



Birley legacy is a timeshare for super-rich

IT'S most reassuring if a holiday destination comes highly recommended. So Botiga, the upmarket second-homes venture, is on to a good thing with its first purchase.

The company, set up by businessman Kit Harrison and Soren Jessen, founder of City eaterie 1 Lombard Street, is close to buying a villa in Morocco that was being developed for the late Mark Birley, founder and former owner of Annabel's, the Mayfair nightclub.

The mansion, in the Ourika Valley, 30 minutes outside Marrakesh, was being developed by Lynn Guinness and her business partner Francis Pike, Birley's former son-in-law.

It was left without a buyer when Birley died last August. "Mark was a legend and it is fabulous to be able to realise his vision for this extraordinary house," said Harrison.

His company aims to buy 60

luxury properties around the world. It is seeking 400 members who will pay €625,000 (£495,000) each to join, plus an annual charge of €35,000, for which they can spend between four and six weeks in the properties a year. It's a sort of timeshare for the super-rich.

Early investors include Michael Spencer, the boss of Icap, and Guy Innes-Ker, the tenth Duke of Roxburghe.

The villa has five bedrooms and a three-bedroom guest cottage attached. Birley was going to buy it with some of the £100m raised from the sale of Annabel's and his other clubs to clothing tycoon Richard Caring.

Botiga's advisory board features JCB heir Alice Bamford, the Earl of Mornington and someone who should know his way around villas on the Med, Prince Nikolaos of Greece and Denmark. Buckets and spades at the ready.