

Eye for a deal

Inspiration Awards For Women 2013 winner Celia Sawyer talks to **Louise Alexander-O'Loughlin** about her work/life balance.



Image courtesy of the British Heart Foundation

Celia Sawyer has built an impressive multi million pound business portfolio in under a decade. The owner of Celia Sawyer Luxury Interiors and highly respected international property developer gives us an insight into her world and being the face of Channel 4's Four Rooms.

You're the founder of Celia Sawyer Luxury Interiors. How did you get started in the world of interiors?

Well, I've been a property developer both in the UK and overseas for many years and my ultimate aim is to add value to properties. I began by finishing off and dressing them beautifully, but before long clients were asking me to design their houses, and it all snowballed from there.

You spin so many plates, what drives you?

I won't lie, I love a nice lifestyle and I enjoy

the buzz of stepping up to and overcoming every challenge thrown my way. Financially I wasn't fortunate when I was young. I remember I used to sit in the back of my parents' car when we drove past beautiful houses and I'd say: "I want to live in one of those big houses when I grow up." I always believed I would. I'm a positive thinker and I believe that the journey doesn't ever finish – no matter what you have, you always want more, but the trick is above all to enjoy the journey.

Many people claim to be 'interior designers'. What makes you different?

I think you've either got it or you haven't. I've come across a lot of people who think they can set up an interior design company, but what strikes me more than anything is their lack of passion. Without passion they are set to fail. I am 100% passionate about my business and I believe fully in my →



capabilities and myself. My clients are my biggest critics and I have yet to disappoint them. It's also very important for me to be 'hands on' with my clients no matter how many projects are on the go at once.

What's your top tip for businesswomen out there?

My advice is to believe in yourself, be confident and listen to your instincts. In my opinion these qualities will be fundamental to your success.

You must have been thrilled to win your recent award?

Yes, absolutely. I won the Inspirational Award for Women in Business, and was both thrilled and surprised to receive it. It was such an honour!

How did you enjoy your time on Channel 4's Four Rooms? And how did you get the part?

I loved working on the show. I'd never been on TV before and hadn't even considered it. One night I noticed online that Channel 4 were asking for people to send pictures of their vintage or interesting treasures. Much to my daughter's horror, I sent a picture of myself and asked: "What about me as one of the dealers? Just check out my website and let me know." So they did and they called me the next morning. It was assertive, but that's just me.

Having never done something like this before, were you nervous being in front of a camera?

Yes, I was terrified! The screen test was so scary; in fact I can now say that was probably one of my biggest fears of all time.



The money used in the TV programme was your own money, so how did that feel?

It was really exciting, but because we were in a studio for over two weeks in total, picked up when it was dark and dropped home when it was dark, with long days, I had to give myself a talking to and get a grip because I was exhausted! There were times when I felt as if my money was Monopoly money. I imagine I would have felt the same if I'd been in a casino for two weeks straight.

What was the strangest object brought onto the show?

That had to be Hitler's toilet, which was brought over from the US! It was absolutely filthy and was supposed to be from one of his ships. I had too many questions, including the obvious: "How do we know that Hitler actually sat on it?"

Were any controversial items brought on to the show?

Yes! There was a very unpleasant piece of art that sent shivers down my spine. It was a sculpture commemorating the horrors of the Auschwitz concentration camp, in which Danish artist Marco Evaristti, a Chilean-born Buddhist convert with Jewish parents, used teeth and gold fillings. He said these teeth and fillings came from a person in Austria who claimed they were taken from the Nazi death camp. He also threw in a few teeth from his Jewish grandmother who did not die in the camp. It was an amazing piece of art and had diamonds and white gold, but there were disturbing skulls of red gold looking out of the window of a train. Needless to say we were all pretty shocked and none of us offered any money for it.



me, and I get a lot of people stopping me in the street asking me if I'm the lady from the TV. My kids found that very funny at the beginning, but they are used to it now. I try to look my best at all times, which can be hard when I'm having an 'off day'. I have a

You left school at 15 with very few qualifications, and you became a success. How do you ensure your kids work hard and get qualifications knowing your educational background?
My son said to me the other day: "So many



If I were going into an auction house, I wouldn't have a clue where to start! What advice would you give me?

I'd say go for something that interests you, visit other auction houses, speak to a few experts, do your homework and know what to look for. Research is the key.

You are obviously a family-oriented person – you don't even have a full-time nanny – how do you cope?

You just do. I get up at 5.30am and go for a run every morning, then I get the kids ready for school, feed them, put the washing on and they are off to school. I then get ready – and my day starts!

How has appearing on Channel 4 changed your life?

It has definitely made people more aware of

lot of people asking me if I'll invest in their business, and the interest in Celia Sawyer Luxury Interiors has increased. Other than that, I don't allow it to affect my personal life at all.

Will we see you on C4's Four Rooms again?

Yes, I've signed a new contract. I'm very excited!

What would you like to be remembered for later in life?

I'd like to be remembered as someone who gave something back. I do a lot of charity work and I really want people to realise there are success stories out there to inspire people who don't have an amazing education.

people who have done well in life don't have many qualifications." I promote education and fully believe in my kids working hard at school and going to university. However, there is a part of me that says: "Well I did it without any of that!" I always tell my kids that education is important, because it enables people to have choices in their lives. ●

essence info

Website: www.celiasawyer.com

The Inspiration Awards for Women celebrate the achievements of remarkable women who inspire those around them, either through the media or through their astounding achievements in their everyday lives. The annual event takes place each October at the iconic Cadogan Hall, Chelsea, which is home to the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Website: www.inspirationawards.co.uk