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## In the City: all do and no talk for distinguished clients

Edward Fennell

### Quiet assurance

While some firms in recent weeks have been happy to spill the beans on what their well-known clients have said in private conversations, Farrer & Co, by contrast, has maintained an absolute discretion. For example, over lunch last week at the Skylon on the South Bank in London (previously, appropriately enough, the People's Palace), the firm's senior partner, James Furber, uttered not a word about its most distinguished clients.

Instead, he concentrated on the day-to-day challenges and opportunities that face a firm that is a mix of West End and City. Like other firms in that neck of the woods, Farrers has been able to recruit good-quality, experienced people in recent months from larger firms hit hard by the recession. "Once law firms start to cut not just the fat but the muscle from their partnership then I call that qualitative easing, not quantitative easing," he says.

As a supporter of Charlton Athletic Football Club, Furber understands the wisdom of knowing one's place in the world and he carries that across to his legal practice. "We are in a service industry," he emphasises, "but I fear that some law firms have forgotten about that during the days of the financial bubble. There seemed to be an assumption of entitlement — but, as events have proved, that can't be sustained." For once, plain talking beats slick gimmicks for insight.

### Act now

You don't just get art works at Collyer Bristow. You get drama, too. By chance when I dropped in to see the firm's excellent *Line Journeys* exhibition last week — which focuses on how art fits into place — the firm's construction team was setting up a mock mediation for clients in the building and finance sectors. The aim was to distil a complex mediation process into a hour's worth of roleplay, some of which was scripted but much was also made of ad-libbing reactions to the unexpected.

Leading the session was Phillip Howell-Richardson, of Independent Mediators, who clearly had a grip on how to make the abstruse accessible via play-acting. "In one of the 'private' meetings, Phillip asked the contractor to get into his helicopter with him and to fly up and survey the dispute from above," explained Jane Hughes, a partner.

"It was an extraordinarily effective way of looking at a messy and complicated situation, impartially and from a distance." A flight of fancy — but pretty down to earth as well.

### Sporting chance

Leading sportsmen these days are best known by their willingness to get their kit off. However, Martin Winter, of Taylor Wessing, is campaigning with the Jane Bubear Sports Foundation to provide children from deprived communities in developing countries with sports kit and equipment as a step towards self-reliance. He is recruiting runners and sponsors for a 10km run in Zimbabwe in May. "Running aptitude is not a requirement," he says archly, demonstrating an ability to walk the talk.