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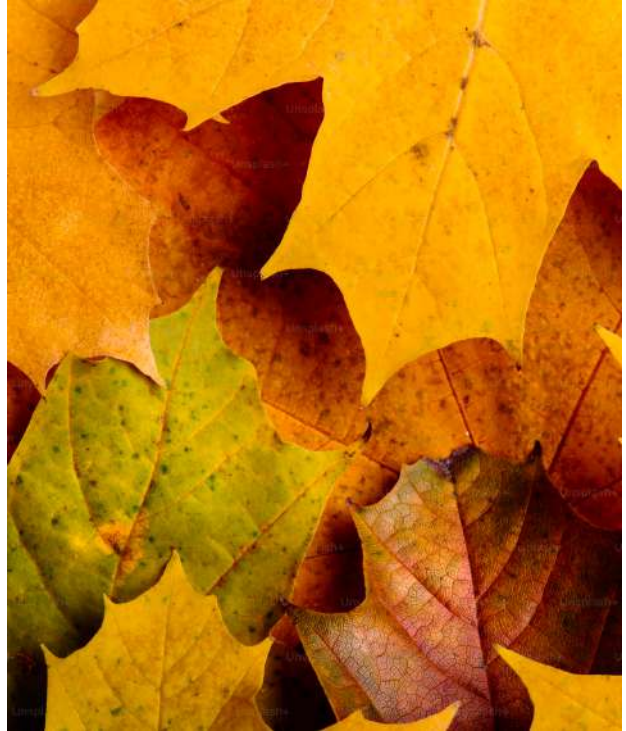
THE MONTH

SEPTEMBER 2023

BACK TO SCHOOL ROUND-UP

Q&A WITH RICHARD AND SOPHIE ROGERSON OF RFR

Richard Rogerson, CEO, RFR, and Sophie Rogerson,
Managing Director, RFR



RFR is a leading property advisory firm in London. The firm advises private client buyers on finding and acquiring high value homes in London. RFR has discreetly advised on some of the most high-profile, high-value and highly sensitive transactions in London.

According to one senior lawyer "their commitment to finding and securing the best properties for their clients is astonishing". Described by one Macfarlanes' Partner "as good as it gets in advising private clients" and by Chambers HNW Guide as the "leading buying agents in the UK" with "a client service that is second to none", we sat with the founders and husband-and-wife team Richard and Sophie Rogerson to ask about their journey.

How hard is it to build a new private client firm from scratch?

Very! Don't believe anyone who tells you otherwise! It involves immense hard work, a lot of trust in your fellow founders, a conviction and belief that is

prepared to get tested and resilience to face the unknown unknowns (of which there have been many in the last decade). However, it is also incredibly rewarding – you experience an immense sense of achievement, meet extraordinary people who help you on your journey, and the learning never ever stops. Whilst we would never dare to compare ourselves to Maurice Turnor Gardner, both firms began at a similar time and have many shared experiences as we've grown alongside one another. Clare, Ceris and the team have always been very kind, honest and supportive. That shared entrepreneurial spirit is so important, especially in the more challenging moments.

Twelve years on, has RFR delivered on your original vision?

Yes, no and maybe ask us that again in 12 years! Yes, in the sense that we had one clear ambition at the outset – we wanted to build a market leading firm whose service was on a par with the very best professional service firms (like Macfarlanes and Allen & Overy,

where we trained). We have achieved that in our industry.

No, in a sense that all businesses and business plans evolve. At the outset we tried to achieve too many things for clients - in addition to buying advisory, they needed property management, project managers and designers which spread us too thin and took us away from our core expertise. Thankfully, a very wise mentor told us to focus solely on acting for buyers – a role where we were pre-eminent and add the most value. This was pivotal advice and has shaped the firm over the last six years. This focused speciality has given us our edge and enabled us to focus on the job we love, and where we excel.

As for the future, the next chapter is to sustain our position at the top and build the next generation of RFR Partners. We made a decision to train younger recruits rather than seek lateral hires – in this way we create the 'stick of rock' in terms of quality and values throughout the firm. In the years to

come (some way off yet – as we hope to remain in our prime!) we want to ensure that there is a transition to a second generation that ensures RFR's longevity in the professional service world.

What are some of the most enjoyable elements of the role and some of the most challenging?

The most enjoyable element is absolutely the people. We are very fortunate to work for some of the world's most exceptional and extraordinary high-profile individuals and families. Since our role is ultimately to find and secure them their home, it is deeply personal – we always have a direct and meaningful relationship with the client, often in some of the most extraordinary moments of their lives. Unfortunately, these are never stories we can share (as we never ever disclose details about our clients), but, needless to say, they are hugely rewarding and often very inspiring moments for us. There are also important relationships with the professional private client community, as well as the selling agents and property professionals across London – such a myriad of individuals, firms and characters, many of whom we are fortunate to call good friends. You have to love people to do this job – loving football also helps! Sophie and I are committed Spurs fans (through the bad and good!) This brings a constant conversation which is always a source of connection to bind and unite.

The biggest challenge – sometimes also the people, I suppose. Not every relationship is straightforward as anyone working in the private client arena knows. Being able to dig deep, to find the service in your heart and work through those challenging moments is never easy, but it is important to who we are as a firm, and to who we are as people.

What has changed the most since you founded RFR in 2012?

Wow – so much. Stamp Duty was barely a footnote in 2012; Brexit and Covid weren't yet words; Trump, Ukraine, Inflation, Interest Rates, Coalition, Corbyn, Boris, King Charles III. It feels like it has been the most extraordinary, unpredictable period. In many ways, we have to

credit our Chairman, William Drake, in those moments. He has always been reassuringly steadfast: "don't worry, keep doing what you do, there will always be a need for good advisors", which has proved true at every turn.

I suspect one of the biggest changes is the realisation of how important a buying advisor is, and perhaps that not all buying advisors/agents are equal! When we started RFR, we were one of a handful. Now there are hundreds of so-called buying agents, or property consultants or runners (titles vary). The perception is that barriers to entry are low, and the rewards are high. Thankfully that is not the reality. It's immensely hard work and the trust and respect of the private client community is earned over decades.

At the outset, there was a perception that a buying agent just "saved you time" but did little else. I think this has fundamentally changed. Clients and their advisors now understand that the leading buying advisors have an exceptional knowledge of the London market, have access to the best properties which all now trade discreetly, can advise on value and win out in competitive offer situations (we haven't lost a competitive situation since long before the pandemic) whilst also undertaking extensive due diligence to protect buyers in a system where recourse to a seller is non-existent. These transactions are now typically in the tens of millions, very occasionally in the hundreds of millions, and consequently prove to be very significant investments. With stamp duty at nearly 17% and a market that is illiquid and where value is very subjective, making a mistake has very significant financial consequences (not to mention emotional ones). Having an adviser who sits on the buyers' side of the table, without conflicts of interest (sadly too many buying agents also sell) – is invaluable.

How do you approach conflicts of interest – do these arise?

This is very important. Our legal backgrounds mean that avoiding potential conflicts is part of our DNA. To this end, from the outset, we made incredibly important commitments as a firm, that we have never wavered from:

- We only ever act for buyers. We believe that also acting for sellers creates the risk of a conflict.
- We never accept fees from anyone but our clients. Lots are offered by property sellers, selling agents, insurers, contractors which inevitably risk a conflict of interest.
- We never take on two similar mandates at the same time. The market is too small and good stock too scarce to have two competing mandates within the same firm. Thankfully, we are at a size and with financial resources that we can afford to turn away work.
- Finally, we keep at least 12 months of working capital in reserve. This ensures that the firm's financial position never bares on our advice. Too many advisors live hand to mouth, meaning the next deal is critical for their survival.

I suspect pro bono work is less relevant to your specialism, so how do you give back?

It's a fair point, and yes, pro bono doesn't really work in our sector. Instead, we tend to encourage the team to do something off their own back to give back (in combination with donations we make as a firm). For us, Richard recently became a trustee of The Rainbow Children's Trust - an amazing charity that supports families with a child who has a life-threatening illness. For Sophie, it has been to become a Prince's Trust mentor, helping to mentor young people with business ideas of their own.

Are you excited by returning to Villa d'Este?

We are very selective in conferences we attend but Villa d'Este is one we are absolutely committed to. The setting is truly stunning, the attendees are all exceptional (many of whom are now friends), and the agenda is thought-provoking long after you leave. I am particularly excited this year as Sophie is hoping to join me and we are sponsoring a tennis break out on the free afternoon!

What next for RFR?

I think we are quietly enjoying where we are. We

have great chemistry in the team, a strong position in the market, a full client roster and ever-growing demand for our services. Spurs are even second in the league. For now – that is enough! ■





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