

Nightingale ready to spread its wings as investors return

■ Investment adviser with Middle Eastern links hopes to go global

BY JENNIFER RIGBY

People leaving large firms to set up on their own has been one of the stories of the year.

But one pair blazed a trail down this route more than two years ago – in the eye of the credit crunch storm.

Since then, in one of the worst markets the industry has ever seen, former GVA Saxon Law investment surveyors Rupert Mitchell and James Turner's Nightingale Partners has been busy. It has been involved in £265m of direct property transactions and helped to set up joint ventures that carry more than £1bn of firepower.

Now, as investors begin to flock back to the UK market, the pair are eager to put their investment brokerage experience to good use.

Flying emirates

Mitchell and Turner left GVA Saxon Law in the summer of 2007, after spending 18 months in Abu Dhabi setting up Foundation Property Management, which is now one of the emirate's largest property asset management companies.

Before setting up Foundation, they were involved in the £4bn spree led by Lancer Asset Management, the asset manager and adviser of the Abu Dhabi royal family. Lancer Asset Management is led by GVA Saxon Law's Andrew Lax.

"We returned after 18 months in Abu Dhabi to GVA and felt that with the contacts we had made in the Middle East, private and institutional, it was a good time to set up," explains Turner.

Nightingale took flight with the full backing of Lax – although he thought they were "brave" with their timing, as Mitchell puts it. The two even inhabited



On song: Turner (right) and Mitchell (third left) have been growing their team, recently adding Pope (left)

We take calls regularly from people saying: "We want £200m"

**Rupert Mitchell
Nightingale Partners**

the same Berkeley Square office.

"When we started we were in a broom cupboard," says Turner.

They kept their cost base low, employing no support staff and adopting a Savills-style "eat what you kill" bonus culture – neither of which could protect them completely from the collapse of the market.

Instead, the pair – investment and asset management specialists – turned their talents to equity origination and finding the funds

for a UK industrial developer to set up a £250m joint venture to invest in UK industrial assets.

Next they introduced Cavendish, a subsidiary of a Gulf institution, to one of the UK's most respected, and recently active, property companies: AIM-listed London & Stamford Property. Cavendish provided a £200m equity injection for a joint venture with Raymond Mould and Patrick Vaughan's firm, giving it £1bn spending power with debt.

The joint venture subsequently completed one of the most talked-about transactions this year, buying a 50% stake in British Land's Meadowhall shopping centre in February for £588m.

Turner points out that Nightingale was not involved in the Meadowhall purchase – it only advised on the setting up of the joint venture.

Mitchell and Turner visit Abu Dhabi once a month to maintain their

business links, and say they hope to be there when the Middle East begins investing again.

"They may not buy this year," he said. "They may buy in five years. But when they dust off their files, we hope to get the call as a result of ongoing relations."

No pigeonhole

Turner also stresses that Nightingale's role is not confined to simply bringing Middle Eastern equity to the UK.

"Our time in the Middle East is a USP, but we don't want to be pigeonholed," says Mitchell.

"Next year it might only be the Japanese who are buying and we want to be able to deliver. Clients need money – equity and debt – and product. We can do all three," he says.

This claim was bolstered in July this year when Nightingale recruited Richard Pope, former GVA Saxon Law investment director – a "big fish", as Mitchell puts it.

"It is great to be hands on," says Pope. "It is a fantastic time for niche agencies."

The firm has refocused back to its investment brokerage roots in the UK as the market returns. Among its institutional clients are Aviva Investors and Legal & General, as well as private individuals in the UK, Europe and in the Middle East. It is also speaking to other parties in China and Canada that have money to spend.

"We are definitely not ashamed of our equity raising, it is a big part of our business and we take calls regularly from people saying: 'We want £200m,'" says Mitchell. "We would of course work on putting a partnership together but we are an investment broker. Our deals are client led."

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