

THE SQUARE MILE AND ME

We dig into the memory bank of the City's great and good. Today, **Alex Michelin**, founder and CEO of London property developer Valouran, tells us about his career

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST ROLE IN THE WORLD OF BUSINESS?

I began my career in investment banking before founding the prolific development firm Finchatton in 2001. Using my knowledge of financing and structuring property transactions, in 2016 I also co-founded Capital Rise, a property lending specialist.

WHEN DID YOU WANT TO BUILD A CAREER IN PROPERTY?

Whilst in investment banking, I sought more fulfilment and the opportunity to create lasting buildings and communities, which led me to property development as the ideal balance of finance and creativity. I co-founded Finchatton with my good friend, after identifying a gap in London's un-institutionalised residential market, and over two decades we completed over £2.7bn in sales.

In 2022, I founded Valouran with Matt Robertson, utilising our deep financial expertise and knowledge of the residential market. We have some amazing buildings being delivered which we hope stand proud in London for decades to come.

WHAT'S ONE THING YOU LOVE ABOUT THE CITY OF LONDON?

I love the incredible history of this city and the blend of old and new. The Square Mile is one of the most historic parts of the capital, yet it also boasts some of the most contemporary buildings and architecture. At Valouran, we revitalise older buildings and bring them into the modern era, so this contrast really resonates with me.

AND ONE THING YOU WOULD CHANGE?

I would make The City more environmentally friendly. It is still far too concrete and I think everyone would benefit if we could greengreen some of the open spaces and incorporate biophilic design. It is a simple yet powerful change that will have an outsized impact on wellbeing.

WHAT'S BEEN YOUR MOST MEMORABLE BUSINESS LUNCH?

Lunch with Marcus Meijer, CEO of MARK, in late 2018 to celebrate his purchase of the historic Whiteley's building in Queensway. From then, we began an epic seven-year journey where we have completely reimaged The Whiteley into a landmark residential and hospitality destination.

AND ANY BUSINESS FAUX PAS?

Quite early on I hit "reply all" to an email meant for my business partner, accidentally ranting to 15 senior board members, leading to weeks of apologies. Thankfully they saw the funny side and we still did the deal.



WHAT'S BEEN YOUR PROUDEST MOMENT?

Launching Valouran. Our central London portfolio is already over 445,677 square feet with a value of over £1bn.

AND WHO DO YOU LOOK UP TO?

I look up to amazing business leaders who have gone before me. Guys like Steve Schwartzman and Elon Musk, who came so close to losing it all but kept going, building enduring and exciting companies, are inspirations.

WHAT'S THE BEST BUSINESS ADVICE YOU'VE EVER BEEN GIVEN?

The best advice I have received is that "fear kills more dreams than failure ever will". This inspired me to name my business Valouran, derived from the word valour, meaning 'strength of mind and spirit. People told me I was crazy to start again after 20 years building a successful company but I am happy I had the valour.

AND THE WORSE?

Anyone who tells you "it can't be done". Those who never take no for an answer, and constantly find solutions to problems truly fulfil their potential. Usain Bolt ignored all the sports coaches who told him at a young age he was too tall and skinny to be a sprinter.

ARE YOU OPTIMISTIC FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?

Despite current headwinds in London, political challenges and tax rises,

CV

Name: Alex Michelin
Title: Founder and CEO of Valouran
Previous roles: Investment Banker
Age: 48
Born: Jamaica
Lives: Henley, UK
Studied: Economics, University of Nottingham
Talents: Making rum punch
Motto: Who dares wins
Biggest perk of the job: Working with the most talented and creative people in property in London
Coffee order: More of tea kinda guy
Cocktail order: Rum and coke
Favourite book: Wuthering Heights

London is an amazing city filled with deep, intelligent pools of creativity and talent. It will evolve, as it always has done, and remain a leading global city we should be proud of.

WE'RE GOING FOR LUNCH, AND YOU'RE PICKING - WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Let's grab a sandwich and take it to the benches at Postman's Park. I find it inspiring to read the tales on the amazing memorial there to heroic sacrifice on the wall displaying 53 hand-lettered tiles describing tales of ordinary people doing extraordinary deeds. It helps me put whatever stress I am having that day into perspective!

AND IF WE'RE GRABBING A DRINK AFTER WORK?

I would head to The Emery Rooftop Bar for a great view and atmosphere. Or for something more relaxed, we could head to George in Mayfair.

WHERE'S HOME DURING THE WEEK?

We recently moved to the Henley area to give our children an idyllic childhood in the British countryside. We are all enjoying the peace, fresh air and space out there and I love coming into the energy of London for work.

AND WHERE MIGHT WE FIND YOU AT THE WEEKEND?

With three kids, you will either find me on the sports field, cheering them on from the sidelines as they kick a ball around, or in the car being the taxi driver as I ferry them around!

YOU'VE GOT A WELL-DESERVED TWO WEEKS OFF. WHERE ARE YOU GOING AND WHO WITH?

I grew up in Antigua, so I love returning there with my family whenever we get a chance to relax and recharge. Nothing beats a cold beer on the beach watching the sunset.