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**T**o my shame, the world of finance has always been a mystery to me. I've never even opened the money section of a newspaper and I've rarely considered what I should be doing about saving for the future, preferring to put that can of worms

away on a shelf in my mind entitled, 'Will sort itself out.' I know I *should* be squirrelling away money for my 65-year-old self, but it's so hard to think that far in advance. And, frankly, all the terminology surrounding money makes a cast-iron shutter come down in my head.

But, according to Simonne Gnessen of Wise Monkey Financial Coaching ([financial-coaching.co.uk](http://financial-coaching.co.uk)), and co-author of *Sheconomics* (Headline, £7.99), taking charge of your money isn't just about looking after your future self. 'It's incredibly empowering to be in control of your own finances,' says Gnessen. 'You know that, no matter what life throws at you, you'll be okay financially.'

Perhaps that's the real reason I've been avoiding planning for the future. Not because it's boring or hard to understand, but because I hate acknowledging that I don't feel in control of that part of my life. Rather than face up to my fiscal flaws, I prefer to just not think about it. 'Once you get past all the complex-sounding jargon, finance is quite simple, really,' says Gnessen. 'There are lots of ways you can make your money grow.'

I went in search of ways to invest, and found inspiration in four women who each have a creative way of saving – and not a pension pamphlet between them.



# PAINTINGS, PROPERTY & PINOT

IN SEARCH OF AN ALTERNATIVE PENSION, MAY FROST MEETS FOUR SMART SHOPPERS WHO DISCOVERED INSPIRING WAYS TO SAVE

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

JENNY LEWIS, ALUN CALLENDER





## THE ART OWNER

ILONA PACIA, 36, is passionate about buying art. She is the co-founder of commercial cleaning company [donningtonclean.com](http://donningtonclean.com), and lives in London with her husband, Stephen

### What inspired your interest in art?

When I moved to London in my early twenties, one of the first flats I rented belonged to an elderly lady, called Elizabeth. She was an avid collector and the flat was packed with paintings and sculptures. It captured my imagination and Elizabeth became a mentor to me.

### What was the first piece you bought?

It was one of Elizabeth's paintings – a portrait in oils of a Welsh farmer by the artist Kyffin Williams (pictured). She started clearing some of her possessions from the flat, and I couldn't bear to part with it. It's probably one of the best investments I've made. I paid a couple of thousand pounds for it and now, since the artist's death, it's worth about £70,000.

### Why did you start investing in art?

The concept of a traditional pension never appealed to me. I'm too much of a control freak to trust other people with my money. After buying my first couple of paintings, I realised that this was a way I could manage things myself, with the added bonus of being able to enjoy my investments.

### How can you tell which artist's work might become valuable?

A lot of it is down to trusting your instincts. I think I've developed a good eye over the years and that's something that comes with time.

### What if you're just starting out?

The best thing to do is to get talking to people. Go to small, niche galleries and exhibitions, ask the owners for advice and get them to put you on their mailing lists. Educate yourself, too. Find out about local artists and what their work sells for. You may notice that some are getting bigger and better shows.

### Do you have any tips on who to look out for?

I love a Polish artist, called Wojciech Zielinski. He's quite well-established, but his work is still very under-priced at the moment, in my opinion.

### What advice would you give to someone who's thinking of collecting art as an investment?

Start gradually. Invest in one or two pieces a year and don't overstretch yourself financially – you can buy things that cost just £100-£200. If you don't have a genuine interest in art, I wouldn't recommend doing this as a means of saving. I hope my collection will be a good nest-egg but, if not, at least I have pieces of art that I love. 🐼



## THE PORTFOLIO INVESTOR

**RACHAEL FISHER, 37**, relies on her stocks and shares portfolio to give long-term results. She runs her own online gardening advice business, [urban-allotments.com](http://urban-allotments.com), and lives in Sussex with her husband, Rob



### How did you start saving?

When I left my job as a management consultant to set up my own business, I wouldn't have a company pension anymore. I wanted an alternative way of saving for the future, so I opted to invest in stock and shares.

### How did you know how to get started?

I didn't! I got in touch with a company, called Fidelity ([fidelity.co.uk](http://fidelity.co.uk)), which specialises in helping people with investments. They have a team of financial experts whom you go to and say, 'This is how much I can put aside every month – what's the best thing to do with it?'

### Is it risky?

Not necessarily more than any other form of investment. The level of risk you take is up to you. For example, you could buy £100 worth of shares directly from one company. That could be a risk, because you're putting all your eggs in one basket.

### What's a safer approach?

You can pay money into a fund, instead of buying shares directly from a company. A fund is a collection of shares that a fund manager – in my case, one who works for Fidelity – has bought from lots of different companies,

and put into one big pot. They do all the hard work – selecting companies they think will do well and buying shares from them – so you don't have to think about it.

### How does it work?

You invest money into the fund every month, which means you own a portion of its entire value. The overall value of the fund obviously fluctuates according to how well all the companies it's comprised of are doing. It's a less risky way of investing, though, because your money is spread equally across lots of different companies, so isn't riding on the fortunes of one business alone. I can sell my shares any time I choose, but because I see this as a long-term investment, I won't do that until I'm older. I'm hoping that I will have at least doubled my investments when I finally sell up. Fidelity charges me an annual management fee of 1%.

### What do you like about investing in this way?

It gives me flexibility. I invest £200 a month, but I can put a bit extra in when I want to, which is handy because being self-employed, I get paid erratically. These days I quite enjoy tracking how well my fund is doing online.

HAIR AND MAKE-UP: FRYAL ARNEIL AT TIME; RACHAEL FISHER

## THE PROPERTY OWNER

**FEDERICA MONSONE, 38**, runs her own PR company, [a3communications.co.uk](http://a3communications.co.uk). She owns and rents out three properties that are investments for the future. She lives in Hampshire with her husband, Paul



### How did you get on the property ladder?

I bought my first flat, in New Malden, Surrey, when I was 27. After living there for a few years, I wanted more space. I had saved enough cash to get a deposit on a house nearby, in Tolworth,

without having to sell my old place. Renting out the flat seemed the obvious, as well as wisest, thing to do.

### Why did you go on to invest in more property?

I started my own business in 2003, so I don't have a company pension. I've been putting money in an ISA since my mid-twenties, and a bit in stocks and

shares. But I realised those savings weren't going to be enough to sustain me when I'm older. Property seemed like a reliable thing to invest in long-term.

### How did you make it happen?

In 2009, the flat below the one I already rented out came up for sale. By then, I'd got married and sold my house in Tolworth to buy a place in Hampshire with Paul. I felt my other investments weren't working hard enough, so instead I started saving up for the flat below mine, which I bought in 2010. I took money out of other investments again for the deposit on a third property, in Morden, Surrey, which I bought at the end of last year.

### Is investing in property something anyone can do?

Absolutely. The first hurdle is raising the money for a deposit, but there are ways you can do that,



## THE WINE COLLECTOR

NATALIE POTTS, 29, is PR manager for Wines From Rioja, and also a wine collector. She lives in west London with her boyfriend, Trefor

### When did you first start investing in wines?

In the summer of 2009, there were stories about the harvest of wines from Bordeaux being particularly good that year, so I thought I'd invest in some. In the wine industry, there are a few types of wine that are really valuable. Some come from wineries in Germany and Portugal, but most come from Bordeaux.

### How do you do it?

I've opened something called a Cellar Plan with the wine company Berry Bros & Rudd ([bbr.com](http://bbr.com)). I pay in £250 a month and it all goes into a pot for me. I take money out to buy wine when I want to.

### How do you know what to buy?

I get regular emails from experts at Berry Bros telling me what stock they've got and what might be worth investing in. I also read a bit about the value of different wines on the open market in magazines like *Decanter*.

### Where do you put it all?

All the wines I buy are kept in bonded warehouses. Bonded means it hasn't had duty paid on it, so even though the warehouses are in the UK, for tax purposes, they aren't. I pay about £9 a year for storage. It's worth the money because the wines are stored in the right conditions to preserve them. If I wanted to drink my collection, I'd just have to pay the tax to bring it into the UK.

### Why is it good to invest in wine?

People will always drink fine wine. And if you've invested in wines that become sought after, your investment should give you a good return. Also, countries like China and India are becoming wealthier and more interested in buying wine, which is driving prices up globally.

### Do you think your wine collection will be a good provision for your future?

Yes. Because I've only just started the Cellar Plan, I haven't got to the stage yet where the wine has gone up in value and I can see the profits, but I know these wines will accrue value over time because of their provenance and rarity. When I'm ready to sell, I would expect them to have at least doubled in value. ■

like remortgaging your house or, if you have a bit of money saved here and there, pooling those resources.

### What main piece of advice would you give?

Speak to an independent financial advisor about the kind of mortgage you could get. Then, with that budget in mind, start looking in areas you know well. I always go for one-bedroom properties, because there's more demand for them. Choose a place you can do up a bit, too. You'd be amazed by how much value you can add by spending a small amount to get it looking decent.

### Will you sell your properties when you retire?

No, I'm planning to keep renting them out and use the rent money as my income. The mortgages on the properties will be paid off in about 10 years' time. When I retire they should be generating at least £2,000 a month between them.