

# Sandra Burrows

Meet Round Hill Capital's COO, driving the growth of one of Europe's leading living platforms, whose career spans PE, investor relations and organisational transformation.

**“ Looking back, what first drew you to real estate?**

I came into real estate somewhat accidentally, having started in private equity before being asked to support the real estate team at Blackstone. What kept me there was its breadth. Unlike other asset classes, where capital is often allocated at a distance, in real estate you are building structures, managing tangible assets, working closely with clients, and the quality of your execution shows up quickly. That combination strongly appealed to my preference for seeing things built and working as they should.

**Your career spans investor engagement, operations and transformation. Was that**

**path intentional or did opportunities emerge along the way?**

It was a combination. Early in my career I had the opportunity to work across different parts of the Blackstone business, which gave me a broad understanding of how organisations function across the alternatives space. Over time, I became much clearer on where I could add the most value. I am not a natural salesperson or investment manager. Those aren't my strengths. But I am very detail oriented so I focused on execution, on building operational platforms, and on making sure things work as they should. As my career progressed, the roles became more deliberate in that

direction. I think it is important to understand your own strengths, but equally to respect the strengths of others and build teams that complement each other.

**You joined Round Hill Capital as COO during a period of growth in the European living sector. What attracted you to the role?**

It came down to people and timing. I place great trust in our CEO and leadership team, and I could see that the European living sector, despite a challenging few years, was at an inflection point. The businesses that invest in their platforms now, in people, processes, governance, will be the ones that benefit most as the cycle turns. I wanted to be part of building that.

**How have your experiences as a woman in the industry shaped your career journey?**

There have been challenges, but also a great deal of support from individuals across the industry both men and women. If anything, I would say that background and access to opportunity can be just as significant as gender, if not more so. Coming into the industry from a non-traditional background brings its own challenges. Ultimately, I have focused on doing the job well, continuing to learn, and taking opportunities when they arise.

**Who or what in your childhood or teenage years had the biggest influence on how you saw your future?**

My mother, in many ways. She was not an easy person,



and our relationship was complicated. But she was incredibly resilient, and it left me with a sense of responsibility that has shaped everything I have done since. I cared for her throughout my career until she passed a couple of years ago. That was not always straightforward, but I never considered not doing it. She was my mother. Looking back, I think that this experience taught me so much. Patience, persistence, managing difficult situations with grace, those are transferable skills, even if they do not appear on a CV.

**Has mentorship played a role in your development as a senior leader, and if so, how important has it been along your journey?**

Mentorship has been important at different stages of my career. There have been individuals who have taken a chance on me, offered guidance, and provided opportunities that I might not otherwise have had. That support was often less about formal mentoring structures and more about people creating space for me to contribute and develop. It is something I try to be conscious of in how I work with others.

**Were there pivotal moments during your career where you had to take a leap or step outside your comfort zone?**

Yes, several. Coming from a non-traditional background, I didn't always assume I'd progress into senior roles and often underestimated my own abilities early on. Over time, through experience, taking on roles outside my comfort zone proved crucial. They're where you learn the most, even if they do not feel comfortable at the time.

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## WORDS OF WISDOM

**What advice would you give to young women considering a career in real estate or private markets?**

If it is something you are interested in, then pursue it. It's a competitive industry, and you need to be willing to put yourself forward. Do not be overly concerned about whether you feel ready. Take opportunities, ask questions, and be prepared to work hard. Over time, that will build both experience and confidence.

**If you could give your younger self one piece of career advice, what would it be?**

Trust yourself more, and do not wait for permission to step forward. I spent time early in my career doubting whether I belonged. I questioned whether my background, my circumstances, the fact that I was managing responsibilities at home, made me less capable. It did not. If anything, it made me more capable.

**Was there a point in your career where things didn't go quite to plan? What did you learn from it?**

Yes! That is the reality of any career. What I have learned is that difficult periods build judgement and resilience in ways that success rarely does. The key is to keep perspective, learn what you can, and move forward.

**What continues to motivate you after nearly two decades in the industry?**

I am motivated by building things and seeing them through properly. I would describe myself as a completer-finisher. I take satisfaction in taking something from concept to a point where it is working well and delivering consistently for the client.

**What progress have you observed in improving gender diversity within real estate leadership during your career?**

There has been progress in awareness and intent, with more firms focusing on building diverse leadership teams. However, senior levels are still not as diverse as they could be. My experience has been mixed, but I have also worked with men and women who have been supportive and have helped me progress. I have always believed that the best person should get the job. For that to work in practice, there needs to be genuine access to opportunity and a level playing field. That is where the industry continues to evolve.

**You are involved in women's initiatives such as Chief and The Boardroom, which aim to strengthen leadership networks and diversity at board level. Why are these communities important?**

These communities are important because they focus on capability and preparation, not just representation. They provide access to networks, practical experience, and support that help individuals operate effectively at senior levels. That is critical. It is not enough to want more diverse

leadership, you need to ensure people have the tools and opportunities to succeed when they get there.

**What practical steps can firms take to empower more women to reach senior leadership positions?**

Culture matters enormously. Without an inclusive environment, policies alone won't work. Beyond that, it's about giving early stretch opportunities, increasing visibility of high-potential talent, being deliberate about mentorship, and honest about a firms' blind spots.

**Outside of your professional responsibilities, you are also a Founding Trustee of SEND Spaces. What inspired you to become involved in this initiative?**

This is a cause that is very close to my heart. As a parent of an autistic child, I've seen how important access to the right support is, something not all families have. Through SEND Spaces we aim to fund and deliver high quality sensory environments in state schools and community settings, helping improve outcomes for children with additional needs.

**With such a demanding career, how do you maintain balance and perspective?**

"Balance" in the traditional sense, is not really how I would describe it. With significant caring responsibilities, you develop a clarity about what matters. You prioritise ruthlessly, focus your energy, and keep family as the anchor. Everything else is organised around that. And the fact that life is full, in every sense, is what keeps me grounded. I do not have time to lose perspective ■ ”

# INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

**The COO role often sits at the centre of strategy, governance and execution. What do you see as your main priorities as you help scale Round Hill's European living platform?**

First, ensuring we have the right people in the right roles, and that they feel invested in what we are building. A growing platform needs strong talent and a culture that retains it. Second, putting the operational infrastructure in place to support growth. That means investing in governance, reporting and systems so that we scale in a disciplined way. Third, keeping the client at the centre of our business. As we move forward the experience our investors have should be consistently excellent. People and technology are the two key enablers of that.

**Operational excellence is often less visible than investment performance but equally critical. What are the key ingredients of a best-in-class real estate platform today?**

Operational excellence is fundamental. Strong performance is not just about making good investment decisions, it is about consistently delivering on them. A key part of that is trust. Investors need clear, timely information and honest communication. It is better to be realistic about outcomes and then deliver consistently, rather than overpromise. Beyond that, it is about having the right systems, processes, and people in place to execute effectively at scale, and increasingly, using technology to enhance both efficiency and the customer experience.

**With the European living sector continuing to attract capital, what structural trends do you believe will shape its evolution over the next decade?**

Demographics are the most obvious driver. Urbanisation, changing household structures, and affordability pressures are all creating sustained demand for professionally managed rental housing across Europe. Regulation will also play an increasingly important role. Markets are at different stages, but the direction of travel is towards greater oversight, and operators who engage constructively with that will be better positioned. Finally, I think we will see a growing distinction between platforms that invest in operational quality and those that do not. As the sector matures, residents and investors will increasingly gravitate towards operators who deliver consistently.

**Real estate firms are operating in an increasingly complex environment, from regulation to technology to investor reporting. How do you see the operating model of asset managers evolving over the next decade?**

We are likely to see a divergence in the market. Some larger platforms will continue to evolve, but change may take time. Others will be more agile and able to adopt new technologies and ways of working more quickly. There will also be businesses that struggle to adapt and some may not survive. Technology will play an important role, particularly in improving efficiency and the quality of information available to both operators and investors. Those who can use it effectively to enhance the client experience will have a clear advantage.