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Hidden assets

Today's luxury-apartment owners are rejecting ostentation in favour of discreet technology, subtle detail, impeccable service and, above all, stunning views



Words: Catherine Moye

Yesteryear's swanky pads flaunted a brash blend of gizmos and furnishings from super-sized stereo bins to shag-pile carpeting with all the subtlety of a Big Fat Gypsy Wedding. How things have changed. Today, the hallmark of an upmarket apartment is that its gadgets will be well hidden.

Peter Allen, marketing and branding manager at luxury property developer Londonewcastle (londonewcastle.com) explains, 'What's cool now is the very opposite of having it all on show. Even if you did just spend a fortune on the latest Gaggenau steam oven, you'd still want it to be concealed behind a panel.'

Smart technologies in particular – lights, display screens, docking devices, climate control, and even the flat screen television (if not in a dedicated cinema room) – are as well hidden as a Pèringuey's adder in a sand dune. Often, only the true cognoscenti would know that a state-of-the-art bathroom mirror, for example, is 'steam-free' as opposed to regular glass.

According to Andrew Dunn of property design company Finchatton (finchatton.co.uk), the same level of understated sophistication extends to the décor and interior design. Unlike the swanky pads of yore, what makes today's classy home stand out is not the features but the detailing. A display cabinet's carpentry is considered as admirable as the objects on show. '[We go] to extraordinary lengths to ensure the most minute details are delivered to perfection, whether that is hand-stitched embroidery or bespoke shelving cabinetry,' says Dunn.

Things such as the quality of wallpaper matters as much as its design, as does the provenance of

the stone flooring: Marron Laurent marble, for example. 'Our clients are global citizens who have developed a very discerning style over recent years,' says Dunn. 'They no longer seek show homes with luxury interiors for the sake of luxury, but instead look for homes of an exceptional quality that are very "liveable".'

And Dunn clearly knows his market. In early 2013 Finchatton sold all six apartments at The Lansbury, opposite Harrods in Knightsbridge, within weeks of the launch, despite asking prices of £3.6 to £12.5m – almost double the Knightsbridge average per square foot at the time. Finchatton is now embarking upon its most ambitious project: a scheme of 26 private residential apartments and five staff apartments at 20 Grosvenor Square, for which the company reportedly paid £250m.

Part of The Lansbury's appeal to buyers was its partnership with The Capital on Basil Street, which meant that all owners benefited from the hotel's five-star services. In fact, access to full concierge and hotel services – rather than just a bloke in an ill-fitting uniform at the front desk – is the true definition of an upscale home today.

At Stratford, in east London, Harry Handelsman's Manhattan Loft Corporation is currently building Manhattan Loft Gardens (manhattanloftgardens.co.uk) – a double-cantilevered 42-storey tower with open-air gardens carved out of the building's form. It will also include an upscale hotel. Only here, the residential and hotel aspects – from entrance to lobby, gardens to cafes – will fuse into one.

Handelsman believes that the luxury apartment of tomorrow will be defined by what happens



beyond as much as within its fabric-lined walls.

'I want to create a community of a building; an environment that is entertaining and amusing, where people will feel "this is where I belong" and "I can show it off to my friends".' His aim at Manhattan Loft Gardens is for 'a social nexus where ideas can be exchanged: a catalyst for the government's vision of a Tech City in Stratford.'

If Handelsman has yet to come up with a fresh term for his hotel meets residential community of visionaries, it can't be long before someone coins one. These days no one lives in a flat but in an apartment or, if it's a studio, then the term is now suite (as in a five-star hotel). As for selling an apartment with an upstairs and downstairs, that would be a duplex or a triplex, and open plan has long since morphed into lateral living.

Some things never change though, and that is the ultimate in swanky pads: a penthouse apartment with panoramic views. A recent report by property specialists CBRE found that penthouses in prime central London typically sell for a 60 per cent premium over the rest of a development.

Anyone in the market for a truly commanding vista right now might want to look at NEO Bankside, close to Tate Modern (from £7.5m to £22.5m; neobankside.com), and The Heron Tower (herontower.com) in the Barbican, where penthouses are scheduled to be released from late September, or the Bézier development at Old Street, available now (£5.75m; beziervlondon.com). Foxtons (foxtons.co.uk) has a penthouse on the market at Imperial Wharf in Fulham at £24m, and an ultra-luxurious Candy & Candy-designed penthouse at Cheval Place in Knightsbridge



High life

Previous page: Panoramic views from a corner apartment at The Heron Tower

This page, from top: The detail-rich design of the penthouse apartment at 1-3 Arlington Street; the feel of a luxury yacht in the heart of London, at the Bézier

is available through Knight Frank (price on application; knightfrank.co.uk).

Perhaps the ultimate penthouse, available now, is the Candy & Candy-designed apartment on the fifth and sixth floors of the Grade II-listed building that houses The Wolseley restaurant, at 1-3 Arlington Street in St James's (candyandcandy.com). The design team's vision for the duplex – which was originally used as servants' quarters – conceived every piece of architectural moulding, architrave and corning, creating a light-filled, lavishly decorated, five-bedroom residence with an extensive roof terrace and 360° views over central London's topography. In the neighbourhood of royalty, this expansive apartment is fit for a king. ●