

PROPERTY developers? They're all ruthless — stopping at nothing to make a profit. And charitable? Not likely!

Unless that is, you ask Charlotte Grobien, a former conference manager and events organiser turned property magnate, who has made a cool £600,000 profit from developing three houses.

And amazingly, she's giving it all away to children's charities.

'I'd never painted a door or tiled a wall before I came up with the idea of raising money for charity through modernising and building properties,' says Charlotte, who had worked at Wandsworth prison and in schools before deciding to emulate Property Ladder's Sarah Beeny.

Early last year she set up Give It Away, her development company, and has dedicated each day to persuading builders, architects, estate agents and legal advisers to give their time and work for cost price, or sometimes for free.

'It's been exhausting — a full-time job and more besides. But those people who have been helpful have been very helpful indeed,' she says.

'It's been a leap for them because they didn't know who I was or anything about Give It Away. After all, it's not exactly a typical property company.'

But she singles out Wandsworth council and the utility companies as being particularly unhelpful.

'Everyone else was being flexible because they knew we were giving money to charity and weren't professionals. But the petty officialdom of the local authority and the gas, electricity and water companies made our life a nightmare.'

Charlotte's 18-month labour of love is nearing an end. The first of three refurbished homes in Putney, south-west London, is on sale at £1.15 million, with a second coming on the market at a similar value imminently. A third, for £1 million,

Charity begins at home

A property developer with a heart is giving away her £600,000 profits. Graham Norwood finds out why

goes on sale in September. She calculates a profit of roughly £200,000 on each.

Estate agency Barnard Marcus, which is selling the properties but waiving its fee, calls the first four-bedroom, semi-detached home 'an amazing house finished to an unusually high standard' with granite worktops, a German kitchen, Spanish tiles and fitted maple cupboards.

'It's as good as anything you could get from the finest developer and we've priced it absolutely according to its market worth, not because proceeds are going to charity,' says Lisa Koracevic of Barnard Marcus.

'We're not mentioning Give It Away in any of the details because Charlotte didn't want any potential buyer to feel under pressure.'

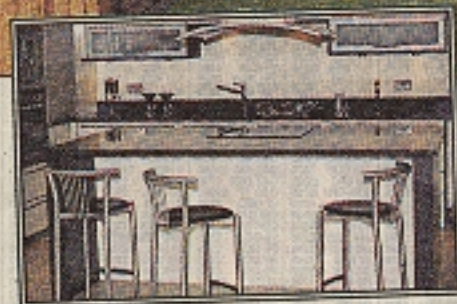
Charlotte draws no salary but has been project-managing the building work as well as liaising with contractors, who have never come across a scheme like this before.

'It was difficult to believe at first, but it's true,' says Geoff Barham of JTD, a firm building timber frames for homes.

'If Charlotte keeps the same team for any future scheme it'll build up trust and create a different way of working for all us contractors.'

Charlotte is still on the look-out

PICTURES: MIKE FLOYD



Success: Charlotte Grobien and one of the Give It Away homes. Inset: The swish designer kitchen

disabled children; the Shooting Stars Hospice for children; the South London Actionnaire Club's centre for blind and partially sighted children; and the NSPCC.

By the end of September, all three properties are likely to be sold and Charlotte, who is also managing the building of a holiday home for her family in Spain, says she is hanging up her hard hat — but only for a while.

'I need to get my life back and have a holiday,' she says. 'But I've made a pledge to myself that I want to give away £1 million, so that means at least one more property project.'

'It'll be a completely new-build home because they have the largest prices — and the biggest profit for the charities.'

■ BARNARD Marcus: 020 8785 3322. For more details about Give It Away, tel: 020 8876 8807; give-it-away.co.uk