

When Sharon Mulroney was made a partner in the Mayfair law firm Forsters, she arranged for an ice-cream van to park outside Forsters' office - then in Grosvenor Street - and treated everybody in the business to a "99" ice cream.

As celebrations go, it was quirky - how often have you even seen an ice-cream van in Mayfair? But it was also strangely in character for a law firm that doesn't take itself too seriously.

Forsters won a private client team of the year award in 2008 and has just been shortlisted for the same prize again by *The Lawyer* magazine, it is the number one firm for commercial property deals in London and it is big in all aspects of residential property.

Just to take a recent example, Sharon helped renegotiate terms on a £100 million plus residential property deal at The Lancasters, a luxury development facing Hyde Park, to bring in completion just before the rise in stamp duty on homes worth more than £1m kicked in. Forsters saved the buyer a fortune.

So, there's no question that Forsters does and is a serious business. The partners interviewed for this feature stressed how proud Forsters is of its reputation for giving a first class service. But they were quick to point out that the firm has achieved this without losing its spontaneity, flexibility and quirkiness.

They talk with enthusiasm - and often at the same time - about their love of Mayfair ("it's chic and glamorous and fun"), their place in the community, the work they do for charity and their client parties. But when they are asked about champagne-cork-popping moments in their own recent careers, they all fall strangely silent.

"I'll tell you what it is," says Penny Elliott, a partner in the private client team, after a while. "We're all thinking can we tell you this anecdote without disclosing the nature or name of the client ... because we're frightfully discreet. It's our hallmark really."

When Forsters was founded 13 years ago, it employed around 100 people, squeezed into premises in Grosvenor Street.

The founders moved to Mayfair from the City because they wanted to specialise in private client and property work - and both types of client were traditionally based in Mayfair and St James's.

The firm has since doubled in size and in 2005 it moved into the elegant former home of Elizabeth Montagu - "Queen of the Bluestockings" - at 29-31 Hill Street.

Designed by Robert Adam and James "Athenian" Stuart in the 18th century, the building has more in common with a private hotel than the swish steel-and-glass corporate headquarters of the big City law firms - and that's the way the partners like it.

Forsters' clients span the corporate and property worlds but it was the firm's Mayfair private clients who featured most in the discussions with the partners met. They explained that most of their clients are private individuals, family offices or the trustees of trusts that have been set up to hold clients' personal or business interests. Many of the clients are non-doms, international players with assets or interests in London.

Asked a naive question about the international movement of money and other assets in the wake of what we are now calling the Arabian spring, private

client partner and tax expert Kelly Noel-Smith says that her job is to make sure her clients' assets are safe whatever is going on in the world.

"We protect our clients to make sure that if something like the Arabian spring happens they are in the best possible position," she explains. "So, I have not seen a flow of money [out of the region] as a result of the Arabian spring."

Smiling, she adds: "In fact, I have had clients calling me to say, I'm glad our assets are so well protected - usually through some form of trust structure."

Kelly works closely with Mayfair wealth managers and family offices, often taking a central role in coordinating from London the advice provided by overseas advisors for clients who have a multi-jurisdictional asset base.

Getting to really know its clients is key to Forsters' success. "We invest in the relationship with clients," Penny says, "you know, be good advisers and be responsive to whatever crisis there is and always take the long-term view."

Later, she says, only half-jokingly: "We aim for a two or three hundred year relationship."

Sharon says: "Our private clients like the fact that they can come and see us, they can go and see their bank and then they can lunch in Nicole's and make a day of it. That's part of the appeal of being here.



Instead of, 'Oh God, I've got to go to the lawyers', it's 'Oh good, I'm going to Mayfair ...'

She talks enthusiastically about the firm's place in three communities: about its own people, who are encouraged to balance life and work and have fun; about the Mayfair community, in which the lawyers and support staff are increasingly involved; and about the global community - Forsters takes its environmental responsibilities seriously.

The firm also supports the charity for the homeless Centrepoint.

"We don't just raise money for them," Sharon explains, "we go in and repaint the dining room, we sleep rough and I jumped out of an aeroplane for them. It's actually getting involved and giving your time and energy, not just money."

Internally, Forsters has a book club, a theatre club and its runners train together in Mayfair's parks. The firm celebrates harvest supper with a hog roast on the terrace and is known for the parties it holds throughout the year. It has also launched The Mayfair Business Club, which started life as a technical forum and has morphed into a much more social event.

"When Forsters set up I think it was the best thing professionally that has ever happened to me, without doubt," Paul says. "I've been very fortunate, very lucky, to be with a firm that values its individual clients and values its people. It has been good fun; Mayfair is a fantastic place to work. I couldn't imagine working for another law firm, I really couldn't - or in a better location."

FROM LEFT: KELLY NOEL-SMITH, PENNY ELLIOTT, SHARON MULRONEY, PAUL NEVILLE.

THE LAW FIRM FORSTERS EMPLOYS MORE THAN 200 PEOPLE AND HAS ONE OFFICE - IN A FORMER BLUESTOCKING'S HOME IN HILL STREET. IT IS ONE OF THE LEADING LAW FIRMS IN LONDON. BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN IT DOESN'T HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOUR ...



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# A peculiarly Mayfair practice

FORSTERS IS A LEADING LONDON LAW FIRM WITH OFFICES IN HILL STREET, MAYFAIR. Forsters provides a wide range of services to corporate clients and private individuals. Forsters is best known for its property and private client work but also has thriving corporate, commercial and litigation practices. Its practice areas are:

**Charities**  
**Commercial Property**  
**Corporate**  
**Family**  
**Hotels**  
**Landed Estates**  
**Litigation**  
**Residential Property**  
**& Leasehold**  
**Enfranchisement**  
**Trusts and Tax**

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