

Keeping it personal

Natasha Higgins meets the team at **Behr & Butchoff** and hears about their first 30 years in business.

When it comes to buying and selling houses, or renting and letting properties, long-established estate agency Behr & Butchoff are veterans in their field of practice.

"We opened the agency on the very premises it stands today in 1983," explain Michael Behr and Martin Butchoff who started the company together after gaining experience at another leading estate agency in the area.

Behr was, and still is, the lettings and administrative side of the business while Butchoff is sales and marketing. "I remember

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Martin and myself desperately searching for an office in St John's Wood. One afternoon, after we'd had lunch at a pub on Allitsen Road, we wandered over and stood at the corner of the high street chatting. When we looked up we noticed a 'for sale' sign at 105 St John's Wood Terrace. I popped into one of the red phone booths, the same ones as are still opposite our offices 30 years later, and made arrangements to see the premises. We've been based there ever since."

Behr, who comes from a property background in South Africa, moved to London in the mid-seventies. When he and Butchoff started the business in the early eighties, there was only one other estate agent on St John's Wood High Street: "The area was much

sparser than it is today and the competition was nothing like it is now." Both Michael and Martin believe St John's Wood can be a tough neighbourhood to crack in the world of estate agency: "It's all about who you know," they explain.

It was Martin's idea to start a business together. Michael was somewhat apprehensive as he had a family of four children to support. Still, he made the leap and has never looked back: "It took around three years to really develop the business – a new business always takes time and requires a huge level of commitment. We were both working over twelve hours a day in the beginning."

Over the years the company has sold and let to celebrities, footballers and musicians alike and has expanded to cover other parts of north London including Regent's Park, Hampstead, South Hampstead, Swiss Cottage, Maida Vale and Little Venice. Another string to their bow are commercial and residential investments. These cover all parts of London and stretches around the country to Brighton, Wales, Cornwall, Lincoln and just about anywhere else.

Paul Bennett joined the practice in 1990 and was made a partner a couple of years later. When he joined the company he set up the specialist House Sales department and during the period that the company also had an office in Hampstead, he looked after the overall running of the St John's Wood office. Currently, with Martin, he oversees the residential sales side of the practice with particular emphasis in house sales, but has also developed a more commercial element to the business. These include the letting of numerous retail premises and the sale and purchase of residential/commercial investments across London, his quirkiest transaction being the sale of a 30,000 sq ft nuclear bunker in Lincoln.

Part of Behr & Butchoff's business model and a contributing factor in the company's long-standing success is that every employee, even those at a high level including Michael, Martin and Paul, endeavour to look after each and every one of their clients personally. The team today consists of 12 members of staff, most of which have been with the company for more than 10 years but all of whom are excellent at their roles and strongly support the firm's principle of providing their clients a first class personalized service.

These days Paul and Martin are heavily

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involved in the sales side of the business while Michael looks after lettings and management, an important part of the business: "I take a personal interest in every property we let and manage. In the last 30 years I've not had one horror story or disaster. I treat the property as if it were my own and I do the utmost possible for our clients. Clients who are abroad are reliant on a good level of service and I make sure they are kept satisfied."

Michael is certainly well positioned to understand the ins and outs of the lettings business having been a founding member of ARLA (The Association of Residential Letting Agents) in the late seventies. "We set up ARLA at a time when the lettings market needed some form of regulation and landlords and

tenants needed protection." Martin, in turn, is the longest practising agent in St John's Wood. He has been working in the area for more than 40 years.

With three such prominent agents, the question beckons, what's does the London sales and rentals market hold in store? "On the sales side it's very difficult to predict but certainly prices have increased over the past year and we see no reason for this upward progression to



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not continue, certainly whilst there remains a shortage of property for sale and the fact that we have numerous UK based and overseas buyers keen to invest in this part of London. Rentals have consistently been a strong performer in our marketplace. This location is exceptionally convenient for tenants providing them easy access to the City and West End, furthermore as sale prices exponentially increase potential buyers are choosing to rent therefore automatically improving the rental sector even further," concludes Paul.

In these uncertain times, at least one thing remains a constant in St John's Wood, those two red telephone booths outside the florist and opposite 105 St John's Wood Terrace.



GLAD THEY MADE THAT CALL (left to right): Paul Bennett, Michael Behr and Martin Butchoff

FOR SALE: Elsworth Road, NW3 Price upon Application

This architecturally stunning property is graciously appointed within the Elsworth Road conservation area. It is set behind a wide carriage drive and comprises 6,559 sq ft/609 sq m of superbly planned accommodation.



FOR SALE: North Gate, Prince Albert Road, NW8 £5,800,000

An exceptionally bright, well proportioned apartment of approximately 3,140 sq ft/291 sq m situated on the fifth floor of this landmark, prestige red-brick Edwardian development located directly opposite Regent's Park.



FOR SALE: Hill Road, St John's Wood, NW8 £5,200,000

A beautifully presented five bedroom Grade 2 listed house occupying this corner plot. Arranged over four floors, the house benefits from a double aspect reception room, a fitted kitchen/family room, conservatory and a south-east facing garden.



TO LET: Cumberland Terrace, NW1 £4,000 per week

A brand new and stylish penthouse apartment on the third floor of a well planned property affording excellent views across Regent's Park. The apartment is situated in the centre of the prestigious Nash Terrace.

