

YOUR WINTER



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COVER PICTURE: From the new range of Spring fashion by Laura Ashby. For local stockists see www.laurashby.com



Christine Yorath, right, in the front room of her spacious Val d'Or home in Leeds which she shares with her footballer husband Terry, left

Christine Yorath lived the life of a footballer's wife. Now she's busy developing her property empire as **SALLY CLIFFORD** found out. Pictures by Anthony MacMillan

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Many associate her surname with sport as opposed to bricks and mortar. Christine Yorath's husband, Terry, made his name in the beautiful game as a professional player and club manager; their eldest, daughter Gabby, is a TV sports presenter.

Chatting excitedly about the sites she's currently developing in her home city of Leeds where trendy apartments dominate a skyline once reached predominantly by tower blocks, it's evident property is Christine's passion. It's also her profession.

She was in her late 30s when she made her first property investment. "It was a run down back to back with about 100 cats living in it!" she laughs. "I spent a year renovating it then sold it. I was going to keep it and rent it out but Terry said I'm too house proud to be a landlady so I sold it and bought another one."

And so it went on from there. "Eventually I started diversifying. I bought bigger things and started to build bigger things."

She talks fondly of the old Volvo estate straining under the weight of flat pack kitchens; tiles and cornices she'd buy to titivate homes she was renovating. Not very footballers' wives is it?

In 2001 Christine founded Leodis Property Management Ltd which has since been re-branded into the property letting and management empire, Flats in Leeds Ltd.

Says Christine: "The business has not changed. What we're doing has not changed. Part of the strategy is moving forward."

It's a snazzy set up. A personalised-plated Mini is among her fleet of black branded vehicles seen buzzing around sites she's working on within the city centre and sub-



urbs, not so far away from her own abode. Val D'Or (Valley of Gold) is as lavish as its name suggests without being too ostentatious. Terry and Christine bought it back in 1984 from Bradford mill owners, the Sidi family who built it and lived there for years. The Yoraths are the only other family to occupy the seven-bed house which has great sentimental attachment. A willow tree in memory of Terry and Christine's son, Daniel, a promising footballer, stands proud next to the goal net in the spacious back garden marking the spot where he died from a rare heart condition. "He's still part of our lives," says Christine.

With so much space to maintain inside and outside, various extensions have doubled the size of the property, you'd think she'd be looking to down-size. "The children often say 'don't you rattle around in it?' but I don't. I use every bit of the house," she says.

Val D'Or remains a family home even though her children have flown the nest. It's a retreat for their return. Photographs on walls and table tops, among them precious pictures of her first grandchildren, Gabby's twin son and daughter to husband Scots rugby star Kenny Logan, are a constant reminder of loved ones when they're not around.

They're very close. Gabby had visited a few days before Christine and I met. They and her other daughter Louise, a model in the States, chat regularly on the phone. Jordan, the baby of the brood, stops there in between his University studies. He's following in his mum's footsteps.

The 20-year-old is currently in the second year of an estate management degree at Northumbria University and has obviously inherited his mum's prowess for property. He's already invested in



Christine Yorath with some of her staff helping to build her property empire, and left, in her building site gear

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◀ two flats. "He thinks I'm running a corner shop and he wants it to be a department store!" Christine laughs.

Gabby has also invested in property on one of her mum's developments in Leeds. She's currently in the throes of a personal property development project - her new London home. "She has a really good eye and she's good at making decisions," says Christine.

Has she ever been tempted to develop outside Leeds? Christine says she's had offers of land outside the county but admits having a tendency to stick with what she knows best. "I know it so well," she says, referring to her home city.

However, there's a hint Bradford could be a place she'll eventually buy into. At one time it appeared untouchable to developers. The recent city living boom has made it a lucrative location. Christine toured it recently with an agent and hints it's a site she's considering.

Should she do so, homeowners will benefit from her flare for interior fashion, something she's perfected since helping out a friend's relative who called on her for style inspiration after buying a flat off-plan. "There are a lot of new buildings and a lot of people who buy off-plan become a landlord and trail off to furniture stores."

With so many investing in the buy-to-let boom, shopping



in cheap and cheerful furniture stores to kit them out is no longer an option according to Christine. Individuality sells. Something unique is more likely to appeal to discerning homeowners/tenants. Prospective buyers and renters are selective. Something that looks like it's neighbour is likely to leave it languishing on the market.

Christine's style is 'eclectic.' "I put together pieces I like," she says.

The garden room, at Val D'Or, is an example of her classy style. It's also her favourite space, a place where she can relax with her mood music under twinkling ceiling constellations.

Many may say the beautiful game has afforded her this lavish lifestyle but while footballers' wives are perceived to live a charmed life of luxury and leisure, Christine has always had a willingness to work. It's in the genes.

"We're a family of grafters," she says, referring to her bookie dad and her mum who worked on the site and ran a café. She smiles when she tells how her mum is still grafting at 79, albeit voluntarily for the local charity shop!

Brought up in Beeston, beauty was Christine's first enterprise. She ran her own salon in Leeds for a while before pursuing her passion for property. She laughs recalling her preferred love of home style mags to ▶



Above and below, the family home she and husband Terry still enjoy, even though the children have flown the nest

◀ high fashion glossies during her days as an original WAG, the tag given to footballers' wives and girlfriends. She was fashion conscious but not so much as to become a clothes horse for designers as she says the partners of today's Premiership players tend to be.

Financially the game is in a different league, too, compared to Terry's playing days.

"It's the amount of money they earn," says Christine. "When we were footballers' wives they had a good wage but it wasn't so far removed from other people, whereas now they are."

However, it has contributed to the foundations for the property developing empire she's rapidly expanding.

By nature she's a bit of a gambler, property developers tend to take a gamble on every house they buy. Fortunately for her the risks have paid off. "I think I have the right disposition. I have a bit of a gambler in me but I'm sensible and don't get carried away," she says.

Is she willing to take a gamble on property developing abroad? Her second home in Spain, she tells me, is a place where she goes to switch off, not to work.

For now her sights are set firmly on home turf where she has pals who are also busy building empires. According to Christine, they're also at a stage in life where they're looking forward to retirement, something she doesn't want to consider. "I don't think at all like that! Each new thing I love doing. Jordan says he doesn't think I'll retire, I'll just fade!" she laughs. "But in winter when I'm out on site and it's freezing, I've got my high visibility coat on and rigger boots, there are times when I say in the next life I'll open a dress shop!"

