

Suburb Style



Suburb Style editor, Deborah Warland talks to local residents

A WHITING FROM CAPE COD

featuring John Whiting

John Whiting is undoubtedly a man of many talents who describes himself as 'the worlds oldest promising young man!' His outwardly calm and quiet exterior masks an energetic, inquisitive and 'always on the go' inner self, and one can tell that his boredom threshold is incredibly low. We had hardly finished the interview when John was already rushing to his computer to Google local musician Deborah Calland whom I had mentioned during the course of our conversation. I could hear his cries of, "Oh, so she has performed with...and oh, she must know..." as I walked down the path! Now in, as he calls it, his ninth decade, John can look back on his different careers with both pride and sardonic amusement and yet is still determined to work in those areas which interest him of which are many.

Born in Massachusetts, John wittily refers to himself as 'a Whiting from Cape Cod'. His education took him to the west coast of the United States, to UC Berkeley where he took a degree in English Literature and became a devout Anglophile. One thing that John was expert at from an early age was the art of manipulation. This showed itself in his ability to get himself to the UK to do his draft – he got himself posted to England for two years as Base Librarian at RAF Chelveston. During this time, he says, "I managed to develop a taste for Claridge's, Dover Street tailors and being chauffeur-driven in a Rolls Royce during my time off."

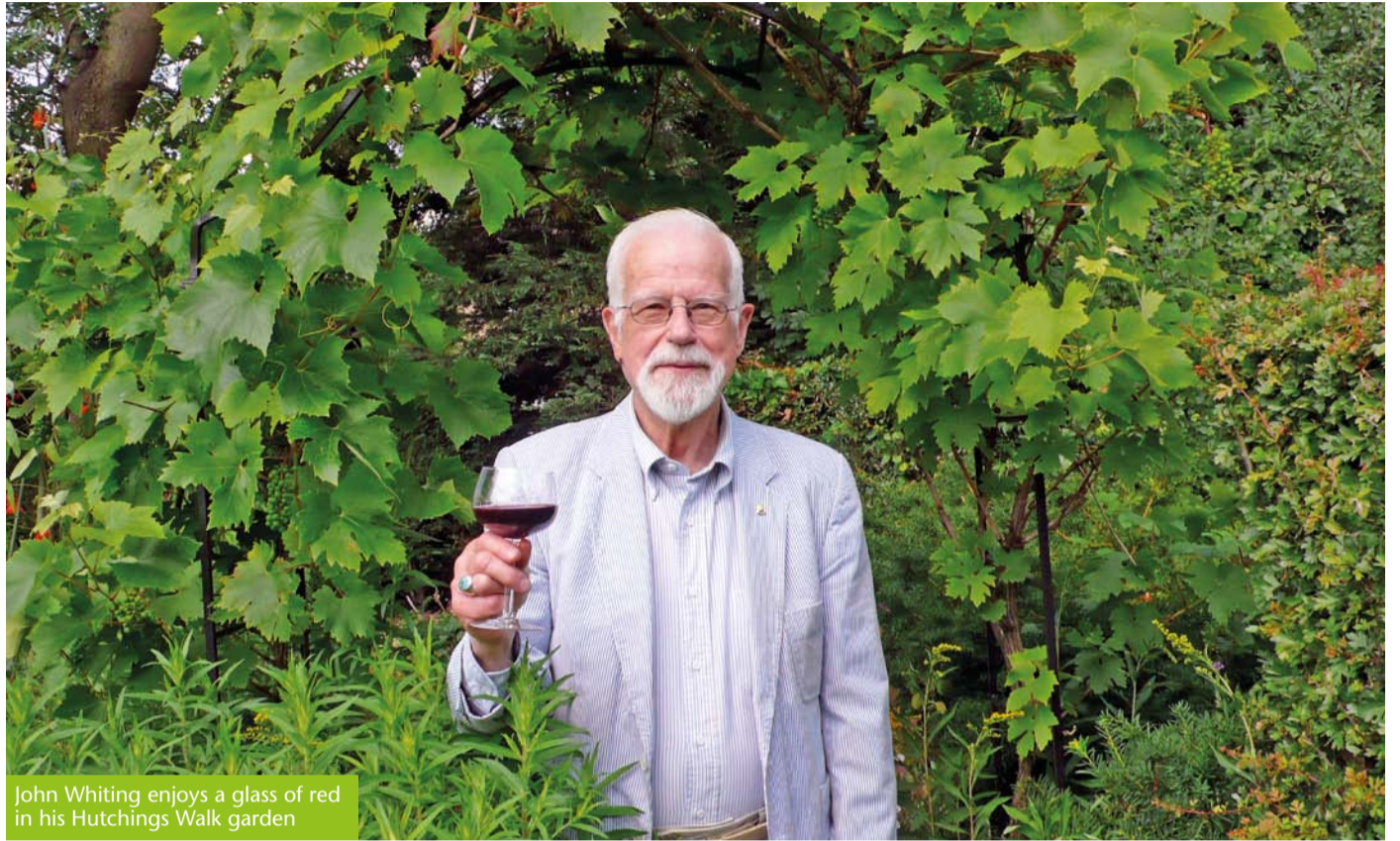
When he returned to the States, John went back to California and Berkeley, first as the Archivist of Recorded Music at the University and then as Production Director of what he refers to as 'Berkeley's egghead FM station KPFA – the equivalent of BBC Radio 3 when it was at it's zenith – a public service broadcaster, very highbrow, but having an amazing rapport with its listeners'.

We now move on to another of John's manipulations. He was asked to create a brief for the role of London correspondent for his radio network, which he did, fully intending to assign himself to it. He describes the next four years when he was fulfilling this role as 'rather like being a poor man's Alastair Cook, but it was great fun'.

John decided to call it a day with radio. He says, "I demonstrated my perversity. I had taken Eng Lit in California – I now decided to take an MA in American Lit at the Institute of United States Studies, at the University of London." It was during this period that he met his wife Mary, now a food writer. She says, "We were both on a course called Looking at London and very romantically we got into conversation while admiring the Battersea shield at the British Museum."

As John had always been a great fan of contemporary music his next career change was almost inevitable. He became a sound designer for the next couple of decades. He describes the occupation thus: "Using my experience as a recording engineer, I worked with avant-garde music ensembles, digitally treating their output and bouncing it around concert halls." Or, as Mary says with a twinkle in her eye, "He makes funny noises." However one describes what John did, he was a success at it. He worked at Glyndebourne Opera, with the London Symphonietta, the Hilliard Ensemble, and dozens of symphony orchestras from Los Angeles to Leningrad. He has performed with conductors such as Sir Simon Rattle, Andre Previn and Ricardo Chailly and in his London studios, October Sound he produced pre-recorded performance tapes for, amongst many others, John Cage and Luciano Berio. For 20 years he was the sound designer for the electro-acoustic vocal quartet Electric Phoenix, whose tours took him regularly around Europe and America.

In 1974 John and Mary moved to the Suburb, first to a flat in Ossulton Way and then to Hutchings Walk, where they still live. When John decided to end his career as a sound designer he took up food writing, making himself an overweight expert on Paris Bistros, and



John Whiting enjoys a glass of red in his Hutchings Walk garden

subsequently became News Editor of *Fine Food Digest*. He and Mary go gourmet travelling in France in their camper van and John has his own excellent website www.whitings-writings.com. If you Google Paris Bistros, John's website is one of the first to come up.

He is now pretty critical of the new Suburb. "Where, unlike the vision of Henrietta Barnett, the rich live next door to the very rich. Many of the people who are now moving in have little sense of community. I feel sorry for the Trust – they must feel like they are running Homeland Security in the States – keeping out invaders who, if there were not hedges, would build walls. Then the whole Suburb would look like Bishops Avenue. The Trust will never have enough money to counter this 'invasion' and it is going to get worse and worse."

He and Mary love Bigwood in any season and, as John likes the city and Mary the country, they are both happy with the Suburb. When asked about a memorial bench, John said he would like to have it in the middle of Falloden Way – to slow down the traffic!

My last question was whether he and Mary had any feelings about living north of the A1. John answered with a quote from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of being Ernest*. When Jack Worthing tells Lady Bracknell that he lives at 149 Belgrave Square, she replies dismissively, "The unfashionable side."

There is no doubt that John's tongue in cheek reply to my question is an indication of a humour and intelligence that will last for a long time yet. **S**

MY VIEW OF THE SUBURB

featuring Mirren Gidda

Mirren Gidda has been a Suburb resident for 11 years and has just finished her final year at Haberdashers' Aske's School for Girls. She is hoping that her exam results will enable her to take up the offer from University College London to read English.



Mirren Gidda

I have enjoyed growing up amongst the Suburb's leafy tranquillity yet I cannot allow myself to wax loquacious as to the Suburb's naturalistic beauty since that clearly wouldn't be cool. For many, the Suburb is an idyllic place to grow up and raise a family, yet for a teenager it pales in comparison to Kentish Town and Finsbury Park which make up for their lack of privet hedges with copious amounts of graffiti and concrete. However, I have found a certain charm within the Suburb which makes it

vastly more interesting than the aforementioned places. What always strikes me the most about this beautiful, green area is the number of 4 x 4s blasting their way through. As someone who has recently passed their test, the Suburb became a terrifying place to learn to drive. As soon as I set off an X5 would be on my tail, honking at me with all the impotent rage of the average London cab driver whilst I broke into a cold sweat and prayed that I didn't stall.

Yet my lessons weren't to end with my acceptance that the big car is always right. Having passed, I have been inducted into the Suburb driving laws which seem to be, much like the rules of Fight Club, that you do not talk about them in fact you ignore them

altogether. In the Suburb it is every man for himself. Despite our reputation as genteel garden loving folk, put us behind the wheel and suddenly we're running into stand-offs with each other, frantically mouthing obscenities behind the wheel or in one memorable encounter announcing 'I have right of way because my car is more expensive'. I wish that last comment was a joke but alas, it actually happened...

I quickly learned that nowhere was more dangerous to drive than the Suburb and I decided that I was safer walking. It was a beautiful summer's day as I recall and I stepped out onto the heath extension and straight onto a decidedly naked sunbather. It was of course a member of the non-Suburb migration. Annually this specie descends upon the Suburb, waving picnic baskets, dogs and pushchairs with gay abandon, pausing only to shriek 'Maisie do not eat that! Get out of the car! We are meant to have fun and so help me we will!' whilst tossing their litter into my immaculate privet hedge.

Like all migrations I can only wonder at where these people have come from and how they found the heath. I find myself lapsing into paroxysms of rage at these intruders, contemplating various methods of sabotage such as deflating their tyres or, on a particularly emotional day, charging at them with a spear. It is of further frustration to me that fellow Suburb dwellers who don't live so close to Golders Hill Park are not aware of this seasonal migration, perhaps because the BBC continue to ignore my requests to make a documentary on the subject... If only you were aware of this invasion then perhaps we could form a kind of Suburb Army and vanquish these intruders for good. If the Trust will let me build a catapult I reckon that we could reclaim the Heath Extension in what shall be known as 'The Scuffle of the Suburb.' Yet I fear that the Suburb party poopers of Winnington Road and Ingram Avenue might refuse to join in.

And now I segue nicely into my focus on Winnington and Ingram. We recently engaged in a bloody and bitter battle to cut down Ol' Peary, a beloved pear tree which was defecating pears upon our beloved 4 x 4, yes I'm a hypocrite, apologies. Fortunately the Trust, a fellow pear aficionado, refused to allow my family's attempts at tree homicide which I'm grateful for as I have preserved the joy of watching wasps get drunk on the pear liquor and act like my friends on a Saturday night.

Imagine my shock however when I noticed that certain roads had not just torn down some of their fruit trees but their entire homes! I was, well, as shocked as if I found out the Suburb library was going to close. Oh wait... For as far as the eye could see, these roads were scattered with cranes, lorries and builders demolishing perfectly good homes and building new ridiculous ones. But why? I mused to myself as I sat getting drunk on pear liquor, why are these wealthy property developers and owners able to demolish and rebuild multi-million pound homes? Why are these multi-millionaires able to defy the Trust and their limited budget? Alas it was to no avail. This must remain the great mystery of the suburb and one which will plague me for as long as I live here. **S**

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