



Custom-made cabinetry in the Goodman Penthouse at Berkeley Group's Goodmans Fields development in Aldgate, London

The return of bespoke joinery

At first glance, the duplex penthouse apartment at the Artisan development in the smart neighbourhood of Fitzrovia, in London, is clutter-free; there is nothing to disturb the clean lines and free-flowing spaces of the home, which has a streamlined "architectural" look. Yet appearances can be deceiving — hidden behind cleverly concealed doors, this flat contains a large amount of bespoke joinery in the shape of cupboards, other furniture and room-divider units.

Specialist carpentry is becoming more common in new, high-end homes and also in the renovations of older properties, in a trend being driven by open-plan living. People want ways to separate areas of open spaces. They also want somewhere to put their stuff — living with minimal possessions may be something some people can achieve, but most of us need things.

Another reason why people are commissioning bespoke furniture is to create a home office or a study. Not everyone has a garden big enough for a summer house that doubles as an office (see article, left). The price of a piece of bespoke joinery starts at about £3,500, but some people are prepared to spend

as much as £60,000 on one room.

At the Artisan flat, the dining room adjoins the kitchen but the two spaces can be separated — by a "pocket" door that slides into the walls. However, perhaps the most clever piece of bespoke joinery is the unit that sits between the master bedroom and the en suite bathroom. It contains a two-way open fireplace, plus a cabinet to hide the television, but the unit also has two doors on either side. When these are shut, it creates a hallway that provides access to the flat's main balcony for guests. They no longer need to walk through the bedroom.

"We wanted the look to be architectural and we were able to keep it that way by using bespoke carpentry," says Katherine Neathercoat, the head of interiors at Rolfe Judd Interiors, the architect that designed the flat. All the joinery was made by the Hertfordshire-based furniture-maker Tagg.

Prices for the one and two-bedroom apartments at the Artisan scheme start at £1 million. The development, by Dukelease, takes in one existing building and four new-builds on Goodge Street.

Developers say that they are spending more of their budgets on bespoke joinery and are opting to use the same manufacturer to create continuity.



The cupboards and shelving, above and inset left, are handcrafted and made to measure by Neville Johnson

"When we work on £10 million-plus homes, we want the joinery to have a uniform colour and grain so that the cabinetry matches the architraves, doors and skirting boards," says Joe Burns, of Oliver Burns, the interior design and development company. "Every tiny detail counts at this end of the market." He says that he uses bespoke joinery to integrate technology, such as audio and visual systems, and to cover the grilles of air-conditioning vents. Neathercoat says that buyers love cabinetry. "It is all about the end user — the buyer — and people are really delighted by it."

Behind the rise of bespoke joinery in older properties lies a demand from homeowners for storage that suits their requirements. The bespoke manufacturer Neville Johnson says that furniture for the bedroom makes up 50 per cent of its business, but demand for living room and study furniture is growing. Method, a workshop and design studio in West Lothian, makes privately commissioned trunks to store items such as malt whisky and watches.

Simon Tcherniak, a senior designer at Neville Johnson, says a colleague designed a wall unit for a customer that has become a popular design. It has curved cupboards and a series of square shelves designed to display ornaments and a television. Tcherniak says: "It is expensive but buyers understand they have to pay more for custom-made pieces."

Claire Carponen



Sleek bespoke cabinets conceal kitchen equipment and allow for clean lines in this penthouse apartment in Dukelease's Artisan development in Fitzrovia, London