building together. Candace's wrist and neck tattoos reflect the same philosophy, showing symbols of purpose, meaning, and identity. For the Samrais, tattoos are a visual expression of who they are. They believe in showing up authentically, living with intention, and staying connected to what matters most in their marriage and in their business.

A Track Record That Started Before Sacramento

Before building their brand in Sacramento, Candace was sharpening her skills in two highly competitive Southern California markets. She began with her Orange County team, then later joined her Los Angeles team, a private boutique firm off Abbot Kinney that produced more than seven billion dollars in sales.

That level of exposure shaped her expectations for service, presentation, and performance. It also helped her understand how elite real estate operates behind the scenes. AJ brought his

own strengths to the partnership, pairing a strong business mindset with a commitment to excellence and consistency. Together, they saw an opportunity to create something distinctive in Sacramento, rooted in luxury service but grounded in genuine human connection.

Building a Brand That Feels Like Family

Samrai Properties Group is more than a name. It is an extension of their values. Every client is treated with sincerity, respect, and the feeling of being cared for beyond the transaction.

AJ and Candace are not guided by gimmicks or scripted philosophies. Their focus is on fundamentals: doing the right thing, building real relationships, and delivering at a level that reflects the standards they learned in Southern California. Clients describe their experience with the Samrais as warm yet elevated. The process feels high-end, but the communication remains personal. There is structure, strategy, and precision, balanced with the ease of working with people who genuinely care about the outcome.

A Professional Identity Rooted in Connection

For AJ and Candace, their identity as professionals comes from the way they show up every day. They lead with integrity, prioritize honest communication, and create an atmosphere where clients feel supported from start to finish. Their success is shaped not by slogans but by consistency, quality, and the trust they build with every person they serve. This approach has allowed their reputation to grow quickly. Their business expands through referrals, returning clients, and a



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NOT BY SLOGANS BUT BY
CONSISTENCY, QUALITY,
AND THE TRUST THEY
BUILD WITH EVERY
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growing network of people who appreciate the blend of warmth and excellence the Samrais bring to each transaction.

Looking Ahead

As Sacramento's luxury market evolves, AJ and Candace are expanding with purpose. Their goal is to develop a team that reflects the authenticity, professionalism, and high-level service on which they have built their business.

They want every client to feel the same combination of comfort and confidence, knowing they are in the hands of a team that delivers results without sacrificing the personal touch.

What began as a chance meeting has transformed into a powerful partnership. AJ and Candace continue to show that when love and purpose align, something extraordinary can rise from unexpected beginnings.



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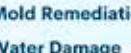
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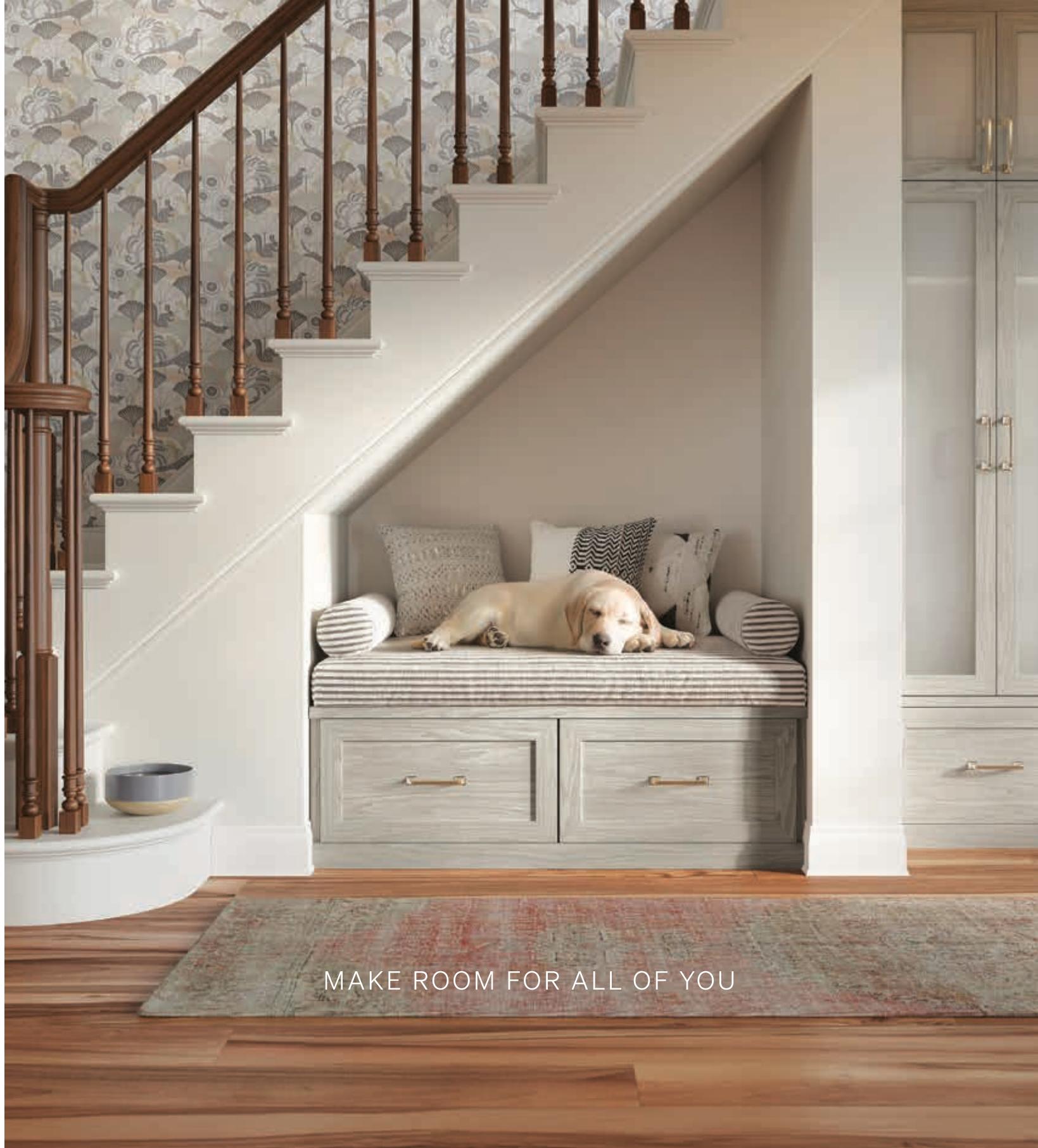
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AGENT PROFILE:

ERIC LAM

PHOTOS BY OLHA MELOKHINA PHOTOGRAPHY



ERIC LAM

AGENT PROFILE:

ERIC LAM

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AGENT PROFILE:

ERIC LAM

PHOTOS BY OLHA MELOKHINA PHOTOGRAPHY

Eric Lam, a top agent at Portfolio Real Estate, has quickly made a name for himself since starting in 2018. With nearly \$13 million in transaction volume and 27 deals in 2024 alone, Eric combines his entrepreneurial drive, passion for design, and strong personal ties to the community. From flipping houses to creating a business centered around family values, his real estate journey is all about hard work, meaningful connections, and a dedication to helping clients reach their goals.

Q1: Can you tell us about your tattoos?

A1: My first tattoo was in October 2018, when I was 19 years old — a realistic owl on my left shoulder. I wouldn't say I regret any of my tattoos, but if I had the chance to go back, I'd probably choose not to

get them. At the time, I was in my late teens and early twenties and thought they looked cool — and I still do. But as I've gotten older, I've grown to appreciate simplicity, and I'd probably prefer my bare skin now as a personal choice. The tattoo that holds the most meaning for me is the Roman numerals on my left arm — they represent the date my aunt passed away from cancer. She essentially helped raise my siblings and me until I was about four years old. My parents had recently immigrated to the U.S. and were working long hours to make ends meet, so my aunt stepped in and cared for us while they worked. She played such an important role in my early life, and that tattoo is my way of honoring her memory and the impact she had on who I am today.

Q2: How long did it take to get all of your tattoos?

A2: Roughly about 40 hours total, spread over eight sessions.

Q3: Can you tell us about your background before real estate?

A3: Before becoming a real estate agent, I worked at Vic's Ice Cream — a local Sacramento staple — from my sophomore year of high school all the way through getting my license. About six months after becoming licensed, I left Vic's to pursue real estate full-time.

Q4: What led you to real estate?

A4: After high school, I went straight to UC Davis to study managerial economics. While I was there, I kept asking myself what I wanted to do once I graduated, but nothing really clicked. I couldn't see myself working a typical 9-to-5 in accounting, finance, or a job of that nature. After about a year of going through the motions, I decided to drop out. I didn't know exactly what

I wanted to do next, but I knew college wasn't the right path for me.

Getting into real estate after dropping out of college was completely unplanned. I was talking to a friend who had just gotten his license, and after hearing about what he was doing, it sounded interesting, so I decided to give it a shot. Growing up, I've always had an entrepreneurial mindset. In elementary school, I sold Yu-Gi-Oh and Pokémon cards. In middle school, I resold Nikes and Jordans — my mom would drive me around in her minivan to meet up with guys way older than me. In high school, I was selling snacks out of my duffel bag between classes. So even though real estate was brand new to me, it felt like a natural fit — just another form of business and sales, but on a much bigger scale.

Q5: What do you find most fulfilling about being a real estate agent?

A5: What I find most fulfilling about being a real estate agent is helping people achieve their goals. Whether it's a first-time homebuyer planting roots or an investor expanding their portfolio, being the person who helps make that dream a reality is incredibly rewarding. Seeing my clients' excitement and knowing I played a part in that milestone is the reason I do what I do.

Q6: How is your business unique?

A6: I'm sure there are other agents who do similar things, but here are three ways I think my business stands out:

I'm a real estate investor and house flipper. Since 2020, I've completed over two dozen fix-and-flips. That hands-on experience with construction,

“

IF YOU CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT
A SITUATION, WHY WORRY? **AND IF**
YOU CAN'T DO SOMETHING ABOUT
A SITUATION, WHY WORRY?”

— UNKNOWN.



budgeting, and design allows me to better advocate for my clients and provide practical advice grounded in real numbers.

I'm both data-driven and design-oriented. I love crunching numbers to see if a potential flip makes financial sense or if a rental property will cash flow — but I'm equally passionate about design. While having the numbers pencil out is crucial, I believe great design plays a huge role in achieving those numbers. Certain returns are only possible when a home looks and feels a certain way, and I take pride in bridging that gap.

I specialize in mid-century modern architecture. There are other agents who focus on this niche, but I think my perspective is unique because I've not only sold and flipped many mid-century homes — I also live in one. That personal connection helps me speak the language of

design and authenticity that mid-century buyers and sellers value.

Q7: How has your background shaped your work ethic?

A7: I was born and raised in Sacramento, but my parents immigrated here from China in the 1990s. They didn't have much when they arrived, but they worked incredibly hard to buy their first home in 2004. We didn't grow up wealthy, but my parents always did their best to make sure my siblings and I were happy and had what we needed. As a first-generation American, I was raised in a very traditional Chinese household — so you can imagine the reaction I got from my dad when I told him I was dropping out of college, haha.

Looking back, I think my upbringing is what gave me my drive. The constant reminders from my dad about the importance of hard work, along with watching my parents build a life from nothing, taught me the true meaning of perseverance and sacrifice. That foundation shaped my mindset and work ethic, and it's something I carry into everything I do in real estate today.

Q8: What motivates you in your career and personal life?

A8: A pivotal moment in my life wasn't a single event, but rather watching my parents work countless hours just to make ends meet. We didn't get to travel much or do some of the things other families could, and while I'm incredibly grateful for everything my parents provided, seeing that struggle firsthand lit a fire in me. That experience shaped me into someone who's driven and grounded. Watching my parents sacrifice so much taught me that nothing worth having comes easy. It pushed

me to work hard and stay disciplined. It also made me value freedom, which is a big part of why I'm so passionate about real estate and helping others create that same stability for themselves.

Q9: What are your hobbies or things you enjoy outside of real estate?

A9: My family really values spending quality time together. My dad loves to cook, so we often gather at my parents' home for family dinners and just to hang out.

I genuinely love what I do, so I often find myself working even in my downtime — it rarely feels like work to me. Outside of real estate, I love spending time with my two dogs, Polo and Stella. I'm also big on staying active, so you'll usually find me at the gym or out for a run. I also love to travel and explore new places — visiting different National Parks has become one of my favorite new hobbies.

Q10: Do you have any quotes or personal philosophies that guide you?

A10: “If you can do something about a situation, why worry? And if you can't do something about a situation, why worry?” — Unknown.

I love this quote because it's such a simple yet powerful reminder to let go of unnecessary stress. It helps me stay grounded and focus on what I can control. Whenever I catch myself overthinking or worrying, I come back to this quote.

Q11: What is your definition of success?

A11: To me, success isn't defined by numbers or status, but instead it's about freedom and giving back to the people who got me

here. My idea of “making it” is being able to provide an annual, all-expenses-paid vacation for my immediate and extended family. Creating those memories together and giving them experiences we didn't have growing up would be the ultimate reward.

Q12: What do you hope your legacy will be?

A12: I want to be remembered as someone who was genuine — a person who brought laughter, joy, and positivity to the people around.

Q13: What are your personal and professional goals?

A13: Personally, I hope to have a family and children someday. I love Sacramento — especially Elk Grove — and I can easily see myself raising a family here. Outside of real estate, running has become a big part of my life, and completing a full marathon is definitely on my personal bucket list.

Professionally, I plan to continue selling real estate for the foreseeable future, but one of my long-term goals is to develop a small subdivision of mid-century modern homes throughout Sacramento and Elk Grove. I think there's a real demand for that architectural style and not nearly enough supply, so it would be amazing to bring that timeless mid-century design into today's market.

Q14: Any final thoughts or thank-yous?

A14: Thank you to Katie and *Sacramento Real Producers* for this amazing opportunity! And a huge thank-you to my friends, family, clients, and my partner, Lindsey, for the continuous love and support — none of this would be possible without you all.



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EMPIRE HOME LOANS

BY CHRISTINA KITCHEN • PHOTOS BY SARAH NELSON PHOTOGRAPH

For Leo Whitton, Vice President of Empire Home Loans, the mortgage business was never part of a carefully mapped career plan. Instead, it found him at a pivotal moment in life — and once it did, there was no looking back. What began almost by accident quickly revealed itself as a calling, one rooted in service, resilience, and a deep belief in helping others achieve the American dream of homeownership.

Raised in Roseville and a graduate of Oakmont High School, Leo's journey into lending began in the early 1990s. At the time, he was a full-time student at American River College while bartending at Fanny Ann's Saloon in Old Sacramento. After earning his associate degree and preparing to transfer to Humboldt State, a late paperwork submission changed the trajectory of his future. Leo stepped into the mortgage business during that semester —

and discovered a profession that fit him perfectly.

"I didn't plan on a career in lending," Leo shares. "But it didn't take long to realize this was it for me."

That sense of alignment has guided Leo through decades in the industry, including some of its most challenging seasons. Like many in real estate and finance, Leo faced significant adversity during the 2008 financial crisis.

He lost everything, filed for bankruptcy, and went through a divorce — a period that tested him both personally and professionally. But it was during this difficult chapter that he received advice that continues to shape how he leads today.

He received advice that continues to shape how he leads today.

Sitting in a Starbucks with a coach, Leo shared his failures and the disappointment he felt as a father and husband. The response was simple, but powerful: failure would not define him — it would strengthen him. That moment reframed how Leo viewed obstacles, pushing him to focus forward, not backward, and to see opportunity where others might see defeat.

BUILT ON
RESILIENCE,
RELATIONSHIPS,
AND THE BELIEF
THAT ANYTHING
IS POSSIBLE

That mindset now sits at the core of Empire Home Loans.

At its foundation, Empire Home Loans exists to serve consumers by providing thoughtful, strategic home loan solutions. But Leo is quick to point out that the company's true differentiator goes beyond rates and products. It's about education, composure, and doing what is right — even when that means referring business elsewhere.

"I educate my competitors, I'll refer loans to competitors if it's better for the consumer, and I pride myself on keeping my poise — especially when clients feel overwhelmed," Leo explains. "Our job is often to talk people off the edge and help them make clear, confident decisions."

That level of integrity resonates deeply with real estate professionals who value long-term partnerships over transactional wins. Empire Home Loans has built a reputation as a steady, trusted resource — one that protects agents' relationships while delivering a seamless lending experience for clients.



“
IN MY YOUNGER YEARS, SUCCESS
WAS ALL MONEY-DRIVEN.
NOW, IT'S ABOUT BALANCE -
DOING THINGS AND BEING WITH
PEOPLE WHO FUEL YOUR SOUL.”

Equally important to Leo is the culture he has helped create inside Empire Home Loans. In addition to serving borrowers, the company has become a place where loan officers can truly learn, grow, and build sustainable careers. Leo is intentional about leading by example, guided by a principle he lives by: never ask someone to do something you wouldn't do yourself.

That leadership philosophy is deeply rooted in Leo's upbringing. He didn't grow up with financial privilege, and after his parents



divorced at a young age, he learned early the value of hard work. By the age of eight, Leo was already an entrepreneur — mowing lawns, building fences, painting, and raking leaves throughout his neighborhood. That same work ethic continues to drive him today.

Outside of the office, Leo's life is centered on family and the outdoors. He is the proud father of two sons, ages 29 and 26, who share his love for adventure. Together, they spend time snowmobiling and boating, with his sons very much

a part of his “crew.” Recently, Leo stepped into a new and cherished role as a grandfather — a season of life he looks forward to with gratitude and excitement.

When he's not working, Leo can usually be found embracing the outdoors — boating, wake surfing, snowmobiling, riding motorcycles, or catching live music. That sense of balance now defines how he views success.

“In my younger years, success was all money-driven,” Leo reflects. “Now, it's about balance



— doing things and being with people who fuel your soul.”

Looking ahead, Leo remains focused on continuing to grow Empire Home Loans into the best broker shop for loan officers to learn, thrive, and succeed. Personally, he has his sights set on earning a pilot's license and traveling more — embracing life fully and intentionally.

At the end of the day, Leo hopes to be remembered simply and sincerely: as a good father, grandfather, friend, and someone who lived life to the fullest. It's that authenticity — paired with resilience, experience, and an unwavering belief that anything is possible — that makes Empire Home Loans a valued partner within the Sacramento real estate community.

For agents seeking a lending partner who leads with integrity, perspective, and purpose, Empire Home Loans stands ready to serve.



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AARON RALLS

FAITH, FIRE, AND FIGHTING BACK

Across his back, an angel stands triumphant over the devil — sword raised, wings unfurled, light breaking through the darkness. For Aaron Ralls, that image of St. Michael defeating the devil is more than a tattoo. It's a reflection of his life, his faith, and the relentless drive that's carried him through every battle he's faced. Today, as President of Ralls Realty Group powered by eXp Realty, Aaron leads with that same energy — determined, grounded, and guided by purpose.

Having grown up in Rosemont, Aaron attended Folsom High School, where he met his wife,

Laura, and, as he admits, "barely graduated." After getting married and starting a family, Aaron and Laura built a life in Folsom that, for a while, felt steady and secure. Then came 2008. Aaron lost his job unexpectedly.

"We still had Laura's salary from her job at the DMV, but with three young children and a new mortgage, it wasn't enough," Aaron explains. "In 2012, our home was in foreclosure, and we nearly lost everything. With no money, we were peeling foreclosure notices off our door."

They did everything possible to stay afloat. Aaron worked three

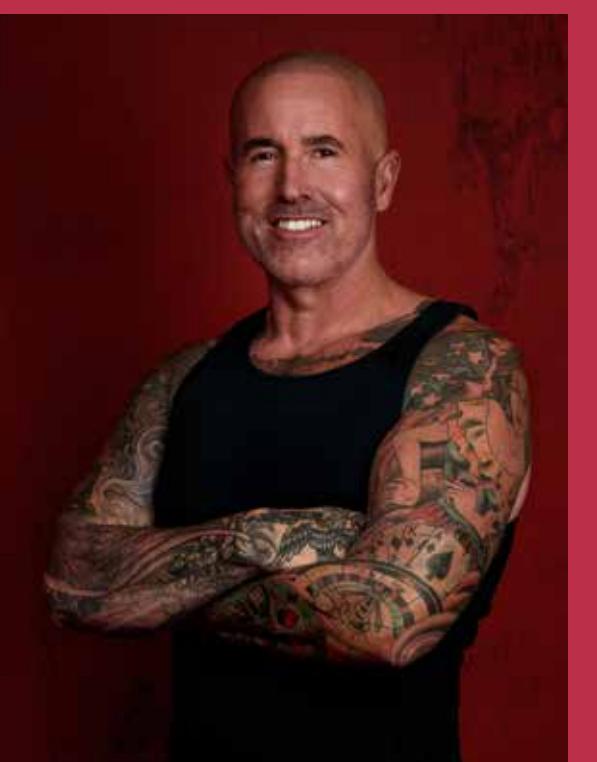
jobs, sleeping only four to five hours a night. Laura worked with the bank to modify their loan, begging for a chance to stay in their home. They cashed out all their assets and changed their entire lifestyle, which wasn't easy on the kids — but through it all, Aaron's faith never wavered.

"I was never worried that things wouldn't work out, because I knew that I would do whatever it took to make it."

Finally making it over the hump, Aaron started something new: a barbershop called Lucky's. He poured everything he had into it — long days, late nights,



BY CHRIS MENEZES
PHOTOS BY OLHA
MELOKHINA
PHOTOGRAPHY



“

**WHEN WE
TAKE ON
A CLIENT,
THAT'S THE
MINDSET
WE BRING.
WE'RE ALL IN.**

”

and endless determination. What began as survival became something much greater. The shop quickly turned into a gathering place — a hub for conversation, connection, and community.

“Though I never imagined my career path would lead me in that direction, it became obvious that this was where I needed to be. We didn't have to worry about losing our home anymore, and through the process we found something we loved even more — working with people and being an active part of the community,” he says.

Over time, those conversations in the barber chair began to spark a new idea. “I was connecting clients with other people constantly,” Aaron says. “One day, I realized I could take that same energy and use it to help people in real estate.”

In 2015, Aaron earned his license and founded Ralls Realty Group, with Laura eventually joining him

full-time after a 21-year career at the DMV. Together, they built their business the same way they rebuilt their lives — through hard work, honesty, and heart. “We've been through tough times, and that taught us to do whatever it takes,” he says. “When we take on a client, that's the mindset we bring. We're all in.”

Today, Aaron has become one of Folsom's most recognizable REALTORS®, known not just for his success — over \$31 million in volume last year — but for his authenticity. He drives his lowrider to open houses, shows up in Converse, a T-shirt, two full sleeves of tattoos, and brings a down-to-earth energy that clients trust.

The St. Michael tattoo on his back isn't about appearance; it's a reminder of what he's already overcome. “I decided back then to turn all problems over to God and take my future into my own hands,” Aaron says. “That's when everything changed.”



At home, life has come full circle. He and Laura's three grown kids — now 25, 22, and 19 — are the pride of his life. They spend their free time boating, camping, and enjoying the simple moments that once felt out of reach. Together, they also support local causes through Friends of Folsom, continuing to give back to the community that gave them their second chance.

"I live my life based on what people will say about me at my funeral, with my kids sitting in the front row," Aaron says.

For Aaron, every challenge, every sleepless night, every risk has been another battle in his own version of that St. Michael story — faith conquering fear, light overcoming dark. And through it all, he's emerged stronger, more grateful, and more determined than ever to help others find their way forward.

Because at the end of the day, his tattoo isn't just a symbol of victory. It's a story — and he's still writing it.



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