



Suburb Style

Suburb Style editor, Deborah Warland talks to local residents

A CHANGE OF HEART featuring June and Alan Armstrong Wright

Alan and June bought their house on the Suburb and took possession of it on the day after the big storm in October. They had an anxious drive to the empty house that day, past fallen trees and lots of damage – the Surveyor's report: "there are two notoriously shallow-rooted, mature, birch trees far too close to the house," dominating their thoughts. Fortunately they were still standing.

1987 was the year they returned to the UK after thirty three years abroad – the majority of which was in Hong Kong, then finishing with five years in America. June came ahead of Alan especially to find a house to settle in. She cast the net wide and searched from Chiswick to Hampstead with over 150 viewings. Their Hampstead Way house was top of a short-list of three. "Where is it?" he asked. "Hampstead Garden Suburb," June replied.



"Suburb! No way! Look, we've lived in a wonderful flat in Hong Kong with greenery behind and views down to the harbour in front and a spacious house here in Washington. I am not going to live in a place with Suburb in the title – with row after row of cramped, identical homes." Despite June trying to correct this image, Alan was adamant. It wasn't until he too had returned, and had turned down 2 and 3 on the short-list, that he was persuaded to look on the Suburb. There was an immediate, and lasting, change of heart.

Alan and June first met on a blind date organised by a mutual friend and got engaged six weeks later. They celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary last May. A few months after they married, Alan joined the Colonial Service as a Civil Engineer and they packed their meagre possessions ready to set sail for Hong Kong and a four year tour of duty there. Their thoughts were full of the prospect of an exciting new life opening up. June added, "Only years later did we appreciate the sadness of both sets of parents as we blithely assured them that four years "would pass in a flash." As we climbed up the gangway of the P&O Flagship 'Chusan', our lives did, indeed, change overnight. It was sailing on a three month round-trip cruise to Japan; the first since the end of the war. The cruise attracted a passenger list of nobility and wealthy travellers intent on getting away from post-war Britain. There was also a sprinkling of passengers like us – mainly young people travelling to start a career." They stepped ashore in Hong Kong a month later and were quickly won over by the energy and vitality of the place.

June had acted in England but there was no professional English-speaking theatre in Hong Kong at that time, however, she saw an advertisement for teachers. After a brief interview she was appointed to teach English to Chinese students. She also got involved in the very active amateur drama groups and took part in many plays, acting and directing, both on stage and radio. It was as a result of radio drama that she was invited to join Radio Hong Kong and started a broadcasting career that encompassed Hong Kong versions of Woman's Hour, Down Your Way, Desert Island Words, Forces Favourites and BBC's Two Way Family Favourites. She presented this programme from Hong Kong for the next sixteen years. Their son and daughter were born and grew up in Hong Kong. June told me, "we all loved the life – lots of swimming in the warm sea and at clubs; going out on boats; picnics on the green hills; good schools and life at home made much easier by a dear Chinese amah who was with us for twenty five years and whose daughter grew up with our children."

The leaving of Hong Kong to go to Washington DC was a difficult wrench to begin with but June met up with a British actress within a few weeks and the two of them started a small, professional theatre company called Interact. Over the next five years, she co-wrote and directed fourteen original shows for Interact ranging from a children's puppet show to a play on the reign of William and Mary.

Then it was back to England and HGS and more time to pursue writing a memoir (unfinished), poetry, short stories, entertainments for Fellowship House and the Horticultural Society and a docu-drama on Henrietta Barnett, 'With Regard to the Dame', as part of the Suburb's Centenary in 2007.

For the last 3 years she has been a Volunteer with the Met. Police in the Media Office of Barnet HQ in Colindale. She helped to write press releases and then was asked to write a Blog informing what crimes and scams were being committed and how to combat them and stay safe.

Alan was born in 1929 and during World War II, he was evacuated several times and went to five different schools which he says, "did not help his education – but ended up at Tottenham Grammar School which did!" He was in London during the blitz and I asked him what it was like. "Our parents didn't stop my friend Nobby and me going out after the air raids to spot the damage. After an incendiary bomb raid we went to Finsbury Park and dug up seven incendiary bombs – we tried to set them off by banging them on the footpath until a park keeper chased us off."

After meeting and marrying June, there followed the famous boat trip to Hong Kong where Alan immediately commenced his work as a Civil Engineer. For the next 28 years he had a succession of high powered jobs designing and supervising the construction of main roads, flyovers and bridges on Hong Kong Island, served on the Committee examining alternative locations for Kai Tak Airport. Alan was Deputy Secretary of the Environment and Deputy Financial Secretary and his last job there was as Hong Kong's Commissioner for Transport.

From 1982-87 Alan moved to the World Bank and was based in Washington DC – which must have been quite a change from Hong Kong. He was taken on as Urban Transport Advisor, because of his Asian experience, and his job was to encourage the development of private enterprise efficiency and financial viability. He had to cooperate with many countries around the world including Kenya which he says "was one of my favourites." He continued to work for the World Bank and the European Bank as an independent consultant until he was 71. He has also written many books on various aspects of transport.

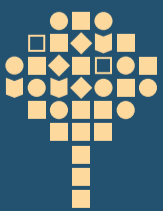
Now Alan has a full life of mainly voluntary work. "I am in touch with the Hong Kong Society, the World Bank and the World Wildlife Fund, regarding their action to eliminate the slaughter of rhinos for the supposed curative power of their horns. Additionally he does work for the Suburb Trust, including helping with the organisation of the Tree Survey plans and the review of the tree consultants recommendations 2012-2013. He drew up the Annual Road Maintenance Contract. In addition to these good works there is still a lot of the humorous side to this gentleman. "I did a Cartoon Course at the Institute but despite many attempts have got only one printed in a Golf Club magazine. I also did a Stand Up Comedy Course and performed a few times with a seven minute gig that went down quite well at the Soho night club 'Pear Shaped in Fitzrovia'.

June and Alan say they thoroughly enjoy living on the Suburb; the rich pickings offered by Fellowship House; the friendship of neighbours and the congregation at St Jude's; the preserved architecture and greenery; walking on the Heath Extension to watch cricket or rugby and last – but certainly not least – to be within easy reach of the treasure trove of theatres, museums and galleries this great city offers. **S**

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January 2014 finds The Institute once again on top form. Our students have settled in well at Bishop Douglass School – where most of our courses now take place – and you will find that same special atmosphere in our classrooms generated by people studying something which they love.

If you missed our main enrolment in September, it is not too late to sign up and enjoy that buzz yourself: there are still a few places remaining on some of our 3 term courses. Visit our website www.hgsi.ac.uk or call us on 0208 829 4229.

As well as our ever popular adult courses, we run a number of children's courses too. There are still some places on our after-school Fun with Clay course for 5-7 year olds which runs on Mondays at the Arts Centre (now the Archer Academy). We also have 3 days of Half Term Holiday Workshops for 7-13 year olds coming up from 17-19 February. You can choose from Cookery, Cartooning and Carnival Fashion. For more information about the half term workshops, email anne.melbourne@hgsi.ac.uk or call Anne on 020 8829 4235.

So what else is new? We have a great range of short courses on offer this term.

Our new 4 week Opera Magic course focuses on Verdi's 'Il Trovatore' and 'La Traviata'. It is designed to deepen your appreciation of opera and enhance your enjoyment.

We have an attractive range of computer courses too including ipad for Artists (Improvers) starting on March 1, a one day workshop on designing leaflets and posters also on March 1 – ideal for someone setting up their own small business or planning a special event – and two Creative Photoshop courses, one for beginners starting on February 15 and a follow-on for improvers on March 15.

Some of our most popular courses return this term too: you can take your pick from Breadmaking (starts March 3), Understanding Your Digital Camera (Beginners – March 1, Intermediate – March 29), a Meditation Workshop for beginners running on Feb 8 and March 22 or two new London Walks: West London (starts February 26) and South London (starts April 22.) We also have 3 First Aid courses – one for children and babies running on February 22 and March 22 and a basic first aid course on March 8 and March 29 – as well as silk painting and life drawing courses starting this term.

So what are you waiting for? Check it all out at www.hgsi.ac.uk – and sign up online. We are looking forward to welcoming you back to The Institute.



For further details ring 020 8829 4229 or visit www.hgsi.ac.uk