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Uncovering classy **Coffee** locally. Discovering iconic **David Bowie** photographs and **Jeremy Houghton's** impressionistic **sports watercolours**. Also inside, the adventures of party planner **Liz Brewer** and why **Cronut** creator **Dominique Ansel** decided to set up shop here.

GROSVENOR

Party planning



Liz Brewer has been organising parties since the 1960s. The Belgravia resident tells Jonathan Whiley about her adventures, her celebrity friends and her charity work

Life and soul of the party

A list names are tripping off my host's tongue before I've finished sipping my first cup of Earl Grey tea.

Socialite Liz Brewer – celebrity fixer, party planner extraordinaire and etiquette queen – is waltzing me through her life story, peppering star names with casual abandon. Sir Paul McCartney, Dame Shirley Bassey, Elton John: they are all cast in her extraordinary biopic.

Three hours in her welcoming company, within the decorative walls of her Belgravia home, is barely enough to lift the lid on the box of delights that is her life.

It wasn't meant to be like this. Originally a debutante, she decided to turn her back on that life – a decision that catapulted her onto an altogether more eclectic path.

Brewer had been a rebellious child – she was expelled from two schools – and the idea of embarking on an adventure captured her imagination. Seduced by the riotous colour of the late 1960s – encapsulated by the starchy life she saw on the King's Road – she made for Portugal, via a brief engagement to a member of the Spanish royal family.

With the Portuguese government encouraging people to invest in the Algarve – under what would turn out to be the false guise of lending money at two per cent interest – Brewer saw an opportunity.

Hiring a Mini on a provisional driving licence, she drove for six hours until she came across Albufeira, a then little-known fishing village. Her memories of that night are vivid. It was 11pm, there was one café open – white walls, bright blue window frames – and she met a Swedish couple who spoke English. "They were bemused by this young blonde girl in a Mini," she says, laughing. "They gave me marzipan cakes and a drink."

Brewer – after persuading people to lend her money – went on to set up the first discotheque in Portugal, spotting a market for tourists at a time when hotels were just starting to be built in the area.

With a barman by her side whom she describes as the spitting image of film star Anthony Quinn, she soon learnt the tricks of the trade.

"I also learnt how to beat the Portuguese," she says. "I bought contraband whisky and gin. I would put the new whisky into the old bottles, and we used to take a stack of wine bottles and row out at night with the fishermen."

"Today there are hundreds of sacks of broken wine bottles about 200 metres off the main beach of Albufeira. It was the only way you could survive. I was supposed to pay bribes and I didn't."

The club started to attract quite a crowd. The likes of singers Shirley Bassey and Sir Cliff Richard revealed in its isolation, with the latter teaching Brewer how to dance. "In the afternoons it was too hot to be on the beach, so we used to go in the club because it had air-conditioning," she says. "He [Cliff] used to come in and he would show us how to do these formation dances."

"He was living in one of [TV mogul] Lew Grade's houses, who became a great friend of mine. He put The Shadows in one house, Hank Marvin and Cliff in another," she says.

Does she still keep in contact? "No," she says, showing me a black-and-white picture of them both on the sideboard of her lounge. "I tried once, but I don't think he realises I'm that girl. He will have known me as Elizabeth. He's not easy to get in touch with. I knew him so well, but that was 35 or 40 years ago."

"It's a shame because I wanted to write to him over this last business [the historic abuse allegations] because I knew that was all rubbish."

While Cliff Richard was cleared, Rolf Harris, whom Brewer also knew, remains firmly behind bars. "I knew him and his wife and I would see them all the time," she says. "I'd invite them to parties and I'd see them down at Bray [Berkshire], because my cousin lives there. He always behaved impeccably; I found it [the revelations] extraordinary."

Another shock came in August last year with the death of singer and television presenter Cilla Black, whom Brewer knew well from her time in Portugal.

"She used to supply me with my dresses. She was given – by [designer] Barbara Hulanicki – these stage dresses and she couldn't wear them all," says Brewer. "She would put them in a pillow case and I would pull out these shimmery little numbers. Cilla basically dressed me the entire time I was in Portugal for my evening gear. She was such a dear friend. It was so sad."

In 1973, Brewer left Portugal, selling the business shortly before the revolution took hold. She returned to London and went on to secure marketing contracts with travel regions – including the Algarve – before

Party planning



ABOVE: Brewer with Ivana Trump
RIGHT: Cilla Black used to give Brewer dresses

overseeing a raft of club openings in London, including one that would prove the springboard for Jimi Hendrix's career.

Despite having been engaged six times, she married only once – to one-time lion owner John Rendall, in 1978.

A year after moving into their Cliveden Place home – one that has been burgled twice and prompted a fear of the dark that took Brewer a long time to overcome – she gave birth to daughter Talulah, who has since become a talented singer-songwriter.

Brewer and Rendall stayed together for a further nine years. Although they split up, she stayed in the house, and has continued to snub the kitchen for more than three decades. It all goes back to an incident involving a packet of frozen spinach and the fire brigade; she hasn't attempted to cook a meal since.

Now she plays it safe and eats out often. "I've got Colbert on the corner for breakfast, the Ivy Garden for lunch, and then if I have to go to the West End I've got my favourites I go to," she says.

While there's plenty of celery, kale and coconut water in the fridge at home – an encounter with an Los Angeles health guru many moons ago has made her health-conscious – being a socialite means concessions have to be made. "I break the rules all the time, because I drink champagne when I'm partying and I love vodka," she says.

Over the years, there have been plenty of occasions to drink fizz – from luncheons and parties at Buckingham Palace to Christmas breaks in the country with "Disco Dowager" Lady Edith Foxwell and her friend the singer Marvin Gaye, and birthday celebrations with the likes of Lady Colin Campbell.

Brewer has an enviable network of contacts – pop stars, royalty, presidents – many of whom she has represented and calls upon to help her fearless charity work.

One of her ongoing projects is with the Sean Edwards Foundation, which raises safety awareness in motorsport. The foundation was set up

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by businesswoman Daphne McKinley Edwards, in honour of her British racing driver son. He died, aged 26, following a mysterious mechanical failure with his Porsche during a private lesson.

An annual bike ride has been set up in his name in Monaco – next May marks the fourth year – and Brewer is helping to organise a programme of events to continue raising the profile of the foundation.

One of Brewer's longest working relationships – and arguably the most high-profile – is with Ivana Trump.

"An amazing, unique woman," she says. "Absolutely incredible and bright and sharp. I definitely learnt patience through Ivana. The detail – I would have to photograph and write down every single expense, down to a stamp."

What does she think of Ivana's former husband, and the man who could yet become the next leader of the free world?

"I'd better be careful what I say," she says. "He's a megalomaniac. If Donald takes on something, he goes in to win; he doesn't go in to come second best. He has the power, and money talks. I don't think he would have gone into this unless he thought he was going to become president."

"He did her last big wedding, which lasted about eight hours. He gave the wedding at Mar-a-Lago [his private Palm Beach estate in Florida] and every man wore white and all the women wore pastel. Donald was in black, and that just about sums it up."

We're drawing to a close but I'm curious – after a life among the glitterati, has Brewer ever been starstruck? There's a pause, and then she bursts into laughter.

"Oh God!" she exclaims. "I do remember falling madly in love with [film star] Yul Brynner, which is why I don't mind bald men. I was a child but oh, his power in [musical] The King and I."

lizbrewer.com
seanedwardsfoundation.com