

Property Week's RESI Trailblazers: the stars of the show

Thu 21 September 2023

Property Week's RESI Trailblazers celebrate the rising stars of the UK residential real estate sector. Below, we outline the achievements of our winners – 12 outstanding professionals aged under 30



Leading the way: the winners of the Trailblazers awards were presented with their trophies at the RESi360 conference in London

Jamie Taylor, operations manager, Assured Sale and Progression

Jamie Taylor started out as sales negotiator for an estate agency, but struggled with her confidence and the nature of the sales culture. She needed to find the right role and so she was delighted to land a job focusing solely on sales progression at Assured Sale and Progression (ASAP).

Since joining ASAP in 2016, she has embraced continuous learning, developing her knowledge of



Jamie Taylor

sales progression and the broader property sector. Her dedication and diligence have been rewarded with several internal promotions. Her latest promotion will see her take up the role of operations director from October.

Taylor's career highlights include playing a pivotal role in ASAP's rapid expansion during Covid-19. She says the pandemic left many estate agencies grappling with the need to cut fixed costs, including staff. ASAP saw a surge in the number of firms wanting to use its outsourced model, requiring Taylor to expand her team from 20 to 70 staff in a year. Through her team's work, clients can optimise forecasting and free up more time to bring properties to market and seal deals.

Taylor has also participated in networking group Women in Residential Property. Her contribution includes presenting a session on uniting minds and hearts in the industry.

Christopher Mizen, surveyor, Gerald Eve

Cambridge graduate Christopher Mizen joined Gerald Eve's trainee programme in 2021 after a stint working for the planning, transport and sustainability service at Lambeth Council. He has since qualified as a chartered surveyor, focusing mainly on the build-to-rent (BTR) sector.

He has become part of a core team that delivers BTR research for Gerald Eve and is working towards its fourth city-specific report exploring the BTR pipeline.

At Gerald Eve, he chairs the committee that invites proptech guest speakers to present to the firm. Recent speakers include experts from ArcGIS and WiredScore, helping his colleagues to further their understanding of new technologies and use this knowledge when advising clients.

Mizen is keen to help others interested in joining the profession. To this end, he has helped develop an alumni network at the University of Exeter and organised an event attended by more than 50 young professionals.

He is also a trustee for the Young People's Trust for the Environment, a charity that encourages greater understanding of environmental issues and sustainability.



Christopher Mizen



Jamie Harris

Jamie Harris, head of student accommodation – capital markets, Harris Associates

In the four years Jamie Harris has led the student accommodation team at property investment agency Harris Associates, it has completed more than £3bn in transactions.

Major deals he has worked on include supporting a £1.5bn joint venture between Fusion Students and Cain International.

Harris Associates says his strengths include leveraging social media, collaborating with influencers and creators, engaging in global public relations and organising in-person events. Harris is also credited with fostering deep connections between investors and projects, which has helped its remarkable growth.

A thought leader in the sector, Harris regularly contributes to publications including Property Week and speaks at industry events. In Harris's time at Harris Associates, the firm has won a number of awards, including Agency of the Year at the Property Awards 2023.

Under Harris's guidance, the student accommodation team has introduced new private equity funds into the market, including EQT Exeter and Lone Star.

Luke De Stefano, operations director, HJ Collection

Luke De Stefano joined the property sector in 2016 as an investment lead for property consultancy Hunter Jones Group and sister company HJ Collection, which converts unloved commercial sites into affordable residential developments.

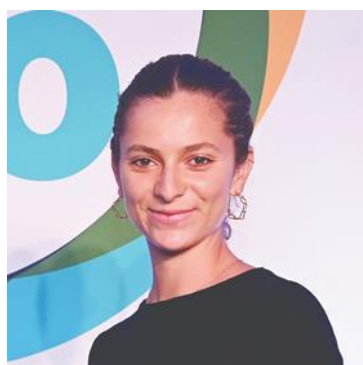
With his natural flair for building relationships with investors and stakeholders, HJ Collection credits De Stefano with making a significant contribution to its financial growth. His achievements over the past seven years include raising more than £100m of capital for development projects and sourcing more than 100 potential residential development sites. He has helped co-ordinate the development of more than 1,000 homes, ensuring they were completed on time and within budget, while delivering above-average returns to investors. He has helped to establish a pipeline with a gross development value of more than £120m for HJ Collection in 2023.



Luke DeStefano

De Stefano says property investment is experiencing uncertain times because of broader

economic events, but he views this as a huge opportunity for growth for savvy developers. He says HJ Collection has multiple sites coming to fruition and is adding more purchases to its portfolio despite the challenging financial climate.



Hannah Chappatte

Hannah Chappatte, founder and chief executive, Hybr

Hannah Chappatte launched student letting platform Hybr aged just 22, having experienced the pains of trying to find housemates within months of arriving at university.

She started by speaking to students about potential solutions and also cold-called landlords to understand the challenges they faced finding tenants. Chappatte found they were stuck between agents charging high prices and placing ads on classified sites, only to be inundated with mostly ineligible enquiries.

With all this insight, she launched Hybr as soon as she graduated in 2019. It now operates in nine cities and raised £2.5m from investors to support its development.

Hybr says students using the platform normally find a house in less than a month and enjoy a supportive rental experience from a trusted brand. Landlords using the platform never experience voids, it adds, while it charges just 2% of annual rent, saving them up to £600 per tenant.

There are now around 30,000 rooms on the platform and Hybr estimates it has nearly 15% of the Bristol student housing supply listed and 5% of London supply.

Sophie Thomas-Lacroix, senior architect, JTP

At just 27, Sophie Thomas-Lacroix became the youngest-ever senior architect at masterplanner JTP in 2021. Her role involves leading teams on high-density regeneration projects, focusing on collaboration, innovative design and sustainability and trying to unlock each site's full potential.

Over the past two years, Thomas-Lacroix has helped to secure planning applications for 750 homes, providing affordable housing for more than 2,500 people.

One of her proudest achievements is The Patchworks, a high-



Sophie Thomas-Lacroix

density urban regeneration project in Walthamstow, London, where amid the challenges of Covid-19 lockdowns, she played a pivotal role in securing planning approval for 580 homes.

As well as designing the buildings, JTP facilitated a partnership with local artist Wood Street Walls to turn facades into canvases to give the local community a voice.

Another highlight was the community-led regeneration of Blackbird Leys, a sustainable social housing scheme in Oxford with 294 affordable homes. Thomas-Lacroix has worked on the project since 2017, going from architectural assistant to lead project architect.

She is also leading an all-female architectural team for a 1,350-home scheme in north London.



Andre Tulloch

Andre Tulloch, head of property services, The LOWE Group

Andre Tulloch entered the property industry 11 years ago as a help-desk operative at King's College London. After a stint at Imperial College, he moved to London transport body Transport for London (TfL) as help-desk manager and went on to become a project assistant.

Two years ago, he joined vacant property specialist The LOWE Group as help-desk manager, before being rapidly promoted to maintenance manager, properties manager and now head of department. In his latest role, he manages a team of 15.

Tulloch says his proudest career achievements include working as part of TfL's team that launched a commercial development initiative to make use of empty commercial units. His role involved ensuring fits-out were completed, resolving any maintenance issues and supporting the marketing team to let the units.

His career highlights at The LOWE Group include investing more money into properties to provide licensees with a better quality of living, rather than just focusing on the security aspect of properties.

Tulloch has also introduced a maintenance reporting system, which allows him to oversee issues reported on a daily basis and manage his team accordingly.

Akeel Malik, fund manager, Urban Splash Residential Fund

As fund manager of Urban Splash Residential Fund (USR), Akeel Malik gives investors an opportunity to invest in its portfolio of UK private rented sector (PRS) properties.

Malik recently guided USR into its fifth successful year of trading, investing £30m in acquisitions and recording a 70% rise in profit.

Earlier this year, he secured a £20m agreement with Barclays, which represented the fund's first deal with a high street lender. Having raised £150m of equity from institutional and high-net-worth investors, the fund now owns and manages 325 homes.

From an early age, Malik showed great ambition and tenacity. While studying at Oxford University, he co-founded edtech platform Aula, which was valued at more than £10m in 2018. After graduating, Malik went on to work at UBS Investment Bank as part of the real estate team, advising on transactions with a value of £20bn.

Urban Splash credits Malik's passion and in-depth PRS knowledge for the fund's successful long-term relationships with investors, and for USR's impressive financial growth. Malik now has ambitions to increase the value of the fund's portfolio to £3bn by 2028.



Akeel Malik



Dan Robinson

Dan Robinson, managing director, VirginLand by Ringley

After graduating with a degree in real estate management, Dan Robinson launched a property management company. Then, working alone from his bedroom, he set up land acquisition service Democ, identifying sites to buy using existing data and sending exclusive letters on behalf of clients to secure deals.

Ringley Group bought the business in 2019, rebranding it as VirginLand by Ringley and retaining Robinson as its leader.

Since then, Ringley has automated many of the procedures Robinson was doing manually from his bedroom. The team has also grown to 15, and now provides end-to-end land acquisition services for small and medium-sized developers that can't afford to do it themselves.

The Ringley Group credits Robinson with playing an instrumental role in modernising the land acquisition process and changing the wider industry.

The firm says small and medium-sized developers that previously struggled to afford the services of planning professionals and land finders can now access a constant stream of opportunities, making it easier for them to buy off-market and pursue projects.

Joe Ellison, chartered surveyor and business improvement manager, Pinnacle Surveyors

Joe Ellison has worked for Derby-based Pinnacle Surveyors since 2015, firstly in an administrative role before going on to qualify and work as a chartered surveyor.

His current role requires carrying out valuations and surveys in north Derbyshire and north Nottinghamshire and working as part of the management team, most recently as business improvement manager.

Since the financial downturn hit in 2022, he has overseen a project to increase the amount of instructions received by Pinnacle. He started by analysing the firm's coverage to identify areas where it could be extended. He then established a team tasked with developing better relationships and referral schemes with estate agents, conveyancers and mortgage brokers. The strategy worked, as the firm immediately saw an increase in survey referrals across the country.

His other achievements include working with a client to overhaul its instruction and reporting platform. Ellison has completed many rounds of testing on the preferred platform, ensuring it provides accurate reports, before it goes live later this year.



Joe Ellison



Nick Hurn

Nick Hurn, asset and development manager, Realstar

Architecture graduate Nick Hurn has risen quickly through the ranks since leaving university in 2015. After completing JLL's graduate scheme, Hurn went on to manage LaSalle's Scottish and North East commercial portfolio, worth an estimated £250m.

Three years ago, he moved to Realstar where he is asset and development manager of a £2.2bn build-to-rent portfolio with 14 operational assets and seven sites in development.

Hurn describes his style as approachable and creative, using his personality and market knowledge to support clients. As an office agent, he says he used his

creativity to help prospective tenants see beyond mundane spaces and visualise inspiring workplaces. He also managed the financial impact of improvements on landlords, securing a 'win-win' situation for landlords and tenants.

At LaSalle, he honed his strategic decision-making, ensuring financial targets were achieved while also maintaining good relationships between different parties.

His latest residential asset management role has required balancing living standards, services and amenities against revenue, operational expenditure and capital spending.

Leana Aristodemou, build-to-rent asset manager, Ringley Group

In the space of five years, Leana Aristodemou has risen from an intern to a senior manager at property firm Ringley Group, overseeing a £162m build-to-rent (BTR) portfolio. Under her direction, the fund's valuation has risen by a remarkable £32m in a single year, boosting client returns.

Her standout achievements include managing the exchange of a 279-unit BTR scheme in Southampton in just two months, drawing praise from all parties involved.

At a time when many property values have plunged, Aristodemou has shown agility and ingenuity. For example, she identified substantial savings by rectifying a 20% VAT overcharge on electricity bills, securing an £8,500 refund for the client. She has also led the digitalisation of tenancy and maintenance records, which has streamlined operations and improved efficiency.

Aristodemou's dedication to innovation is exemplified by accomplishments such as securing BREEAM In-Use 'Very Good' ratings and WiredScore 'Platinum' and 'Gold' certifications for many schemes in her portfolio. She is also leading an initiative to improve energy performance certificate ratings, reflecting a commitment to sustainability.



Leana Aristodemou



The Judging Panel



Alistair Wickens

Founder and director, Goscombe Group



Chris Doré

Business development director, TriConnex

Debra Yudolph

Partner, SAY Property Consulting



Kush Rawal

Executive director of customer services, MTVH



Nicola Haigh

Head of real estate and housing, Lloyds Bank



Shiro Rauniar

Co-founder, The Developers Club



Susan Freeman

Partner, Mishcon de Reya

Tex Jones

Co-founder, The Developers Club



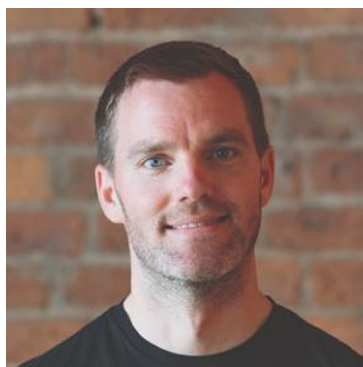
Tim Bannister

Director of property science and innovation, Rightmove



Tim Heatley

Co-founder, Capital & Centric



Property Week is grateful for the support of our RESI360 event partners

Platinum partners:



Gold partners:



Silver partner:



Bronze partners:



Supporting partners



Charity partner:

