



featuring <<

Rod Huguen

Photography by Casey James

& TONY RAY BAKER DARREN JONES

A Life Designed by Balance

You tend to get attention when you have an iguana on your head. People notice that sort of thing, especially if there is a smile on your face while you're wearing it. Tony Ray Baker has a picture of himself with an iguana and a smile, and it's worth a million to him. Actually, it's worth many millions. It's the best kind of marketing — it grabs attention, it makes people smile, and it's free! And attention-grabbing, joy-producing, free marketing is vitally important when you sell real estate like Tony Ray does.

The picture was taken in Puerto Vallarta when Tony Ray and his life partner, Darren Jones, were vacationing, and Tony Ray asked the owner of the iguana if he could pet it. The curious iguana promptly climbed up Tony's arm and onto his head, and Darren snapped the now famous picture. On the advice of a coach, Tony Ray included it in his marketing package, and the rest is history. He laughs and says, "My first call from the iguana picture was from a lady who said, 'I want you to be my real estate agent because everybody in real estate wears a tie and looks all business-like, and you wear an iguana



Rome, Italy



A little village in Greece

on your head!" Tony Ray continues with, "I had to confess to her that I had a collection of fabulous silk ties and that I wore one every day to work, which she found disappointing. But she hired me anyway."

It hasn't always been easy to attract clients. Tony Ray admits to having career aspirations of being a "professional student," and he did it well. For six or seven years he studied everything from design to architecture to psychology to law and anything else



that attracted his attention. To support himself he worked in the grocery industry creating, hosting, and teaching safety fairs and promoting grocery store safety. Eventually, in 1994, his mom, Jane Baker, suggested that he stop being a student and try his hand at selling real estate. He sheepishly admits, "I was very excited and gave my two weeks' notice. It was the stupidest thing I've ever done. I was suddenly unemployed and had no income."

He zipped through real estate school but had no idea how to generate business. For the first year, despite being dropped off in neighborhoods to knock on doors and spending long days on the phone cold calling until he got a yes, Tony Ray didn't sell a single house. Not one. He was told he was being let go, but he begged for another chance. Tony Ray acknowledges that he is a scrapper, a fighter who wants to help people and convinced his boss to give him another chance. He told her, "I



want to sell real estate, I just don't want to do it your way." It was a bold move, but he was broke and living on a shoestring with nothing to lose. He was allowed another year and he laid out his own plan for how he would succeed in real estate.

To know Tony Ray is to know what drives him. He proudly describes himself as a "scrapper," but that isn't what motivates him. Instead,

it's a concept he received early on and repeats often. The phrase that he speaks with an intense, earnest passion is, "Design the life you want to live

and build your business into it." His life isn't about just working until he can retire. When asked about retirement, he bristles and says, "I hate that six-letter word — retire. Live the life you want now, not sometime in the future!" He goes on to say, "I don't ever want to live with regrets." To that end, he has learned the secret of forgiving others and asking to be forgiven. He lights up with joy when he describes the life he lives with the people he loves.

Early on, Tony Ray had hired a coach, Joe Stumpf of "By Referral Only," and set out to do things differently. He vowed to do such a good job with each person he represented that he would turn every client into a raving fan. "Soon, I wasn't doing business with strangers but with friends," he acknowledges, "and I discovered that like-minded people enjoy hanging out together." And that generates more and more business. More and more relationships. These days, he is in regular contact with hundreds of clients, and modestly acknowledges that he could text 200-plus people and they would show up if he asked them to. But good as business is, it's just a part of the life he has designed. His passion is to live a balanced life, so he smiles and says, "My partner and I don't typically work on Sundays or in the evenings because it isn't conducive to the balanced life we want to live."

Tony Ray is also passionate about helping others live the balanced life. He works with his life and business partner, Darren, and says, "I want him to do what he loves." They had to figure out how to work together after that fateful day when Darren came home to announce that he had quit his job and was going to come work with Tony Ray. It was a defining moment for both their relationship and their business. They had to work out their business relationship, and, true to his passion, Tony Ray wanted Darren to be happy and learn about real estate too. "I wanted him to know everything about the business but to also do what he loves." They've figured it out, with Darren

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taking the lead in helping buyers, dealing with home inspections, and handling negotiations and Tony Ray handling more of the marketing, management, and online elements of the business. "We aren't really doing a 'team' thing," Tony Ray laughs, and then goes on to describe Beth Heidenreich who has handled paperwork for 24 years for Tony Ray. He gets misty-eyed when he talks about how she helped him for free in the early days and how grateful he is for her help. He talks about Kelly McCarthy and Ryan Turner and the joy of working with them. He is also enthusiastic about the part-timers, James Portis, who helps with the website and with coding, and Steve "Gonzo" Gonzalez, who helps with social media and video music. "I love to be part of other people's success. I want them to live the life they love as well!"

The balanced life that Tony Ray and Darren have in their business includes enjoying two rescue dogs, Keely and Baxter, taking thousands and thousands of photographs, being "foodies" who love supporting local restaurants, traveling to Europe a couple times a year, and, lately, road trips in their "retro camper,"

a custom-designed 2018 model camper that is a wonderful mix of beautiful old design and the latest technology. He'll gladly show you pictures and tell about the beautiful places they go camping.

Tony Ray is a teacher and pours himself into the lives of others. Out of his early experiences, he teaches the course "Marketing on a Dime" to fellow Tierra Antigua Realty agents, downtown merchants, and any group wanting to learn from his experiences in marketing and relationship building. Passionate about downtown Tucson, he is committed to helping with the Menlo Park development, and works hard to bring condensed housing and homeownership to the area. "Owners care about what is around them," he says and he is driven to help others find an urban lifestyle that can be the basis of a satisfying life.

Tony Ray has designed the life he wants to live and has built his business into it. Oh, and sometimes he wears an iguana on his head...