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## For Gabby it's a life of two halves



In the game: converted flat

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12:01AM GMT 06 Nov 2004

Comment

### A man's game? No way. Chris Arnot sees Gabby Logan bestride the macho world of property development

Gabby Logan is making a flying visit to Leeds, breaking the journey between her apartment in Glasgow and her townhouse in London.

It is late on a Friday afternoon and her husband, the former Scotland rugby international Kenny Logan, is due to play in a pre-season friendly down the road.

Before kick-off, she has a precious couple of hours to spend with her mother, Christine Yorath. The pair evidently have much in common, apart from a mutual interest in a skincare company.

Both married professional sportsmen. (Terry Yorath, once of Leeds United and Wales, is Gabby's father.) Both work in male-dominated professions.

ITV may have lost the Premiership to the BBC this season, but Euro 2004 confirmed Gabby's reputation as a cool presenter of televised football, keeping order among the seasoned pros in the studio.

Christine, meanwhile, is becoming an increasingly big player in the equally macho world of property development.

One of her companies, Town and City Living Ltd, has just sold what is one of the most expensive apartments in Yorkshire's most sought-after city centre. A duplex in the upper reaches of what was once Leeds City Council's Department of Legal Services, it went for just under £1 million.

"A captain of industry bought it as his second home," she confides.

Work is just starting on the conversion of another Grade-II listed building which she has acquired in the nearby financial district, while she has two more projects on the go in the village-like suburb of Chapel Allerton.

One is a new-build block of 18 apartments, the other the conversion of Allerton Hall. Half of the 24 apartments have been sold before the serenity of this boarded-up, former maternity hospital has been disturbed by a single hammer or drill. And one of the buyers is Gabby Logan herself.

At 31, it is her first venture into buy-to-let investments, but it seems unlikely to be her last. "I might buy another next year," she says, sinking into one of many comfortable sofas scattered through the much-extended art deco house which her mother calls home and business headquarters.

The presenter reflects on the benefits of bricks and mortar over stocks and shares without straining her voice. "This is the first time Mum has allowed me to buy a property from her," she adds. "I just didn't want her to over-commit herself," Christine puts in.

Like her daughter, she doesn't appear too worried about ever-louder predictions of a dramatic fall in property prices. "I'm 54 and they've been saying something similar ever since I was 20," she goes on. "Sometimes they've dipped, but they've always doubled over a seven- to 10-year period."

"And I'm not thinking of selling up next year," Gabby confirms. "This will be a long-term investment."

When she moved to London 10 years ago, she had trouble enough scraping together the deposit to buy a £70,000 apartment in Richmond. It doubled in value within a year.

"I'd been living in a flat next door, having taken a job with Sky just two months earlier," she recalls. "They seemed to have hundreds of presenters, so I wasn't particularly well paid. Being on my own at the time, though, I wanted to live in a nice area. The flat's location was good, but it was in a late 1960s, three-storey block around a communal garden. Friends used to call it the old folks' home. I remember gutting the place and doing it up with Mum's help."

So do mother and daughter share similar taste? "It's not taste so much," says Gabby, "as being able to ring her and say: 'I like this; where can I get it from?' I remember she got some curtains for me from a woman in Leeds and then came down to hang them."

The Logans' London home, in Chiswick, was built as recently as the 1970s, on four floors with four bedrooms. Like the Richmond flat, it had to be gutted and rebuilt from the inside to Gabby's specifications.

"When you travel a lot, as I do," she says, "you pick up ideas. Our bedroom is modelled on something I saw at a hotel in Bali." Did her husband, I wonder, take a keen interest in the marital townhouse?

"Kenny's quite methodical and practical. He'd take more interest than me in whether the steel beams could support the ceilings because we were knocking down so many walls. He also appreciates good design, but he's not really interested in fabrics."

Well, he is a rugby player, I point out, and Gabby smiles wanly. "He's a great one for hard surfaces," Christine interjects. "I often think that if you sat down in a Kenny-designed house, you'd jar your spine."

Logan now plies his trade for Glasgow after seven years with Wasps, in London. Hence the need for a property north of the border.

"I was surprised how much you have to pay up there," Gabby muses. "In London, you offer less than the asking price. Under the Scottish system, it's 'offers over' a certain cut-off point and the highest bid gets it."

"What drives the prices up is competing against those who've had six offers rejected. There was a house we looked at in the road where the actor Robert Carlyle lives - a big, double-fronted 1860s place that needed a lot of work. But it still went for over a million."

The Logans settled eventually for a three-bedroom ground and lower floor apartment in a huge Victorian villa in Glasgow's West End.

"The house was built in 1854 by Blackie, the publisher, for his two spinster daughters," Gabby says. "There are fantastic high ceilings with ornate cornicing and doors of heavy English oak."

All of which sounds a long way from her mother's upbringing in the back-to-backs of south Leeds. "We were the first family in our street to have an inside toilet and, later, a car," Christine recalls.

She was the daughter of a bookie and always harboured ideas above being a beauty therapist and marrying a footballer. "When I married Terry in 1971," she goes on, "he was earning £69 a week." Yorath's wages would rise sharply as the decade wore on and he established himself in the Leeds first team.

All the same, the lives of footballers' were by no means as pampered then as they are today. "Terry was a bit taken aback," she says, "when I told him I'd re-mortgaged our house and bought a terraced place to do up and let out. But he was all right about it. He just said that I'd be a terrible landlady because I'm too houseproud."

The house she had bought was desperately in need of an injection of pride. "The old woman who had lived there had about a hundred cats, so the doors were all scratched," she recalls. "What's more, there had been fires on the top floor."

Christine set about transforming the place with a zeal that she would later apply to other terraced homes in workaday parts of Leeds. Some she let out; some she sold on, using her experience to acquire mortgages for first-time buyers. "You learn a lot while doing up little houses which you can later apply to bigger ones," she maintains.

This is a woman who spent her early life absorbing the contents of *Ideal Home* or *Homes and Gardens*; one who ordered from W H Smith an American publication called *Architects' Digest*. "I've got every back copy since 1973 in there," she says, gesturing into the middle-distance where the magazine's white spines occupy row after row of bookshelves.

"When I first cut my teeth, everybody in the property business was male. I went to see what they were up to and there would inevitably be woodchip on the walls, cheap cord carpet on the floors and a lot of white paint or magnolia. That's a man's idea of covering a multitude of sins."

"I'd put in fitted kitchens with built-in hobs and nice fridges, and always ensure there was plumbing for the washing machine. I'd put TV aerial sockets in all the bedrooms and brass light fittings. These days you have to sell lifestyle."

Be it football punditry or property development, it seems that mother and daughter enjoy showing men how it should be done.