

Q&A: Five minutes with Matthew Robertson, co-founder and CFO of Valouran

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The co-founder and chief financial officer of Valouran on how he got started in property, his number-one travel destination, his top TV show and podcast recommendations and his favourite historical figure.



Matthew Robertson

How did you join the property industry?

I am a chartered accountant by training and while always being a 'numbers guy', I wanted to be involved in a business that delivered a tangible product of which I could be proud. High-end residential certainly ticks that box.

Before joining the industry, I worked for a corporate finance advisory boutique. We were mandated to raise further capital for a commercial property and strategic land developer and, as is typical, I spent significant time with management getting to know the business intimately. Having got to know the CEO well, when he asked if I could head up the finance side, I jumped at the chance.

What does your job entail?

My role is principally focused on working with our equity partners and lenders to optimise the capital structures we put in place to fund each of our developments. In the early stages of a project, the focus will be on working with our development team to analyse and write the business plan for the deal and then presenting that to our funders.

During the development phase itself, my role switches to one of reporting to and liaising with our funding partners. I get to see every part of the development from beginning to end, which is something I really enjoy.

What do you like most about the property industry?

Being involved in a business that delivers a tangible end product of which I can be proud.

And what do you dislike most about it?

Ours has always been a cyclical industry, but the last few years have seen increased levels of volatility, which have made patience and the ability to stick with projects over the long term ever-more valuable commodities.

What would you change about the property industry?

Successive governments have cited planning reform as a major priority, yet limited progress has been made. Instead of wholesale reform of the system, I would encourage central government to increase public spending on planning as this has consistently fallen since austerity measures were introduced post the global financial crisis.

What barriers or challenges have you overcome?

Like many, I found dealing with the Covid pandemic an incredibly unsettling period. I was so impressed, however, with the pragmatism and adaptability shown by my colleagues. Within a matter of days, we were seamlessly managing the delivery of £1bn developments while all sitting at home.

What are you most proud of in your career?

I am immensely proud of what we have achieved in our first year at Valouran. Lots of my friends raised their eyebrows when I announced we were launching a property development business at a time when the UK was teetering on the brink of recession, interest rates had soared and construction cost inflation was rampant. Against this backdrop, within 12 months we have projects under development with a gross development value in excess of £500m.

What do you value in people?

The passion, energy and drive of the people within our business and within the design and engineering consultancies we work with are incredibly inspiring.

What advice would you give someone starting a career in the property industry?

To my mind, the foundation to a successful career is forging great relationships with people. All the most positive moments on my journey to date have been created this way. You can only do that by getting out there and meeting and working with as many people as possible.

Top recommendations

Favourite destination?:

I love Hong Kong and am fortunate enough to be able to travel there to see our investor partners, as well as taking family trips to see friends who live there. I never fail to be taken aback by the energy of the place and the can-do attitude of everyone who lives and works there. It is also astonishing to see the growth of the city every time I visit.

Favourite TV show?

I have finally finished watching the TV series *Succession*, which I thought was great. It is a show that treads the line between drama and (very) dark comedy magnificently, and the way the characters slowly reveal their true selves over 30-plus episodes is something to behold.

Favourite podcast:

Friends have been recommending *The Rest Is History* podcast to me for years and having finally now got into it, I am wondering why it took me so long. I am impressed by how the show manages to distil the essence of very complex historical events into a podcast-sized level of detail, and the chemistry between the two hosts is hugely entertaining.

Favourite historical figure:

I'm currently engrossed by a podcast about the life (and death) of John F Kennedy. The experiences he had and the amount he had achieved by the time of his tragic demise (at the same age as me) are quite staggering.