

INTEGRA

AFFINITY | LIFE | LIFESTYLE

ISSUE 4 SUMMER 2023

ATLANTIS THE ROYAL, DUBAI

G.A Group, headquartered in London, have worked on this seminal project from 2014 through to opening this year.



'STILL TIME FOR THE 20S TO ROAR!'

Integra took to the road in early spring with its Partner roadshows, which took in events at the Shard, Graypaul Nottingham and Maranello Egham in Surrey.

GEORGE KRUIS: FROM ENGLAND RUGBY TO WELLNESS STARTUP

The former England Rugby lock is now a successful wellness entrepreneur. He tells *Integra* about playing his career 'on his own terms'.

INTEGRA BEST IN BUSINESS AWARDS CEREMONY
House of Commons – THE WINNERS!

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WELCOME TO THE SUMMER EDITION OF *INTEGRA*, AND WHAT A SIX MONTHS IT HAS BEEN SINCE THE LAST EDITION!

In November, *INTEGRA* was privileged to host the very first '*INTEGRA BEST IN BUSINESS AWARDS*', at the **HOUSE OF COMMONS**. The event was kindly supported by former Cabinet Minister **DAME ANDREA LEADSOM DBE MP**. Five UK-based businesses were on hand to collect their awards from Dame Andrea. Economist and *INTEGRA* columnist, Duncan Weldon, provided a captivating keynote speech to kick off the evening with plenty of material at hand following the rather eventful and cataclysmic budget of only a short time before. **CATENA, RED BULL F1, G.A GROUP, FACE THE FUTURE** and **CAMBRIDGE & COUNTIES BANK** collected awards for their contribution to business during the year, as voted by the *INTEGRA* Partners. Our thanks also goes out to Lucy Crankshaw who co-presented the awards.

'Still time for the 2020s TO ROAR!' was the inspirational title that was given to the *INTEGRA* roadshows which took to the road in early February, with events at the SHARD, GRAYPAUL Nottingham and MARANELLO in Egham, Surrey. More than 120 guests throughout joined the team to enjoy an evening of cars, Italian food and wine interjected with tips and guidance from our professional Partners on how to retain capital in order to fuel the roar!

Our final Showcase of this series will be at Graypaul Maserati in Solihull on 13 June. For more information, please go to WWW.INTEGRAPUBLISHING.CO.UK – EVENTS. Thank you to Mario Vignali, and all the teams at Graypaul and Maranello for their fantastic support!

The summer edition of *INTEGRA* extends the theme of high automotive design to the best architectural design, which can now be enjoyed at the

recently completed **ATLANTIS The Royal**, in Dubai. **G.A GROUP**, award winners at the House of Commons, joined *INTEGRA* to discuss their work on this project which was **14 years in the making!** Timing of this article also coincides with the launch of **ELEVATION INTERNATIONAL**.

Elevation has recently launched an office in Dubai with partners GSB Capital in order to provide borderless Wealth Management advice to ex-pat clients living and working in the region.

Fresh from retiring from rugby, *INTEGRA* speaks to **Ex Saracens & England International Rugby player George Kruis**. In an exclusive interview for *INTEGRA*, George discussed with us the transition from his playing career to launching his own start-up business **FOUR FIVE** with fellow ex-Saracens star, Dom Day.

Eighteen months on since launch, we are very excited about the evolution of *INTEGRA*, with its vision of promoting an integrated approach to providing professional services for clients in a fun and more colourful style, both through our magazine and now through the *INTEGRA* website WWW.INTEGRAPUBLISHING.CO.UK

A big thank you once again to everyone who has supported the mission along the way! We look forward to seeing you soon at one of our forthcoming events!



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50 guests joined *INTEGRA* at Ferrari Maranello in Egham, Surrey on the evening of Tuesday 21 March 2023.



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BUY TO LET – STILL A GOOD INVESTMENT?

LANDLORDS HAVE ENOUGH CONCERNS AT THE MOMENT about the likely impact on their tenants of the seemingly never-ending increases in the cost of living and interest rate increases. However, landlords who let residential property in England also need to be aware of the changes which are proposed by the Renters Reform Bill, which has in May 2023 just been presented for its first reading to the House of Commons.

The Bill follows on from the Government's white paper, 'A Fairer Private Rented Sector'.

Since 1988 virtually all residential landlords have been letting their properties by way of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST). This was introduced to incentivise lettings by landlords with there being no limit on the rent and with the landlord being able to evict the tenant once the fixed term of the tenancy had expired, regardless of whether the tenant had broken the terms of the agreement (often referred to as a 'no fault eviction'). This form of tenancy has been popular with landlords and has been a key factor in the growth of the 'buy to let' market over that period.

What are the proposed changes?

The end of the no-fault eviction

- Currently, a landlord may serve notice (under Section 21) on their tenant once the fixed term of the tenancy agreement has expired or at any time during a rolling periodic tenancy. The landlord does not have to give any reason and the fact that the tenant may never have broken the terms of the agreement is irrelevant.

To achieve an end to no-fault eviction, the Renters (Reform) Bill will end fixed-term tenancies and move to periodic tenancies, which do not have an end date.

Note, however, that landlords will be able to serve notice if they wish to sell the property, or move into it themselves (see below), along with other reformed 'mandatory' grounds for possession.

A new dispute resolution service

- An Ombudsman will be appointed,

and membership will be mandatory for all private residential landlords.

The objective will be to settle disputes between landlords and tenants without the need to go to court, and the Ombudsman will have the power to make various orders, including the payment of compensation of up to £25,000.00.

Prohibition of restrictions against lettings to tenants with children or tenants who are in receipt of benefits

- The courts have already ruled that such restrictions amount to unlawful discrimination, and the Bill will make them illegal.

Pets - It is proposed that tenants will have the right to request the landlord's permission to keep a pet, which the landlord will be obliged to consider and unable to unreasonably refuse.

Rent review clauses - Such clauses will be prohibited, and landlords will only be permitted to increase rents once a year with two months' notice of any increase.

Decent Homes Standard - This currently applies only to the social rented sector, but it is proposed to extend it to the private rented sector. To meet the standard, a landlord will have to ensure that there are no serious health or safety hazards.

Eviction of tenants - New mandatory grounds for possession will be introduced for landlords who wish to sell the property or move into it themselves.

Landlords will also be able to evict tenants who have been in at least two months' rent arrears on three occasions within the previous three years.

Property Portal - A new portal will be established so that landlords and tenants can check their rights and obligations.

If the Bill becomes law, will it have any effect on the buy to let market? This remains to be seen but mortgage lenders may be less willing to lend on buy to lets if the 'no fault' eviction is removed altogether, as this has been utilised by mortgage lenders to gain possession of let properties where the landlord has defaulted on their mortgage payments.

It may lead to increased rents across the sector to take account of the changes as landlords factor in the additional risks.

The Court system for dealing with tenants who are in rent arrears certainly needs to be streamlined so that buy to let landlords are not punished by long delays in obtaining a possession order once the no fault grounds under Section 21 are abolished. Without reforms to the legal procedures for eviction, landlords will take a hit by not receiving any rent but having to continue funding mortgage payments with higher interest rates than over recent years.

Combined with upcoming changes to energy efficiency standards, it certainly may lead to some landlords pulling out of the market altogether before the Bill becomes law and a rebalancing of the sector overall.

For advice on all property matters, please contact the Feldon Dunsmore team on **01926 954 694**. ■





MASERATI

History in the evolution

A brief history of Maserati

The Italian luxury car manufacturer was established on 1 December 1914, in Bologna. The company's headquarters are now in Modena, and its emblem is a trident. Maserati was founded by four brothers: Alfieri, Bindo, Carlo and Ettore Maserati. The brothers were all involved in automobile racing from the beginning, and their cars won numerous races throughout Europe. In 1937, Maserati debuted the 8CTF model, which was designed to compete in the newly created Indianapolis 500 race. The 8CTF proved to be very successful, winning the race in 1939 and 1940. In addition to their success on the racetrack, Maserati

also began producing luxury road cars in the 1930s.

The first luxury Maserati was the Tipo V4, which was introduced in 1931. This car featured a powerful engine and sleek design, and it quickly became popular among wealthy customers.

Maserati continued to produce both race cars and luxury road cars throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In 1954, the company introduced the legendary Maserati 250F, which was one of the most successful Formula One cars of all time.

Maserati also produced a number of other iconic cars during this period, including the 3500 GT and the 5000GT. In 1968, Maserati was sold to French car

manufacturer Citroën. Under Citroën's ownership, Maserati released a number of new models, including the Ghibli, Quattroporte and Bora. However, due to financial difficulties, Citroën sold Maserati to Alejandro De Tomaso in 1975.

Today, Maserati is one of the leading luxury car brands in the world, and its cars are highly sought after by collectors and enthusiasts. If you're interested in learning more about Maserati's long and storied history, be sure to visit the Maserati Museum in Modena, Italy. The museum is home to a large collection of Maserati cars, as well as other artefacts and memorabilia related to the company's history. ■



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Vermentino: Sardinia's Salty Secret

by Mark Pygott, Master of Wine

The unification of States that led to the formation of what we recognise as Italy, occurred in 1861. Such nascent nationhood ensures that the differences that we find across the peninsula and associated islands remain significant. Whether it is in dialect, food (think of the multitude of pasta shapes), architecture or wine, Italy has a diversity that reflects the past much more than it does the present. If you love wine, then Italy offers a range of stylistic and varietal permutations that sees it occupy an unparalleled position, one that the curious are only too eager to explore.

Within the twenty regions of Italy, the grape varieties that populate the vineyards are unequalled in their diversity, but the one that finds its way into my glass more than any other is Vermentino. There are arguments (aren't there always?) that centre on from which part of Italy Vermentino originates, but whether it is as Favorita in Piedmont, Pigato in parts of Liguria, or as Vermentino in Sardinia; it is in Sardinia that I find the most compelling examples. Many of the best vineyards overlook the cerulean tinged Mediterranean and whether it is by coincidence or due to the sea's proximity, Vermentino here delivers a saline and pithy twist to the sweet citrus commonly found in one's glass,

that draws comparisons with the refreshing bitterness of a superior gin and tonic. Delicious indeed.

You may know that Sardinia is one of the so called 'blue zones', a small group of islands or places where there are significantly greater numbers of centenarians than is usual. I am not suggesting that

“If Vermentino is so good, why isn't everyone drinking it?”

imbibing of Vermentino daily will guarantee you a birthday card from the King, but when on Sardinia, the food consumed (always fresh and sourced primarily from the sea or vegetable patch), the sense of community that supports its elderly and sees them as valuable contributors to society, ensures that a lot of people are very active into their old age.

So, if Vermentino is so good why isn't everyone drinking it? Well, like many things in life, being popular is not something easily achieved and however worthy I might think Vermentino is as a variety, the reality is that outside of the aforementioned places above, Vermentino is not that widely planted. When scarcity is allied to the geographical separation that Sardinia as an island enjoys, one can understand why the majority of Sardinian Vermentino is consumed by the locals and the tourists who flock here every summer to enjoy this unique 'micro-continent' that feels so different to the mainland. The amount of Vermentino making its way across the Tyrrhenian into the better wine shops and restaurants of Europe is undoubtedly increasing, so all I can suggest is that you keep your eyes open for this crowd-pleasing white, that whatever the weather, always brings a little Mediterranean warmth and light into my wine-drinking life.

Cheers!



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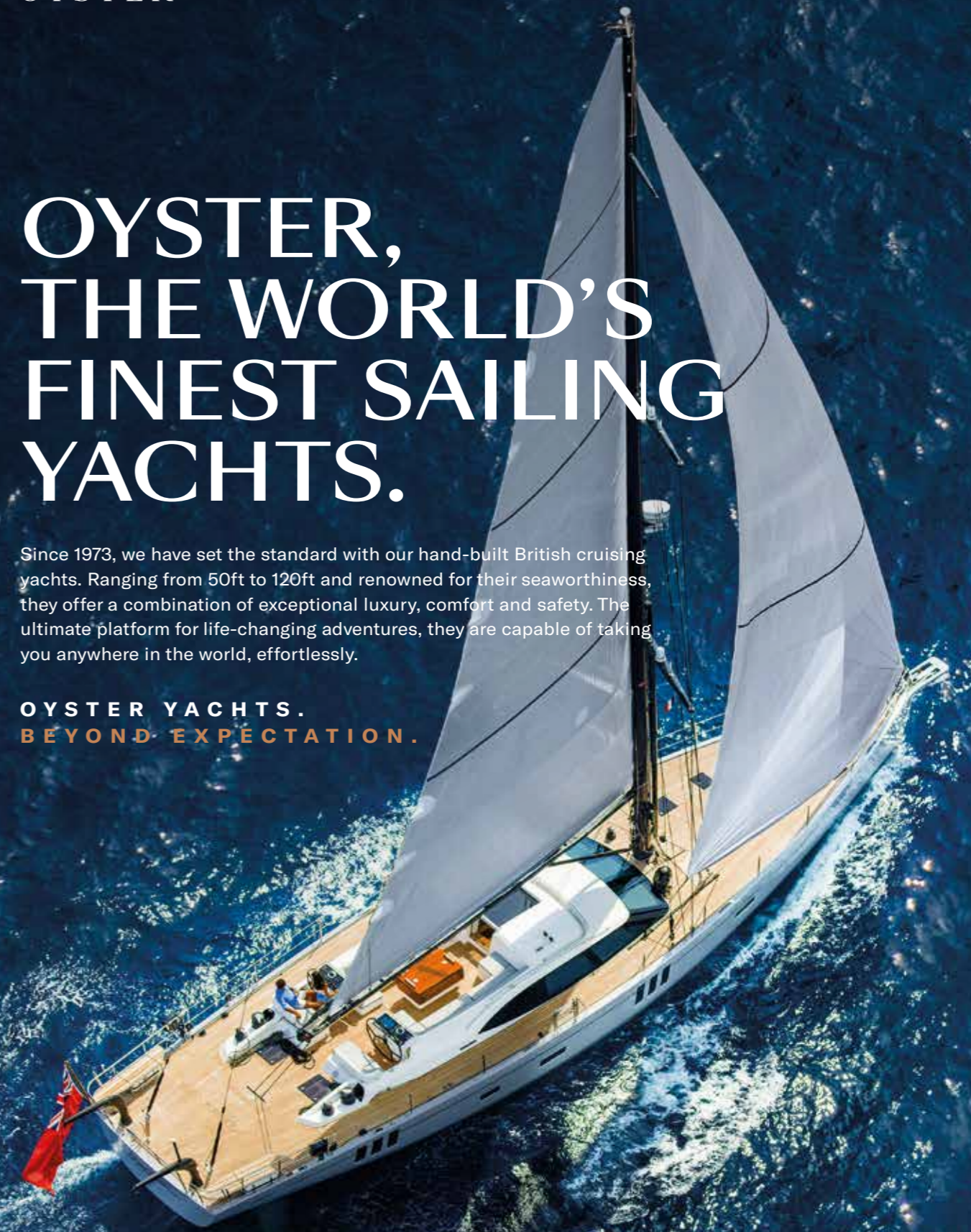


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THE ECONOMIST DUNCAN WELDON

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THE OUTLOOK FOR THE BRITISH – and global – economies is nowhere near as bad as seemed likely at the end of 2022. The bad news is that it is still pretty miserable. The big change has come in wholesale energy prices. Gas prices have fallen by almost 50% since the autumn and the price of a barrel of oil has also fallen steeply. That is enough to materially change the outlook for inflation and to lessen the big squeeze on household finances and give some support to consumer spending. In the case of Britain, a change in government and the regaining of market confidence has given the economy a further fillip.

But it is important to remain realistic. Inflation is expected to fall over the coming months but it will still remain uncomfortably high. Living standards will still be squeezed, even if not by as much as once feared. Whilst the major economies may avoid technical recessions – usually defined as two back to back quarters of a contracting economy – growth is set to remain weak and unemployment to rise. For many people and firms, 2023 will feel like a recession even if the statisticians compiling the official economic data do not agree.

The big change – compared to the 15 or so years after the 2008 crisis – is in the level of interest rates. Central banks, led by the US Federal Reserve, have been tightening monetary policy since late 2021. The pace of interest rates rises in North America, Britain and Western Europe in 2022 was the fastest since the 1980s. As peaks begin to fall, the pace of rate rises

should slow. Interest rates may be close to their peaks already. But those peaks, whilst still low compared to the long run of economic history, are much higher than anything experienced in the 2010s.

Households and firms which have become used to a world where the Bank of England held its base rate under 1% will undergo a difficult adjustment to a world of 4%+. Whilst a decade and a half is not a long time in the grand sweep of history, it is an awfully long stretch in terms of the business cycle. Many business models that have developed since 2008 have been woefully dependent on cheap borrowing costs and may not survive an era of more normal interest rates.

2022's rise in borrowing costs will begin to bite in 2023 and early 2024. Monetary policy, as central bankers are keen to emphasise, does not operate immediately but following what they call 'a long and variable lag'. It takes

time for fixed term financing deals, loan agreements and mortgages to reset to the new higher rates.

There are reasons for optimism in the global outlook – energy prices are lower than feared, the supply chain disruptions that accompanied the pandemic of 2020-21 seem to be finally being ironed out and the worst is in the past when it comes to inflation. But caution is still the best approach. ■



Duncan Weldon
Economist, journalist and author.

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Pros

- Management team is already familiar with most areas of the business.
- They can be ambitious to grow the business together.
- Colleagues know the new owners and there is the reassurance of continuity during the change in management.
- Less onerous due diligence required than by 3rd party.
- Could provide a willing buyer when other trade buyers are not willing to purchase.
- Owner can exit in a more gradual way. If it suits everyone.
- The negotiations are often less confrontational when both parties know each other.
- Can be satisfying for a vendor to handover to future generation of owners who are now benefiting from the business going forward.
- You are confident of the ability of the management team to deliver any deferred consideration.

Cons

- The proposed Management team may not know all the areas of the business.
- They may not want to make rapid changes and investments.
- If some key team members are not included, it may affect morale and the team need to ensure their own smooth transition from employers to employees.
- Current owner needs to be willing to share confidential information with current team members.
- May not have available funds or assets on which to secure potential borrowings.
- Can be difficult for the team to fully take over if the exiting owner is still involved in the same way.
- If the deal aborts, there is a risk that the existing team members will leave.
- If there's any element of the deferred consideration within the deal, this is at risk depending on the experience of the MBO team.

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following that Culinary Concepts has is testament that they have achieved just that.

The uniqueness of Culinary Concepts' Homeware Collections with many designs inspired by the wonders of the world and the beauty of nature, create an undisputed statement in the home and leave customers seeking out new season pieces. James Denton, Co-Founder and Design Director loves all aspects of the design process. His extensive travelling so often provides the experience that becomes the inspiration for the Culinary Concepts Collection.

Culinary Concepts is not only focused upon home interiors, they are also proud to work with leading businesses across the hospitality and events industry to create bespoke designs, installations and couture

styled pieces. Working with brands such as Sexy Fish, The Ramsay Group, Soho House, Scott's, and Annabel's to name but a few. They also develop interior design packages for investment property portfolios.



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JAMES DENTON - CO-FOUNDER & DESIGN DIRECTOR

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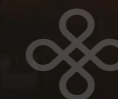


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ATLANTIS THE ROYAL, DUBAI

G.A Group, headquartered in London, have worked on this seminal project from 2014 through to opening this year.

THIS FOLLOWED AWARD-WINNING WORK AT THE CORINTHIA HOTEL, and the St Pancras Renaissance hotel, London. *INTEGRA* got the chance to talk to G.A Group CEO, Jonathan Aeberhard, together with Associate, Carl Longman. They describe the enormity of this project in Dubai and the legacy it has generated.



A NINE-YEAR PROJECT. \$80-160K PER NIGHT SUITES. BEYONCÉ WAS PAID A REPORTED £20M FOR A ONE HOUR OPENING SET TO SHINE A LIGHT ON THIS NEW WORLD ICON. IT WAS ONE OF THE MOST AMBITIOUS PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN IN WORLD HOSPITALITY DESIGN. INTEGRA 'BEST IN BUSINESS' WINNERS 2023, G.A GROUP WERE A KEY PARTNER.

ENORMITY? In terms of physical size, the scale of the ATLANTIS The Royal Hotel has been compared to constructing either a world-size shopping mall or a major airport terminal. HS2, the London Olympic complex or perhaps The Shard stand as the only UK projects that compare with the scale of the ATLANTIS The Royal.

It has been a challenge which, quite fundamentally, will have significance on the shape of the future economy of the Middle East and the wider regions in years to come. It will be another key endorsement that Dubai leads the UAE as the primary destination for travel and Business. ATLANTIS The Royal is, quite simply, a world icon.

So, what was it like to be involved in a scheme which, to the layman, presents as a designer's dream with no apparent limits on budget or creative expression? Jonathan and Carl provided *INTEGRA* with a fascinating insight into the creative outlet that such a mandate provides, the pressures that come with it, and after completion, their reflections of the ATLANTIS The Royal as a legacy for future generations.

***INTEGRA:* You have literally just stepped away from the ATLANTIS project, but tell us first where G.A first began?**

Jonathan: G.A was originally established in Camden in 1984 by my father, Werner Aeberhard, and his business partner, Harry Gregory (G.A). Werner studied in Lausanne in Switzerland and specialised in hospitality interior and architectural design from an early age. He spent a lot of time working worldwide and in particular Africa, with projects for Marriot and Intercontinental – so from inception G.A has always had a global constitution of influence that retained a vision for a consultancy service with a global high-end proposition.

***INTEGRA:* How has G.A evolved out of its original DNA?**

Jonathan: We have evolved as a genuinely globally integrated practice. Head Office support comes out of London, but we harness all our studio talent across the world to help deliver our projects – rather than having each local studio working alone in its market. Our brand advantage is based on having a fusion of diverse world-

wide talent that reflects the technical and cultural needs of our clients and projects.

***INTEGRA:* How do you manage to bring together this global input within the company?**

Jonathan: We have over 160 staff globally and that does not include contractors. The Principals of each local design studio meet virtually weekly to share, collaborate and organise on projects; we call this our 'Global Studio' and it makes the company work across all timezones, seamlessly.

***INTEGRA:* How many G.A studios are there across the world?**

Jonathan: In addition to London, we have studios in Budapest, Kuala Lumpur, Shanghai, and most recently New York. In Europe, our projects tend to be based on renovation of historical property, whereas in the Middle and Far East they tend to be new build projects. The USA is always a challenge to break into, but we have now managed to do that. Shanghai works mainly within the Chinese market, given its scale and cultural considerations.



INTEGRA: What is the common style of a G.A Group project?

Jonathan: We look for projects that resonate. Each project we view as different and having its own unique story. A bit like a Saville Road suit, the quality and detail will be the same, but the finish will be influenced by the customer. For example, The Cadogan Hotel in Chelsea: it has an historic connection with Oscar Wilde, as it is where he spent a lot of time before his arrest in the late 1800s. We looked to carry themes of this association to bring out the hotel's rich history. Further afield, the work we did at the W Taipei is a good illustration of our approach. Here we tried to combine the natural beauty of the location with the high-energy fast pace of the region. This reach into placing genuine identity into a hotel became a template for how W Hotels worked there on in.

INTEGRA: We have recently spent a lot of time speaking to Sytner Ferrari & Maserati. Brands that are leaders in automotive design. Do you think architectural designers carry similar levels of expectation and pressures when looking to deliver on projects at the highest level?

Carl: Definitely. There is no room for disappointment. It is the expectation of a client that has seen everything before. The product has to transcend trends. In our case the ATLANTIS project took nine years to complete. Trends back in 2014 were different to 2022. When we finished it – it still needed to carry the WOW factor. On this scale of project, decisions become magnified. Even with the smallest detail. For example, the choice of grout for bathroom tiling may not seem significant in terms of specification and cost - but when

you multiply the quantity by 800 rooms, it becomes a significant deal!

Equally with more expensive materials, such as the marble which we procured out of quarries in Italy. Marble is a live material, and the finish will differ between loads – particularly such things as the shade of the finish. So, ordering and signing off on it is full of risk, as it can seem like a movable feast. With the quantities involved for the ATLANTIS, the producers filmed me signing off on the final order. Such was the value of the order at stake. It took two years to procure the marble for the public areas of the Hotel. So, no wonder!

INTEGRA: What creates high design?

Carl: Meticulous attention to every small detail. Knowing when and when not to accept compromise.

INTEGRA: We have spoken a lot about legacy – the party to open the ATLANTIS The Royal is still very recent. Beyoncé was reportedly paid \$20m dollars for a one hour set to celebrate the opening of the Hotel and to shine a light on this world icon. Your work was then done. How did it feel?

Carl: I remember thinking, I must take a step back now. Disconnect from a project that had literally, at times, taken over my life, over nine years. I felt pride and emotional about it being complete. But also realising that it was now time for

owners, staff, guests and other people to experience what we have helped create. But very proud, personally and for our great team.

INTEGRA: So, what next for G.A?

Jonathan: We have a huge amount of exciting work in play. Due to non-disclosures I can't comment specifically on detail, but one includes involvement in a new hotel, 1Hotel Mayfair, which is based on environmental sustainability and should open in autumn 2023 – which we are very excited about.

INTEGRA: And the company legacy from the Atlantis The Royal experience?

Jonathan: G.A grew by 50% as a company during the ATLANTIS The Royal build, and probably in greater scale so did our experience of this scale of project. It was a great team performance from every aspect of the company, world-wide. Administration, finance and marketing were crucial in supporting the overall successful outcome. So, we are hugely optimistic about our future. ■



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BLACKWOOD ASSET MANAGEMENT

Another year, another banking crisis. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

THERE IS A SHAKESPEAREAN ELEMENT TO THESE TALES, because they are as old as time and reveal human folly and psychology.



Banks make money by charging higher rates of interest than they have to pay and by having longer duration maturing assets than their depositors (which are instant withdrawal). They increase their profits by investing their deposits in higher return (higher risk) assets, but when these risks get too high they are vulnerable to shocks and, when those shocks eventually come, it kills them.

There is a continual tension between ambition and caution, between rising profits and security, and between the pay of those running the bank and the best interests of the owners. These are not new stories. Banks breathe confidence, that is no bank, however well capitalised, can survive a loss of confidence. Once it is gone the fundamental mismatch between immediate requirements for cash and the banks long term investments are impossible to reconcile.

Since the end of 2022 interest rates have risen to, belatedly, mitigate persistent inflation. As we have often stated, central banks were slow to raise interest rates because of the economic pain it causes. So they misunderstood and mishandled the threat of high and persistent inflation - which

is what we have now. The recent inflation rise due to food prices is starting to ease - the direction of inflation is downwards to between 6% and 7% - as last year's energy and supply shortage inflation drivers fall out of the picture. But interest rates at current levels will not bring inflation down to the Bank of England's desired level of 2%. The underlying inflation is mostly service and wage inflation and this will persist.

The banking crisis reveals the fragility of some institutions when interest rates rise and this will act as a further disincentive to central banks to raise interest rates. Central banks are now unlikely to risk a level of interest rates that would reduce inflation. They have chosen market stability over price stability. Investors now must accommodate the following context: inflation will persist, interest rates will not rise much more, but these levels of interest rates will be maintained for many years. ■

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Changes to R&D Tax Credits



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TO TAX RELIEF

FROM APRIL 2023

The scheme now includes data and cloud computing costs in the list of allowable expenses, broadening the scope of claimable costs. Additionally, it has extended eligibility to advances in pure maths, recognising the fundamental role of this discipline in research and development. To streamline the process and ensure accuracy, pre-notification has been introduced for claims. Lastly, if a claim was mistakenly submitted under the SME scheme, it can now be seamlessly switched to the RDEC.

FROM AUGUST 2023

Companies will need to provide more comprehensive information with their claims, including a thorough description of the R&D, a breakdown of costs across qualifying categories, and the name of any agent or advisor involved in the claim preparation. Additionally, to ensure credibility and responsibility, a sign-off from a named senior officer of the company will be mandatory for all claims. In a move to digitise tax procedures, all claims must be submitted electronically, unless the company has an exemption from Making Tax Digital (MTD). In a significant development, SMEs that are highly "R&D intensive" will now benefit from preferential rates, further incentivising innovative efforts.

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GEORGE KRUIS: FROM ENGLAND RUGBY TO WELLNESS STARTUP

The former England Rugby lock is now a successful wellness entrepreneur. He tells Integra about playing his career 'on his own terms'.

GEORGE KRUIS ADMITS HIS CAREER IN RUGBY came as something of a lucky accident. After leaving school in Surrey in the late 2000s, he'd intended to go straight to university, but instead snared a late trial with the north London club Saracens. 'I think they saw my potential rather than talent,' he says, modestly. That hard work ethic has paid off for Kruis, who last year retired from the game having helped Saracens to four Premiership trophies, with over 45 caps for England, and two seasons with Japanese rugby club Saitama Wild Knights.

Now, he's bringing the nutritional expertise he gained over 12 years at the top of the game to his business, Fourfive. Working alongside former England Rugby teammate Dom Day, the pair have developed a range of high-quality CBD products and vitamin supplements, which are independently lab tested, and available in Tesco, Boots, Holland & Barrett and other major retailers.

INTEGRA: Where did the concept for Fourfive come from?

George: It started in 2018, after Dom Day and myself both had operations [Kruis sustained multiple ankle and knee injuries during his rugby career]. That year, WADA, the World Anti Doping Association, took CBD, which is a compound from a hemp or cannabis plant, off the banned substances list, and as a result, we tried it and got good

benefit out of it [early studies suggest CBD products can help ease pain, anxiety and depression, and aid sleep].

So off the back of that, we created a brand, launched some CBD products and then quite quickly afterwards, launched a nutrition range as well. So your wellness pieces like vitamins, multivitamins, fish oils, biotics. We now do some hydration tablets, and are more a wellness company. So we're now sort of growing as a company – there's eight of us.

Fourfive was our playing position, so a little nod to that sport side of it, but you know, we've got some really good investors that range from, you know, 15 plus international athletes to FTSE 100 co-founders. We also support professional rugby clubs and football clubs and our products are bought by some of the best teams around.

How have you found that transition from rugby to this completely different industry?

I'm on a nice steep learning curve! So as an example of what my day would be like as an athlete, I would wake up at seven or eight o'clock. My supplements will be in front of me and there'd be a breakfast all laid out for us, and towels, kit, everything all laid out for us. The programme would all be sorted individually for you. You go and get coached, you get individual feedback, and essentially, you're sort of mollycoddled all day long. You're inside this bubble, where you're focusing very hard on trying to improve in a certain area, but everything is done for you.

So then you stop playing, and you go into an environment where everything's a new process, you're learning. You're learning to organise yourself, to organise meetings, all these, like new things, which are so foreign to you.

There's a lot of people who struggle with that, from a mental health point of view. You drastically change your amount of exercise, what you're eating, and you change your identity. I'd say on the whole, it's an extremely tough transition.

But I think I've been very fortunate that I've gradually done that over a period of time with the business and the transition into doing it seven days a week. I haven't had to have that



cliff face, which, you know, definitely triggers a lot of things like depression, gambling [in other retired athletes]. I retired early [age 32] on my own terms. In my position you could probably play on for another couple of years, at least. But yeah, I've pulled the trigger on my own terms.

Some people reading this may raise their eyebrows about products made out of cannabis. Could you explain what CBD is and the benefits it can have?

Essentially it's just a compound from a hemp or cannabis plant. It's not the THC, which gives people the psychoactive high. It's just a compound from the plant. Our body has an endocannabinoid system called an ECS system, and it just helps supplement that, much like, you know, you take a vitamin D to help supplement your amount of vitamin D you need in winter. This is just another supplement to help boost your wellbeing.

Obviously it raised eyebrows a little bit at the start having two professional rugby players start a company that's founded from, I guess, a compound within a banned substance [CBD products are legal in the UK, while cannabis itself remains illegal], but you know, looking at around the world legislation, I think progressive wellness in

terms of mushrooms, nootropics, there's a very big area that is being opened up at the moment and it's an extremely exciting area for people who are every day putting themselves under pressure from work and needing to concentrate and needing to be in great condition, and I'm sure a lot of your clients in the next three, four, five years will end up looking into these progressive wellness areas, which are fast developing through research.

People talk particularly in sport about 'it's the journey that counts, not the destination'. Is that true for you?

Yeah, I'm definitely a believer in that. I think there are clear points in my journey where the first maybe one or two rugby trophies, that was the be all and end all. But it's pretty clear after you do, that straightaway time just moves on. You have a week off, and then you're back into preseason, or whatever it is. So there's got to be purpose in what you do the rest of the time, and you have to be able to enjoy it.

What do you find the most rewarding about running Fourfive?

I've been in a team for a good while, and I think the most rewarding thing is

people enjoy the work. Hearing from our employees that they enjoy it, and that they appreciate how much we care for them.

And also just seeing small wins, seeing the efforts you put in and then seeing them convert into something which is a positive. Most people who set up businesses either have a finance or marketing background, and I did a degree in business, but me and Dom, you know, essentially chucked a ball at each other for 13 years or 14 years.

So having come from a background which, you know, isn't as schooled, I don't have the extensive experience to go, 'right you should do this, and do this'. We are learning, so when we're learning and you see stuff that does well, that is clearly something you get a buzz from.

Where do you see Fourfive being in five years' time?

For us, it's about solidifying our retail footprint. There's a couple more retailers we're speaking to. And then there'll be a few more new product categories. And then from there, we will continue looking within Europe for some distribution points. But essentially it'll be really nailing our UK proposition, and making sure that we're building a brand that people trust. ■

House of Commons – Monday
14 November 2022
INTEGRA held the Best in Business Awards at the House of Commons on Monday 14 November 2022 hosted by Dame Andrea Leadsom DBE MP.



INTEGRA Best in Business Winners Left to Right: Paul Harrison – Feldon Dunsmore, Dame Andrea Leadsom MP DBE, Jonathan Aeberhard – G.A GROUP, Dan Bisby - Schofield Sweeney, Claire Bicknell – Catena Network and Jonathan Crankshaw – Oracle Red Bull Racing

'STILL TIME FOR THE 20S TO ROAR!'

INTEGRA took to the road in early spring with its Partner roadshows, which took in events at the Shard, Graypaul Nottingham and Maranello Egham in Surrey.

The strap line **'STILL TIME FOR THE 20's TO ROAR!'** was inspired by the decade 100 years earlier, when after the impact of WW1, the spirit of our nation was lifted and driven by a sense of 'joie de vivre' which marked a decade of colour, vibrancy and fun. Wind forward a century, and after the end of Covid, and other challenges in the world, we are again searching for the blue sky to follow

– just as it did in the Roaring 1920's. That was the challenge for our Professional experts – who were charged with providing investment and tax tips for our audiences to use to at least financially enable planning to support the opportunity for the 2020's to roar – how loud the roar was then left of course to them!
Around a tour of the Ferrari & Maserati latest collections, and themed wine

and food from Italy, guests were able to share tips and advice from the *INTEGRA* partners on how to maximise tax planning opportunities – this included guidance on making school fees more affordable, strategies for optimising net pay and planning a business exit tax efficiency. For further information on this evening or up and coming events – contact the *INTEGRA* team.



INTEGRA @ The Shard
Delegates joined *INTEGRA* at The Shard on Wednesday 15 February 2023. The seminar provided tips and guidance for tax planning, given the likely tightening up of allowances in the forthcoming Spring Budget.

INTEGRA @ Ferrari Graypaul, Nottingham

Over 60 guests joined *INTEGRA* at Ferrari Graypaul, Nottingham on Tuesday 21 February 2023. Presentations provided guests with tips and guidance for tax planning, while surrounded by the luxury Italian cars.



INTEGRA @ Ferrari Maranello Sales, Egham

50 guests joined *INTEGRA* at Ferrari Maranello in Egham, Surrey on the evening of Tuesday 21 March 2023. Presentations provided guests with tips and guidance for tax planning following the Chancellor's Spring Budget a week earlier. Francesco Balli (Head of Ferrari North Europe) gave guests an insight into the current Ferrari collection and its plans for the future.

The evening was then topped off with delicious food and a wine tasting experience, with a specialist sommelier from specialist purveyor of Italian food and wines ALIVINI.



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