

CELEBRATING OUR
20TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR

PUTNEY & BARNES

time & leisure

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*Summer
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IDEAS TO FILL
YOUR DIARY

28 PAGE
ULTIMATE
INTERIOR
DESIGN GUIDE

exclusive interview

RAYMOND BLANC

THE MICHELIN-STARRED CHEF'S NEW RESTAURANT

HOLIDAY STYLE • LOCAL HEROES • LEADING LADIES • OUTDOOR FITNESS

RESTORATION WOMAN

Charlotte Grobien OBE tells Steph Siegle how a love for property conversion took her down the philanthropy path

By her own admission, Charlotte Grobien doesn't even know how to tile a wall, but that doesn't stop her from being something of a property guru. She finds homes, leads the renovation of the property, then sells them on for a profit.

What's special about Putney-based Charlotte, however, is that she then gives that profit away to charity, through her initiative aptly named 'Give It Away'. To date, it has donated more than £1.7million to worthwhile causes and Charlotte deservedly received an OBE from Prince William in 2015 for charitable services to children and young people.

Why did you start the charity?

It all began following a property conversion of our own home; even though we lived through the building work for six months I absolutely loved the project, in part because of the end result but also because of the fantastic team we worked with. We all decided we'd like to do it again and the idea for Give It Away started there and then, back in 2005.

My background is in the voluntary sector in the borough of Wandsworth. Through working in primary and secondary schools, and as a mentor to young people looking for help, I was prompted to think we should go into the property business and donate all the profits from the developments to a variety of charities that help children and young people.

How involved do you get in Give It Away?

I can't build the houses or do any of the technical work, but I do get involved in everything from choosing the property and interiors to buying elements such as the bathroom suites, door handles, light fixtures, kitchens etc. I set out, and maintain, the

budget and keep an eye on the site and, of course, oversee the marketing and work to maximise the profits as much as I can. I have a wonderfully competent team, many of whom work pro bono, from accounts to PR to structural engineers. For example, Sage Consulting advises on structural matters and construction detail, Ashworths Solicitors provide legal services, as well as a number of others who are listed on our website. We're indebted to everyone who gives their support. After the build, I also maintain relationships with those whose lives we help change.

What was the first project you successfully completed?

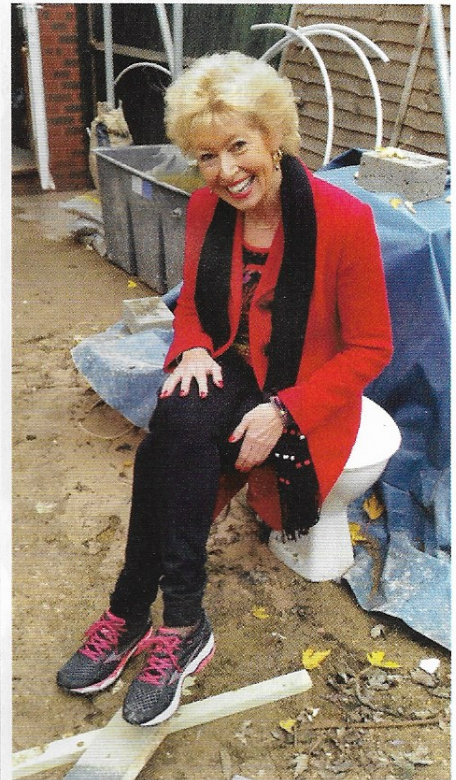
Our very first project was the building of two new homes in the Putney Heath area, followed closely by one in west Putney, back in the spring of 2007. The profits from these meant we were able to distribute £705,000 to charities. As well as selling property, we also raise money through rentals.

How do you find the right property?

Finding property is all about buying at the right price, but you can't second guess the property market and you need to consider local schools and transport. I talk to agents located near me and I hunt out a lot of local suppliers. For example, I Googled the current project manager for our recent Chiswick property.

Do you have criteria when choosing the charities to donate to?

We give careful consideration to where that money goes. They tend to be smaller, local London charities helping young, disadvantaged people, or parents experiencing severe financial difficulties. These charities tend to not receive large, if any, statutory funding grants and rely on donated money to fund their



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activities. Charity recipients have included The Shooting Star Children's Hospice, Whizz Kidz - which provides disabled children with customised mobility equipment, training and advice - and Small Steps School for Parents, part of the national network of Schools for Parents run by Scope, the national charity for people with cerebral palsy. Our aim is to make a real difference to the lives of young people living with disadvantaged circumstances or lack of educational or social opportunities.

What are you working on now?

Our most recent project has been a house in Arnott Close in Chiswick [pictured left], which is now completed and up for sale.

■ www.give-it-away.co.uk

