

# SPEAR'S

## TOP SIX PROPERTY LAWYERS

### David Cooper *David Cooper & Co*

*Outstanding in field*

FIRM SIZE *Boutique*

FOCUS *Planning, leaseholds*

**David Cooper's profile** as the 'king of planning' was enhanced in December when he won a landmark case in the Supreme Court (*Franses v The Cavendish Hotel*). The 5-0 ruling means that landlords' ability to use redevelopment proposals to oppose lease renewals has been substantially lessened. 'Hopefully, this case will shake the system,' he says over breakfast.

Cooper has strong connections with the major London estates, including the Grosvenor and Crown estate, and has many billionaires among his clients. He is also passionate about saving the 'artistic soul' of the St James's area of London, often defending the rights of art dealers to stay put and pay a reasonable rent.

### James Liffen *Mishcon de Reya*

*Outstanding in field*

FIRM SIZE *International*

FOCUS *Conveyancing*

**Legal director** James Liffen specialises in residential conveyancing at Mishcon de Reya, covering ownership, auction sales, portfolio purchases, tenancy and planning issues.

It's a technical and complex role. 'Sometimes we're getting involved at the very early [stage], other times it's all about just getting the deal over the line or just looking at getting the right deal,' he explains.

Like most in the industry, Liffen has noticed a slowdown in transactions, but it doesn't mean he's not busy – he wrapped up a £85 million deal over Christmas. 'From the rest of the world's point of view, there is only one London,' he says.

### Andrew & Valerie Brecher *Brecher*

*Outstanding in field*

FIRM SIZE *Boutique*

FOCUS *International clients*

'Things are not so brilliant out there,' says Valerie Brecher, half of the brother-and-sister team that founded the company. 'There's a certain nervousness in the market because of the uncertainty surrounding Brexit.'

However, Brecher explains that many of her clients, insulated by a cash-rich portfolio, are 'opportunists, just waiting to pounce on a good deal.'

From the firm's perspective, the slowdown in transactions doesn't represent much of a threat. 'There's been a huge surge in litigation and property finance. There are more disputes, and more people are refinancing and restructuring and that's very good for us,' she says.

### Ian Cooke *Charles Russell Speechlys*

*Eminence grise*

FIRM SIZE *International*

FOCUS *International, super-prime*

**With a track record** of dealing with clients from A-list celebrities to Middle Eastern royals, Ian Cooke has become an authority to global UHNWs looking to buy the best property the capital has to offer.

Cooke is the head of the private property team at Charles Russell Speechlys. Around 90 per cent of his work is based in London. 'We've got some very big deals over the line,' he says, adding that the lull caused by 2014/15's stamp duty changes has ceased: '[It] doesn't seem any longer to be deterring people at the top of the market.'

Explaining his approach, he says: 'You have to put yourself into the shoes of the client and think, "What would you want in this situation?", and try to give them that.'

### Simon Pring *Farrer & Co*

*Outstanding in field*

FIRM SIZE *UK*

FOCUS *Landed estate clients*

**Simon Pring's ability** to strategise and guide his clients through the process of agricultural and rural development is second to none.

Pring, who celebrated 30 years as a qualified solicitor last year, has built up a formidable network of land agents, accountants and financial consultants, as well as extensive knowledge of contextual factors. 'It's a team game, [where we] ensure that not only are we recommending the thing that the client would like, but the client absolutely understands what the endgame is,' he explains.

Pring is effusive about his 30 years in the game: 'Some of the clients I work on now, I started working on then, and it's very satisfying to have that continuity.'

### Sonal Thakrar *Mishcon de Reya*

*Outstanding in field*

FIRM SIZE *International*

FOCUS *Complex transactions*

**Sonal Thakrar**, a Mishcon partner who leads one of London's largest residential property practices, rarely sees 'vanilla deals'.

'I don't think they exist any more,' she tells *Spear's*. 'Deals are taking much longer and are much trickier, I feel like everything on my desk is more complex than usual.'

But Thakrar is the problem-solver HNWs need: 'I get told that I always deliver without cutting corners.' She sees Brexit as an opportunity, noting continued inward investment from the Middle East and China. But she worries the tax regime might put off buyers. 'It's almost like there's a messaging going out to the international investor, "We want your money but we don't want you."' ●