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What Happens if Ken Griffin Stops Setting

The billionaire hedge-funder's presence in the market has driven prices higher than ever before
BY KATHERINE CLARKE 4-11-2025

IN FEBRUARY, high-end real-estate agents in Miami Beach, Fla., buzzed that billionaire hedge-fund manager Ken Griffin had purchased the longtime Star Island home of Russianborn hospitality magnate Vladislav Doronin for $120 million, a record for Miami-Dade County. When the deal finally recorded March 6, however, the buyer was cited in the press as a limited liability company tied to a different longtime Chicagoan— healthcare-technology entrepreneur Michael Ferro.

Local spec-home devel-oper Todd Michael Glaser, who has plans for a new mansion on nearby North Bay Road, said he was relieved that it was Ferro's name and not Griffin's at-tached to the big-ticket deal. He has concerns, he said, that Griffin's track record of aggressively purchasing the country's highest- end homes could lead to a damaging perception in the market—that Griffin's the only buyer in town.

"Everybody now, when I tell them that something sold, they're like, 'Who bought it? Griffin?' " Glaser said. "This shows that there's more than one person out there buying $100 million houses."
Ken Griffin has become a powerful force in the luxury real-estate world. Over the past 13 years, the billionaire
Citadel founder, 56, has spent billions of dollars assembling an unparalleled portfolio of trophy properties across the country— Palm Beach, Miami, Chicago, New York and beyond. Industry insiders say his purchases, often for historically high prices, have, for better or worse, helped re-shape the pricing dynamics of the high-end real-estate market.
"He's a whale's whale," said property appraiser Jonathan Miller of Miller Samuel. "In my career, I've really never run into somebody that singularly has dominated a segment of the market in so many different places. He's a prolific buyer of full retail-price real estate."
While there would be nine-digit home sales if it weren't for Griffin, Miller said, he has pushed top prices to rise more steeply and more quickly.
"He didn't create the superluxury market but he emboldened more participants to buy higher sooner," Miller said.
Now, real-estate investors such as Glaser worry that, if the industry's billion- dollar whale was to sour on ultraluxury real estate in the future or liquidate his assets for any reason, those markets he helped propel would suffer.

- Mkt control by one person?

Some look to Chicago, where Griffin set a price record in 2017 when he paid $58.75 million for four fullfloor units at the downtown building 9 Walton. Late last year, he sent waves through the Chicago market when he sold two of those floors for just $19 million, a 44% loss on what he paid, following his company's relocation from Chicago to Miami.

Griffin's purchases read like a laundry list of price records. He holds the re-cord for America's most ex --pensive home with the roughly $238 million purchase of a quadruplex apartment at New York's 220 Central Park South in 2019.

In Miami-Dade County, his roughly $107 million purchase in 2022 of a private compound in Coconut Grove briefly held the re- **Purchase price**

$107 MILLION

$120 million

cord there until the Ferro deal. A source with information on the Ferro transaction told The Wall Street Journal in February that their understanding was that Griffin was the true buyer. Zia Ahmed, a spokesman for Griffin, declined to confirm or deny that. Ferro couldn't be reached for comment.

On Star Island, Griffin owns seven contiguous properties totaling nearly 6.5 acres, for which he has paid a combined $169 million across several transactions since 2023.

In Palm Beach, he's spent more than $400 million across multiple transactions assembling an oceanfront compound starting in 2012.

Those deals represent just a slice of Griffin's portfolio, which also includes a co-op formerly owned by philanthropist Julia Koch in New York, for which he paid $45 million earlier this year, as well as homes in Aspen, Colo., and Hawaii. Beyond the U.S., Griffin also owns homes in St. Tropez, France and London.

"Ken has mostly purchased one-of-a-kind properties and oceanfront lots that are inherently of limited supply and therefore likely to keep increasing in value," said Ahmed, aiming to contextualize Griffin's purchases.

Most of his properties "are in cities where he travels to work from our offices and will become homes for him and his family over the years to come," Ahmed said.

Griffin's public-relations team said it fields multiple inquiries every week asking whether Griffin is attached to a major deal, many of which turn out to be false rumors. In addition to the Doronin deal, Griffin's name has been floated as among the buyers in contract to purchase units at high-end condo projects such as the Residences at Seaway condominium in Miami's Surfside neighborhood. Ahmed said Griffin hasn't purchased at the Seaway project.

Griffin's reputation for paying top dollar for luxury homes has led some industry watchers to suggest that he enjoys the spotlight. "With all this activity, he appears to—I don't know if we can say like the attention— but he doesn't seem to have any problem with it," Miller said.

"Ken Griffin is one of the first people to really show that the number isn't everything," said Palm Beach agent Gary Pohrer of Douglas Elliman. "One hundred million dollars is a crazy amount of money to spend on something, but as a percentage of his net worth, it's really less than what the average American probably has invested in their home."

As of April 1, Griffin's net worth was estimated at

Purchase price

$58.75 MILLION

Purchase price
$60
MILLION

around $42 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

Griffin began his real-estate shopping spree in the early 2010s.

The financier has been assembling his Palm Beach estate since 2012, when he shelled out a record-breaking roughly $130 million for four adjacent oceanfront parcels on Blossom Way. He has been adding to the property since; his total aggregate spend has topped $400 million, property records show, and his estate spans more than 27 acres between the ocean and the Intracoastal Waterway. “It’s absolutely mind-boggling how big this thing is,” Pohrer said.

When a single buyer such as Griffin consistently pays top dollar, it fuels price appreciation, agents said. Developers and sellers adjust their expectations accordingly, setting higher asking prices and banking on the presence of ultrawealthy buyers willing to match Griffin’s aggressive spending.

Pohrer said Griffin’s purchases have emboldened other moneyed buyers to spend nine figures on luxury homes. “Before, some buyers didn’t want to be seen spending that much money on a house, but now that it’s been done so many times, it’s not that weird. They don’t feel like they’re overpaying.”

Glaser said he believed several of his recent deals, including the $63.4 million sale of a lakefront estate he owned in Palm Beach to Goya Foods heir Andy Unanue, wouldn’t have occurred at those prices without Griffin setting a new benchmark for the market there. Properties without ocean frontage never traded in excess of $50 million before; now, you have buyers such as Tom Ford and Unanue paying in excess of that for non-oceanfront properties, he said.

Dental products entrepreneur John Jansheski, who sold his home near Griffin’s on Star Island for $57 million in 2023, said it was difficult to decipher what impact Griffin’s assemblage has had on values there. While on the one hand, it has drawn positive attention to the island, it is also easy for would-be buyers to write off Griffin’s deals as aberrations, divorced from the rest of the local market, he said.

Jansheski, who initially priced his property at $90 million, said some realestate agents and their buyers had balked at asking prices close to what Griffin has spent.

“They said, ‘That’s just Ken Griffin. No one is going to do that again,’ ” he said. “They said it’s a one-off.”

Ultimately, it would have been better for the island’s values if the seven lots had sold at those same prices to different individuals, rather than just one wealthy guy, Jansheski said.

In 2015, Griffin paid $60 million for two penthouse at the upscale Faena House condominium in Miami Beach, then a record price for Miami. That early deal “was kind of a sale that changed everything,” said Devin Kay of Douglas Elliman, a luxury agent in Miami. “Prior to that, we had never seen a sale north of $50 million or so. It really changed the trajectory of the market,” he said.

When Griffin bought in Coconut Grove in September 2022, it was the first deal that crossed the $100 million threshold in the Miami area.

Buyers like Griffin have lent credibility to the ninefigure deal. Since the Faena House deal, more than 14 additional deals have been recorded across Miami and Miami Beach at $50 million and above, according to Miller's data. There have been at least two additional pending or closed deals in the same area at $100 million and above since Griffin's Coconut Grove buy.

Real-estate developer David Martin, who bought a site in the same Coconut Grove enclave for $14 million in 2015 and is building a house there for his family, said he saw Griffin's buy there as a "good, powerful signal" for the local market and likely a positive for his own property value.

However, "I felt it was a good investment whether Griffin bought or not," he said.

Griffin's deals appear to have had the biggest impact on the market in South Florida, where he has racked up more than 10 transactions in recent years.

In New York and Chicago, where his transactions were more dramatic outliers, his deals don't seem to have dragged the market upward so significantly.

In New York, no deal has come close to matching Griffin's $238 million purchase six years ago. Developers who priced their units at that level, such as Extell Development's Gary Barnett, whose Central Park Tower penthouse once asked $250 million, have been unable to find buyers.

Barnett didn't respond to a request for comment on whether his pricing had been inspired by the Griffin deal.

If anything, Miller said, the deal just "conveyed the message that there's a lot more room to grow in pricing at the superhigh end of the market in New York."

Similarly, Griffin's record- breaking purchase in Chicago in 2017 had less impact on the market there because the buyer pool simply doesn't exist in the Midwest city for homes at that price point, said local agent Jennifer Ames of Engel & Völkers Chicago.

Griffin's propensity to pay historically high prices has led many to wonder whether he prioritizes return on investment when it comes to his real-estate purchases.

"I don't think any of these kinds of purchases are being made from an investment standpoint," said Kay. "I don't think you're going out and assembling half a billion dollars worth of land because you think it's a great investment. I think these guys are just doing what they want to do, because they can do it. Whether they make money or lose money, they don't seem to care."

Griffin's recent loss in Chicago has amplified the discussion, but it isn't the first time he's sold for less than he paid.

After purchasing the two penthouses at Faena House for a record sum, he resold them in two transactions in 2020 and 2021 for an aggregate $46.2 million, taking a 23%, or $13.8 million loss on the resale.

Griffin wasn't the only big-name buyer to take a loss at the building amid a slowdown in the Miami market pre-Covid. Art dealer Larry Gagosian and investor Leon Black were among the buyers who also sold at a loss.

Miller said that while buying at record prices comes off "as kind of a flex" by Griffin, dumping properties at a loss also makes a statement.

"It's another type of flex," said Miller. "It's like, 'The market changed, but who cares? It doesn't hurt me.'" The losses taken on the resales of both the Faena House and Chicago units didn't necessarily speak to weakness in those respective markets so much as Griffin's willingness to pay over market-rate in the first place, Miller said.

"I think it confirmed that the original sale was more of an outlier, that it wasn't consistent with the market," he said.

While the high-end Chicago market has seen a precipitous drop in recent years, thanks in part to concerns over crime, few sellers have incurred as high a percentage loss as Griffin, agents said.

For his part, Griffin has blamed the political leadership in the Illinois city for his losses. Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, with whom Griffin is in a long-running public feud, was the buyer of the units.

"The decline in value of Ken's Chicago properties is representative of the failed political leadership in Illinois and the appreciation of his property in Florida far outstrips any losses in Chicago," Ahmed said.

A spokesperson for Gov. Pritzker didn't respond to a request for comment.

Savvy Chicago buyers and sellers aren't taking their cues from Griffin's purchase and sale, Ames said, because he was paying "fantasy prices."

"If Ken Griffin thought the market was going to improve dramatically and catch up to his purchase prices," Ames said of the hedgefunder's Chicago purchases, "then maybe he's not as savvy as everyone thinks he is, because that wasn't going to happen."

RECORD-SETTING BUYS TOTAL AT LEAST

$464

MILLION

Purchase price

$45 MILLION

$238 MILLION

Purchase price

OVER $400 MILLION

Home-Price Records?