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TWO'S COMPANY

SoldOut meets with Melissa Porter and Charlie Smurfit

by Steve Rowland



Diverse and complimentary backgrounds make Porter and Smurfit cutting edge and hassle free designers. Both have extensive knowledge of the foreign property market, interior design and experience in property renovation. Their motto is design for luxury living and from concept to finishing touches, Melissa and Charlie co-ordinate the complete project.

Melissa Porter first graced our screens back in 2002 and she seems determined to stay firmly on them. As well appearing in “Put Your Money Where Your House Is”, “Escape to the Country”, “I Own Britain’s Best Home” and a whole heap of other programmes, she also writes a column for Sky magazine and runs an interior design and renovations company with Charlie Smurfit. Frankly, with all of this going on, it was a surprise that she managed to find the time to speak to SoldOut. We’re SO glad she did...

SO Hi Melissa. It’s really nice to finally speak to you. Are you filming at the moment?

MP I’m down in Sandbanks [an incredibly swanky area near Bournemouth] filming a new property show at the moment – it’s a property run down of Britain’s top locations to buy in, be it by the coast or in a village or in the city. We’re working very closely with Savills who have people that consolidate statistics – based on best schools, crime levels and so on – and then come to us with a list. Then myself another presenter, Ian Blandford, go round and look at them. I wish I could say that the reason I’ve been so busy is that I’ve been shopping, but it’s been work I’m afraid.

SO And how’s Sandbanks?

MP It’s absolutely gorgeous!

SO Have you been doing a lot of other shows recently?

MP Yes – I’m also towards the end of filming “I Own Britain’s Best Home”, which pretty much does what it says on the tin: Each week one of the three presenters cherry pick a property and the viewers get to pick which property they want to see in the live final. They are amazing, aspirational properties – it’s a really great experience.

SO Indeed, sounds like a dream come true. How did you get in to TV?

MP I was working for a company

specialising in relocation – we would help people coming to the UK with finding houses, schools, sorting out visas, that kind of thing and [production company] Endemol called my boss and said “Is there anyone who wants to do their real job but on TV?” so I did a screen test and three weeks later I resigned.

“Endemol called my boss, so I did a screen test... three weeks later I resigned.”

SO Good stuff. Do you find it tricky juggling your TV work with the Porter and Smurfit work?

MP Well, I absolutely love both sides. From university I did marketing and found it really dull doing the same thing Monday to Friday. My agent books me in for all the filming but often it’s only two to three days

a week, leaving me four to five days to concentrate on other stuff.

SO Is it just the two of you [at Porter and Smurfit]?

MP We’re both full time, but we “crew in” – as they say in the film industry – for the big projects.

SO Is it true that you write for a couple of magazines about property as well?

MP Yep, I write about all things property related: what great things to buy for your house, eco-friendly stuff, how to add value to your home, how to deal with estate agents, quick ways to sell your property...

SO Do you think the property market at the moment is as bad as everyone’s saying?

MP To be honest I’m trying to buy at the moment and everything I set my sights on gets snapped up. I think it’s really bad for first time buyers who don’t have much in the way of a deposit and are struggling to get a mortgage. Having said that, I think that the top-end and in the middle it hasn’t really been affected.

www.porterandsmurfit.com



"I wanted to set up a property company, it just went from there."



SO I read somewhere that you're a fan of NLP (neuro-linguistic programming)

MP I like it because I'm all for having a positive mental attitude, I can't bear to moan and groan. I find that when I do have problems and challenges I like to quickly find solutions. NLP helps in that.

SO You're also a patron of the British Thyroid Association. What do you do in that role?

MP Just try and raise awareness of the foundation and all the great work they do. I'm also involved with [homeless charity] Shelter, who again are doing some wonderful, important work.

SO Can you tell us a little bit about how you and Charlie met each other?

MP Sure. My agent invited me to a dinner party and Charlie and her husband were

also there. My partner at the time and I were chatting to her and I thought he was chatting her up! Anyway, he said she was an incredibly savvy woman, and he knew I wanted to set up a property company, so we all arranged to go out for dinner and just went from there really.

SO Do you both get on well?

MP Oh, I adore her – she's fab! She's one of those women...well everything about her – she goes to the gym, she's got a fabulous body, she looks great, she's funny...

SO You seem like an ideal team. I think I can hear them calling you back for more filming.

MP I think you're right. It's been a pleasure...

FACT FILE MELISSA PORTER

FULL NAME:
MELISSA JAYNE PORTER

DOB:
15 DECEMBER 1972

MARITAL STATUS:
SINGLE

LIVES:
SHOREDITCH, LONDON
WORK: TV PRESENTER,
PROPERTY RENOVATOR,
JOURNALIST

CAREER HIGHLIGHT:
MY FIRST TV SHOW 'HOW TO
GET A NEW LIFE' WAS
PRETTY SPECIAL.

"I'm all for having a positive mental attitude."



"We don't really do the "Oh, I want to change my loft" sort of stuff – we're after things that are a bit meatier."



Charlie Smurfit may not be as well known as Melissa Porter, but she's no less prolific. She had been working in interior design for some time before clicking with Melissa and setting up Porter and Smurfit, which has gone from strength to strength. We spoke to her on life, design and rotating carports!

SO Hi Charlie, I've heard you've been really busy...

CS I know - it's been manic! I've just had a baby [six weeks ago] and I've moved house. Everything you shouldn't be doing at the same time, I'm doing. On top of that, work is being done on my house and I haven't had access to email. Never mind, the end is nigh.

SO How do you manage to find the time to work?

CS Well, rather foolishly I'm renovating my own house and everything that doesn't really happen to my clients has happened to me. For example, the tendering process - I've had to have nine builders come and quote for this project, where-as for my clients I usually have four or five. Having said that, I'm really happy with what is going on here - the house has all the really smart mod cons - and I'm already looking forward to my next project.

SO When are you hoping to get back to work on the Porter and Smurfit side of things?

CS Six weeks. The way Mel and I work is that we find clients - or rather, they find us - and we decide who we want to work with. And then work with them.

SO What determines which projects you work on?

CS Location, it has to be somewhere fairly close to London. Failing that, it has to be somewhere which would warrant us flying there - something with a large budget and a luxury twist to it. We don't really do the "Oh, I want to change my loft" sort of stuff - we're after things that are a bit meatier.

SO Have you been involved with much stuff abroad?

CS Yep, we've done a chalet in France and are currently working on another chalet in Canada. That one's only at the build stage though, so it's a lot of talking to architects...

"I became interested in interiors at 20 when I bought my own student house."

SO Is your background in this kind of work?

CS Well, I set up my own company in interior design about four years ago, but the reason why I became interested in interiors was because I bought my own student house when I was 20 and worked with my Mum on it for six months. We managed to find the perfect location,

painted it ourselves, put the floor in ourselves and then, ultimately, sold it. It made something like 190% profit and so I went on and bought two more, then I bought three others and I started getting family and friends coming up to me and saying "Can you help me choose a bathroom" or "Can you help me choose the interior for this room" and it made me realise that I wanted to work in something which is very creative.

SO What were you working in at the time?

CS Marketing, but I realised that what I liked about interiors was that they were a lot more current and were what I loved, so I just quit my job and went and trained.

SO Jumping forward a few years, you then met Melissa...

CS Yeah and we just hit it off straight away - everything came together at the same time and it's been a beautiful union. We share similar ideas too, we don't just walk into places and say: "Ooh, let's make it pink with fluffy cushions."

"We share similar ideas, we don't just walk into places and say: "Ooh, let's make it pink with fluffy cushions."





“Everything we do has its own twists and turns.”



SO Do you have any ambitions to be on television?

CS Um, yes, but I don't think it's as much a driving force for me as it is for Mel. I'm not out to seek fame as such, but I'm really fascinated by interiors, having nice chunky budgets and being able to create.

SO Do you watch Mel when she's on TV?

CS Of course! We're actually due to make a pilot show together soon, where we'll both be presenting.

SO Excellent, I'll keep an eye out for it. What's been your most interesting project to date?

CS Everything we do has its own twists and turns – every single project throws up its own problems and challenges. I'm really looking forward to working with a new client we're working with who has a

budget of £1.2 million for a £20 million house.

SO Blimey, what do you do with £1.2 million?

CS Spend it! Among other things, we're putting in a rotating carport, marbled kitchen and beech wood floors.

SO How would a client like that come to you; through referrals, your website...

CS He actually came through a friend – we don't really do promotion, it's more word of mouth.

SO And I guess this sort of exposure no doubt helps.

CS Oh yes, this is great. We're both really looking forward to seeing it published. 🏠

FACT FILE

CHARLIE SMURFIT

FULL NAME:
CHARLIE LOUISE SMURFIT

DOB:
15 MARCH 1975

MARITAL STATUS:
VERY HAPPILY MARRIED

LIVES: FULHAM, LONDON

WORK:
INTERIOR DESIGNER

CAREER HIGHLIGHT:
WORKING ON A CHALET IN FRANCE



“We don't really do promotion, it's more word of mouth.”