



Women in property

Historically, and perhaps stereotypically, when you mention women and property in the same breath, people immediately think interior design and house doctoring - in short, the 'slightly fluffy' things. The preconception is that women are naturally gifted at design and making a home look nice, and yes, that's true, but they're naturally suited to so much more and are starting to make their presence felt

Text: Sarah Walker

Research suggests that in 2007 a quarter of all buy-to-let mortgages were taken out by women and Landlord Mortgages Ltd came out absolutely in support of them, saying that women tend to keep their properties in a better state of repair than their male counterparts and have a healthier relationship with their tenants, all of which results in happier tenants who treat the properties better and stay longer in one place.

Investment and management suits women on so many levels: it's flexible enough to fit around other commitments so works well as a second stream of income or a part-time project for mothers; it plays to generally recognised female traits of intuition and multi-tasking; and the fact that women tend to have a natural eye for creating a home gives them an advantage over their male peers. Property also offers women the chance to build a career on a level playing field - there's no

'glass ceiling' and no cap on earning potential, so it can provide excellent long term security.

But what about the downside? You might think that women aren't taken as seriously as men by estate agents and surveyors, that tradesmen take advantage and that having to tackle difficult tenants, particularly male, might pose something of a security risk. Well, the short answer is that none of the above seem to have adversely affected the women in property that I've come across, most of whom seem to already have a level of confidence and experience gained through either their job or their upbringing, perhaps indicating that a certain type of woman tends to get involved in property. Many who have never had to negotiate a purchase or use creative financing have, through coaching and mentoring, discovered a natural aptitude for it and are now thrilled with the buzz they get from doing deals.

Sally, a working mother with two grown-up children who is building a portfolio of houses in multiple occupation with her husband in Oxford, thinks it's a very even environment for men and women to work in, but she does believe women's natural nurturing instincts are a tremendous advantage when it comes to running the business. "I always think about whether I would be happy to have my daughter sleep in one of my rooms," she says. "I'm very aware of safety and security and providing a positive environment for tenants, so my husband and I make sure that the rooms are well insulated with decent locks on the doors." Sally strongly believes in making a home for her tenants, rather than just 'lodgings' and has spent time creating the right look and feel for her properties.

The average age of the first time buyer has grown to 34 and there are plenty of professional working people looking for modern, clean accommodation and a certain standard of living. It seems to be that women are naturally suited to providing it, and the properties are, reciprocally, providing what women need: ongoing income, flexible hours and the opportunity to be creative and to nurture. Building a portfolio is hard work in the early days, but increasing numbers of women are finding it's a business that's well worth the effort. •

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Sarah Walker is a property expert and TV presenter, previously presenting BBC1's *To Buy or Not to Buy*. She is also a spokesperson for property investment franchise Platinum Property Partners.

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