

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Alan Isaacs

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Photography: **REBECCA NOONAN**

Having lived in a council estate growing up, I always envied my friends whose parents had their own homes; my ambition from a young age was to get onto the property ladder. I left school at fifteen and my father managed to get me a job as a despatch boy in a large London advertising agency. I then spent fifteen years in the industry, ending up as an account manager. The seeds for my taste for selling were sown. It was while I was working at a company called Lonsdale Advertising that I met my wife, now of over twenty-five years, Caroline Stiff. Caroline's late father, Geoffrey Stiff, owned an estate agent in Willesden Green called Camerons Stiff. Twenty-eight years ago Geoffrey had the vision to see the potential of this area off the Kilburn High Road called Queen's Park and opened an office there offering me a route into estate agency; I took the opportunity.

I have been working in the area for over twenty-five years, so in many ways Queen's Park has been more of a home to me than where I actually live. The great thing about Queen's Park is its lack of pretentiousness; people are down to earth, which creates a great sense of community. This is reflected in the bars and restaurants, often I will go and get a coffee and return half an hour later having bumped into somebody who has either bought from us or who is planning to sell and just wants a casual chat. There is also a sense of history, especially regarding the Park as it is run by the Corporation of London and of course, there is the annual Queen's Park Day which is held every September, which we have sponsored for over twenty-five years now.

Most of the houses in the area are of the Edwardian period and, because of the fairly strict planning controls imposed by the local council, have managed to retain their original façades. Nevertheless, houses do vary internally with loft conversions, side extensions and now cellars. Over the years the type of people coming into the area has changed, proving Geoffrey Stiff's vision to be well founded. Ten years ago Queen's Park attracted media types but now we are finding with the very good transport links heading towards Canary Wharf and the City, that people in finance such as bankers, city traders, and asset managers are flocking here for the relaxed atmosphere. With the transit nature of Europe we are also attracting a lot of foreign investment, especially from France, due to the new Lycee International de Londres opening in Wembley this September. The area is mostly made up of houses so this attracts families, people tend to stay in their houses longer and if they do move they generally want to stay in the area; moving up to Brondesbury Park to gain lateral space is very typical. We do have a very active flat market, which is affordable for first time buyers, and a strong lettings market too.

The prospects for Queen's Park are very exciting, with its good housing stock and great transport links the area is now a bonafide part of Central London. The only cautionary note is that Salisbury Road, known for its more Bohemian feel, is starting to attract corporate business, which I'm afraid, may change the ambience of the location. It's up to the longstanding residents and the local businesses to ensure that the area retains its wonderful character.

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