



In this month's Exchange issue, we are interviewing Holborn's Property champion, John Sparks.

Often on top of the leader board, John is a property sales champion. But did you know he dreams of going to space and has been to 124 countries? Hang on to your hat and read our thrilling interview with John Sparks, a Senior Associate based in Russia, to find out more.

Active beginnings

John grew up in Cape Town, South Africa, and describes his childhood as 'beautiful, carefree and fun.' Accompanied by his friends, John spent a lot of time outdoors climbing mountains and playing cowboys and crooks. 'We did not have television or phones to keep us occupied, so we initiated our entertainment,' he recalls.

Fond of his sports-focused school memories, John reminisces about swimming, running, playing cricket, and rugby: 'PE was quite a big thing back then. We had it every day.' He also enjoyed Maths, Geography, and History. 'It is languages I am terrible at,' he admits.

At university, John specialised in Mathematics and Statistics, majoring in taxation. 'It is something that you have in you, or you do not,' he comments on his ability to understand Maths with much ease.

All around the world

After graduation, John applied for a Financial Manager position in a boat building company, Robertson and Caine. Then, he embarked on his travels and sailed with some brilliant and well-known skippers in the 90s. Remarkably, he prides himself in completing a short-handed race across the Atlantic.

'Travel has always been a big part of my life, and the world has taken me to many different places,' John reveals. Wherever he travelled, he worked and familiarised himself with numerous industries – Tourism in the US and Antarctica, Wealth Management in Mauritius, and Property and Development in South Africa.

John moved to Russia from Mauritius in 2019. 'Covid had a lot to do with me leaving,' he explains.

Holborn: like a second family

John joined Holborn in May 2021. He says he was blown away by the company, its sense of family togetherness, and 'the passion the managers want to pass on to you.' He appreciates weekly online meetings with the rest of the team. 'If you cannot be geed-up by them, you should not be in the business,' he adds.

What John loves most about his job as a Financial Advisor is 'helping people and turning negatives into positives when it comes to their wealth management and legacy planning for the future.'

Although John has not worked at Holborn for long, he admits that The Super Car Convention in Tuscany is his fondest memory so far. 'Moments like that I will never forget – driving Ferraris and Lamborghinis.'

Golden advice – answer your phone!

Admittedly, John has found it challenging to answer phone calls from his clients worried about the current economic situation. 'My advice is: take calls from them. Do not put it off for tomorrow.' He underlines the importance of communication – not only to talk with his clients about business but also about their dogs or family. 'The clients will always take calmness from speaking to you.'

What is the best tip for selling properties? He states it is 'one of the easiest investments to sell, but you have got to love, breathe and fully understand the property you sell.'

When asked about his plans for the near future at Holborn, John confidently states: 'South Africa, South Africa, South Africa,' which is where he is concentrating now. 'There is a huge amount of opportunity there. South Africa has to be tapped. It is a huge market, with 80m people living there and at least 10m needing to diversify their funds offshore.'

Q&A with John

What is your favourite quote?

I love quotes. Early in my life, my favourite was: 'A winner is a dreamer who never gives up' by Nelson Mandela. Then, when I was doing property development, my motto became 'Only when the tide goes out do you discover who's been swimming naked' by Warren Buffett.

As I do not have office hours, sometimes I am on Zoom calls with clients at 2 am. I always say to my son: 'Money never sleeps,' which is a quote by Gordon Gekko.

Finally, another good quote I have learnt a lot from is 'Three things of life that once gone never come back... time, words and opportunity.'

What motivates you?

Not a difficult question – getting up in the morning. Every day is a welcomed challenge, so life motivates me.

What is your favourite book genre?

I like autobiographies. Richard Branson, Elon Musk and Nelson Mandela are some people whose writing I enjoy.

What is the last book you read?

The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank. I took my two kids, aged 10 and 11, to the museum dedicated to her in Amsterdam. I walked through it with tears in my eyes.

Do you have any fears or phobias?

Rats! I am happy with spiders and snakes, but if a rat runs across the floor, I will be standing on a chair and screaming like a little kid.

On the topic of pets – have you got any?

I have always had lots of pets. Right now, we have three dogs, a parrot, and a rabbit in the house.

Who was your childhood hero?

Sebastian Coe. He is an athlete who was a world record holder in the 80s. He partook in the Olympic games in 1980 and 1984 and is very involved in the sports world now. I used to run pretty well at school, so I have always followed his lifestyle.

What is on your bucket list?

Space fascinates me, so I would love to go to orbit for a couple of days. I need to work hard to be able to achieve it. I think this dream is still probably 10-15 years away.

What is your greatest strength?

My greatest strength is mind over matter.

What would you like to improve?

Communication. Sometimes I feel I do not have enough time for communication, which is wrong, but it is something I work on every day.

What are your hobbies?

Skiing, mountain biking, and being out in nature which I find very soulful. I go skiing in Austria with my kids, and as I live in Saint Petersburg, I am 25 mins away from a ski resort.

In addition, I have also doubled in the crypto world since 2015.

Where would you like to travel?

I have been to 124 countries, so I have done a fair bit of travelling. I still have the nature and wilderness of New Zealand to experience.

What is the ideal end of a day for you?

Walk in the forest with my wife and kids. In winter, I like to hit the ski slopes.