

Luxury developments such as
Ten Trinity Square offer a new
way of living in the city

SIZE MATTERS

In a market where a 24-hour concierge service is now considered a must, wealthy property buyers are looking for homes that are bigger, better and offer more luxury facilities than ever before

Words KAREN TAIT

In a city where space is at a premium, a large home is, of course, the reserve of the wealthy. Space becomes the ultimate luxury. This has ever been the case – witness the grandeur of London’s large Victorian and Georgian townhouses or mansion flats.

However, in today’s world buyers are increasingly demanding space all on one level, with lateral living now firmly on the agenda for luxury developers. Open-plan layouts with no wasted space from stairs or hallways foster a more modern way of living, ideal for relaxation or entertaining.

In this spirit of home being where people live, work and play, grand volumes are being accompanied by facilities such as gyms and 24-hour concierges – no longer a luxury but expected by buyers and tenants, with hotel services being the latest on the list of amenities.

BIG IS BEAUTIFUL

The prime central London market is adapting to the demands of international buyers who are used to vast homes that can comfortably fit a growing family, and often staff too. Developers are swapping small single-occupancy units for larger homes, with 71% of developments in the pipeline including at least one three-bedroom unit, according to a recent report from Pastor Real Estate. The average unit size for schemes under construction in prime central London is 763 sq ft compared to 543 sq ft at application stage, reflecting a 40% rise in size.

‘London is moving away from single units and in years to come we will see more luxurious large lateral homes on the market,’ says Susan Cohen, Head of Sales and Lettings at Pastor Real Estate. ‘Not only are new homes getting bigger, but everything that comes with them is getting grander. As wealth continues to pour into the capital, ultra-prime living standards increase.’

Developers are offering ‘an urban paradise’, according to the report, with size and space as important as luxury. Whether domestic or international, those buyers acquiring large ‘ultra-prime’ and ‘super-prime’ new-build residential properties in central London are seeking sound investments in a city which is perceived as one of the most economically and socially stable in the world.

One of the capital’s most exclusive enclaves, Mayfair, is already reflecting the trend for larger homes, with sales of three-bedroom properties rising year on year, and

40%

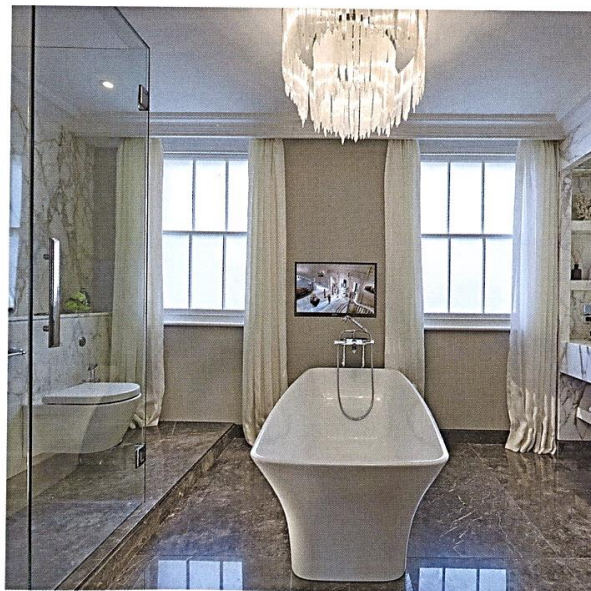
the increase in size for units currently under construction in PCL

the largest apartments in the pipeline compared to neighbouring areas, with units averaging 1,200 sq ft.

‘A standard penthouse won’t satisfy the needs of the UHNWIs any more, it needs to be the best in class in terms of size and design,’ says Richard Leslie, CEO of prime central London developer Dukelease.

Jacob Sullivan of Berkeley Homes, whose South Quay Plaza development is set to be the UK’s tallest residential tower, says wealthy buyers are increasingly looking for ‘supersized apartments that offer vast open-plan spaces. This convenient style of living boasts rooms with high ceilings and gives a sense of grandeur, perfect for entertaining, a necessary component of the current London lifestyle’.

For many wealthy buyers, size equals status, especially in central London where a square foot can be worth well over £5,000 and every small increment in size adds thousands to the value of a property.



This recent project from Residence One, a six-bedroom townhouse in Belgravia, sold for £13m and includes staff accommodation, a cinema and impressive outdoor areas (residenceone.co.uk)

‘As well as a display of wealth, large homes can incorporate all the amenities that buyers are looking for,’ explains Ben Wilson of luxury developer Residence One. ‘Staff quarters are an important feature and seem to be getting larger – with some homes dedicating entire floors to staff, and providing their own separate entrance.’

‘In addition, ceiling heights are increasingly important. As well as bringing a sense of grandeur, they can make a room feel larger.’

‘Ever since the Russians ‘came to town’, we have had to think not only about room sizes, but ceiling heights as well,’ says Mandy Craig of Hamptons International Knightsbridge. ‘Aside from dimensions, Russian buyers are all about creating a statement entrance. High on their checklist is a grand sweeping staircase – the ultimate way in which to welcome guests.’

Wealthy overseas buyers with homes around the world are not willing to compromise on size for their London home. ‘Many buyers from Russia and the Middle East – and some Indian buyers – like the space and grandeur, whether wanting to

replicate their Dubai mansions in smaller form or to accommodate their larger families and multi-generational living,’ explains Giles Elliott of Savills St John’s Wood.

New-build clients have a very specific set of wants, reports Martin Bikhit of central London agents Kay & Co. ‘Essentially, the scale of the rooms must be larger than average; master suites must come with bathrooms the size of a full double bedroom in a normal property,’ he says, adding that flexible space is becoming more popular, ‘rooms which can function either as bedrooms, studies or hobby rooms’.

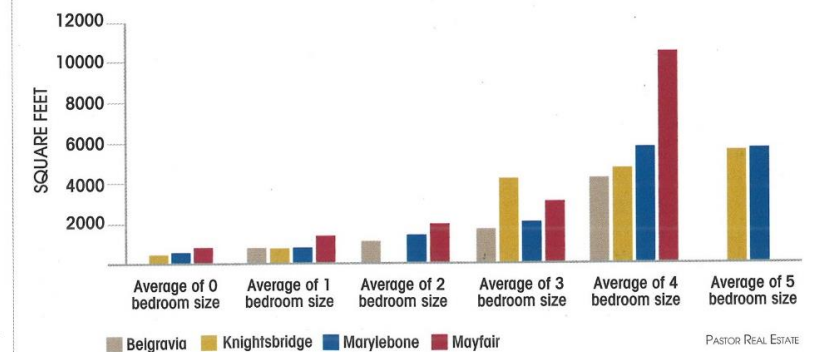
Camilla Dell of property buying agency Black Brick notes that overseas buyers ‘tend to find typical London bedroom sizes very small. A lot of new developments have addressed this by creating larger bedrooms with walk-in wardrobes and en suites’.

At the Luxury Fixtures Forum at Claridges, Niccolò Barattieri di San Pietro, CEO of Northacre, sponsor of the event and builder of over 650 luxury homes in London – more than any other developer – commented that ‘embedded luxury is significantly more important now than obvious symbols of luxury: less is definitely best with volume of space more important than just square footage; generous ceiling heights that enable buyers to hang artworks of scale; and the inclusion of quality finishes, fixtures and fittings by little known, cognoscenti names that give buyers a sense of real exclusivity’.

Balancing the need for maximum inside space and outdoor areas is also important, with the most upmarket developments offering expansive roof terraces and multiple outside spaces, perfect for entertaining and relaxing away from the city crowds.

Introducing a new level of luxury in the capital, Aykon Nine Elms is the first collaboration between Versace Home and a new residential property in London. From £700,000 (aykonproperties.com)

AVERAGE SIZE OF UNIT IN DEVELOPMENT BY AREA



LATERAL LOVE AFFAIR

In the search for well laid out space, typical London townhouses are being abandoned in favour of large luxurious lateral apartments, especially by wealthy overseas buyers who are more familiar with living on one level. The popularity of lateral apartments is such that they can now command higher prices than the finest Georgian terraces, as evidenced when a new penthouse in Mayfair sold for £7,000 per square foot in July, becoming the most expensive home sold in the UK at the time.

'What is considered luxury has certainly changed over the last 20 years; buyers are now just as likely to buy a contemporary lateral apartment as they are a white stucco, six-bedroom mansion arranged over five floors in Belgravia,' says Richard Barber, Director at prime central London estate agency, W.A.Ellis.

'What is important now, to both overseas and domestic buyers, is a good layout and sense of space, which is why lateral living has become so popular. There is still a market for mansion houses; however, the value of wide, low-built houses has become more prevalent.

'Mansion blocks provide this kind of space and

include grand ceiling heights, which are consistently lofty throughout the building, consequently it doesn't really matter which floor you live on. Developers are paying increasing attention to ceiling heights, pushing for three metres plus, which helps them achieve high sale prices.'

The increase in interest in lateral living reflects social change too; the 'upstairs-downstairs' approach of Victorian homes, with owners and staff residing on different floors, has been replaced by a more open approach.

Huw George of PCL agency Rokstone has

£7,000
price per sq ft of a
new penthouse sold
in Mayfair, becoming
the most expensive
home in the UK

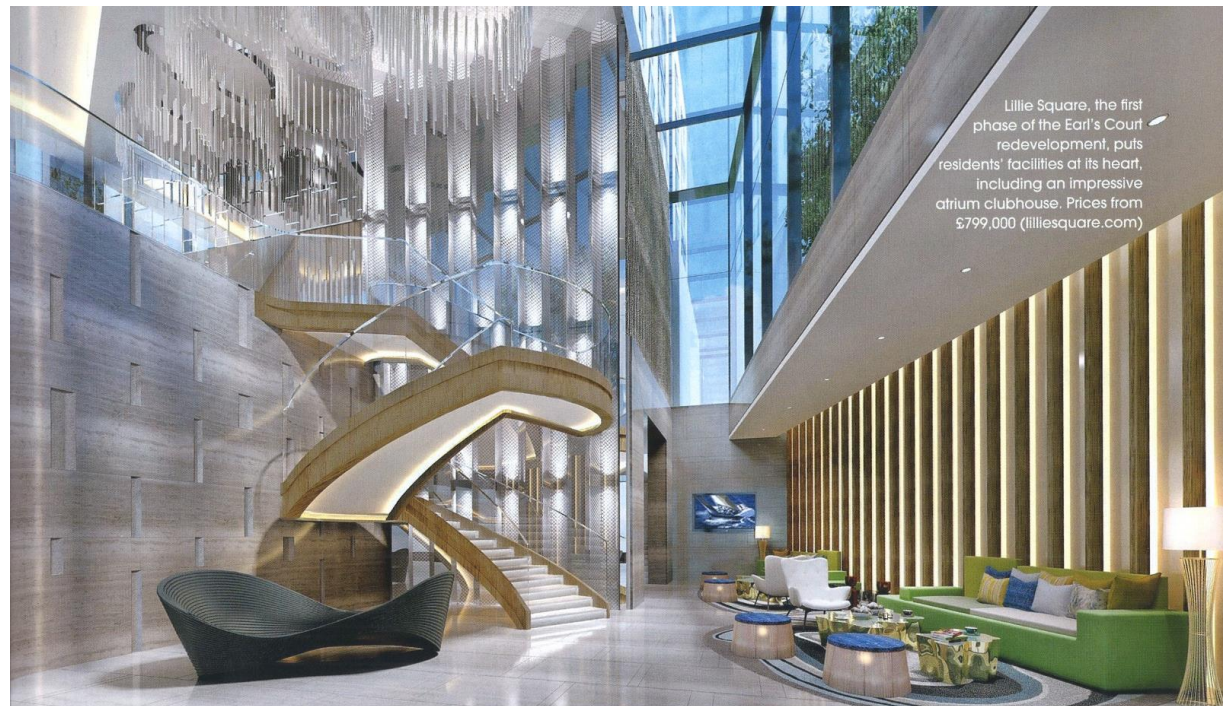
noticed an increasing demand for generous lateral apartments that can accommodate the whole family. 'High-net-worth individuals prefer to own one spacious home that all the family use, rather than three or four smaller apartments on the same floor,' he says.

Shirley Humphrey, Director at Harrods Estates, believes that 'London is leading the way with luxury design, specification and facilities, which appeal to wealthy individuals. There has been an increase in demand for spacious lateral apartments that are more like luxury hotels than residential developments.

'Some of the new developments offer apartments that cover whole floors,' she adds. 'These super-sized homes are becoming increasingly popular. The specification and finishes are like nothing that has been built in London previously. Developments such as 375 Kensington High Street feature luxury spas with a pool and gym, media rooms, games rooms and business centres, which are becoming must-haves in these new schemes.'

Lateral apartments also tend to benefit from a higher level of security, which is particularly important for wealthy overseas buyers who won't always be in residence.

On one of London's most prestigious streets in St James's, The Pall Mall Collection comprises three lateral apartments of 1,762 sq ft and a striking duplex penthouse of 2,575 sq ft with a terrace offering views across Green Park, Piccadilly and Buckingham Palace: from £5,900,000 (amazonproperty.com)



Lillie Square, the first phase of the Earl's Court redevelopment, puts residents' facilities at its heart, including an impressive atrium clubhouse. Prices from £799,000 (lilliesquare.com)

ALL THE TRIMMINGS

While larger apartments are being sought out for both practical reasons and as a status symbol, the demand for state-of-the-art specifications and a plethora of on-site facilities is also on the increase. Developers are having to offer every conceivable luxury in order to entice the wealthiest buyers from around the world, with high-end developments becoming increasingly like hotels, in terms of quality specifications, facilities and services.

'We live in an increasingly technological age, with an expectation of various amenities by homeowners,' says Giles Elliott. 'Buyers look to create the feel of a five-star boutique hotel in their own home, with a gym and pool, large catering kitchens and adjoining staff residences.

'Amenities are increasingly important, hotel-style services such as communal cinemas, meeting rooms, bars, spas and massage rooms, with the cost added to the service charge. Buyers can have all these facilities without having to maintain them, adding an element of ease for those who travel and want an easy lock-up-and-leave home with all the trimmings.'

Set to become the UK's tallest residential building, South Quay Plaza will dedicate the entire 56th floor to a residents' club lounge with bar, screening room and enormous terrace: from £6m for a 3,000 sq. ft. penthouse, £490,000 for a studio (southquayplaza.london)

24-hour security is paramount too, says Richard Barber. 'They also like discreet access, whether via a private underground garage or a lift that opens straight into the home; it is important for wealthy buyers to feel that they are living in complete privacy.'

Developments now have to provide the infrastructure and backdrop to accommodate aspirational lifestyles, believes Simon De Friend, CEO of London developer Regal Homes. 'Many prospective purchasers intend to live beyond the perimeter of their apartment and use the facilities as an extension of their home.'

Shirley Humphrey highlights a trend for clients wishing to purchase a home with a 24-hour concierge who is 'focused on creating communities within the developments they are

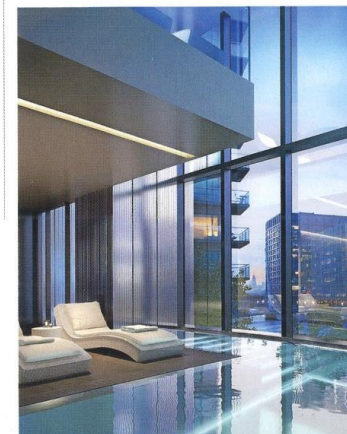
managing. Our clients are well travelled and very busy, therefore, coming home to a place where there is no stress is key'.

Niccolò Barattieri di San Pietro agrees: 'Buyers prize a service that extends far beyond the property, for example, a 'club' experience where you live among like-minded people, all with access to the same exclusive facilities.'

The clubhouse facilities at Lillie Square, Earl's Court, are modelled on the experience of a five-star hotel, explains Mike Hood, Project Director at Capco, the force behind the area's regeneration. 'Buyers want world-class facilities and to experience something as special as a membership to a top private members' club.'

Residents are seeking a private home that is private but offers the benefits of a hotel, says Huw George: 'This trend began with One Hyde Park and is a top requirement of wealthy international purchasers. Developments such as 20 Grosvenor Square, Clarges Mayfair and 77 South Audley Street all combine hotel facilities with private living.'

Service, security and convenience are watchwords, explains Tom Eshelby, Residential Director at Land Securities, whose current projects include Victoria's Kings Gate scheme. 'It doesn't matter if it's their main home, or second, third or fourth in the world,' he says. 'There is a lot to be drawn from the five- and six-star hotel world, both in hard areas of development like quality bathroom design, and the softer elements, like concierge services.'





In the City of London, the Four Seasons Residences at Ten Trinity Square combine a landmark building with grand interiors and hotel services on tap – prices from £5m (tentrinitysquare.com)

LUXURY LOGOS

The real ‘game-changer’, according to Peter Wetherell of Mayfair estate agency Wetherell, is the rise of branded apartments – properties that are associated with a luxury brand, often a hotel. Offering a range of amenities obviously takes up valuable space, so linking to a hotel is a win-win situation for developers.

‘This market is massively undersupplied in the capital with less than a dozen branded residences across inner London,’ says Wetherell.

Branded residences offer the ultimate property investment, offering the reassurance of an established luxury name whose standards remain the same all over the world. A famous logo above the door is especially important in unfamiliar markets, away from buyers’ home countries. And when it comes to hotels, the more stars the better, of course. Branding also provides differentiation, a key point when buyers are seeking something unique.

‘International high-net worth individuals, particularly those who have come into their wealth within a short space of time over the last five to 10 years, will gravitate towards an established brand name, one they recognise,’ says Lulu Egerton, Partner at Strutt & Parker Chelsea. ‘It speaks to them aspirationally of quality, luxury and a certain level of service. Furthermore, it’s about an exclusivity that only ‘money can buy’. As the world becomes more

and more like a global village, international clientele are willing to pay a premium for a brand name attached to their home which is renowned and admired the world over.’

While relatively new in the UK, the concept of homes linked to luxury brands is well known in Asia and the USA, with developments including the Armani Residences at the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, the world’s tallest building, Ritz Carlton Residences across the USA and Moschino properties in Milan.

10-20%
the premium for a
branded apartment

London, by comparison, has only a handful, including One Hyde Park, serviced by the Mandarin Hotel, the Bulgari Residences in Knightsbridge, the penthouse at The Connaught in Mayfair, Battersea’s River Tower, linked to the Wanda Vista complex, and the City’s Ten Trinity Square with its Four Seasons residences.

These developments not only appeal to overseas buyers who are familiar with similar

schemes abroad, but also to wealthy but busy domestic purchasers who appreciate hotel services that enable them to make the most of their precious downtime.

‘The interest which Ten Trinity Square has been receiving is reflective of the growing desire for a number of things to be offered alongside a home,’ says Kalina Boyadjiew, Vice President at Reignwood Investments UK, the developer behind the landmark scheme. ‘There is a want for a home not to simply consist of four walls, but to provide a full lifestyle service; one that ensures the utmost convenience and luxury at the very same time.’

Developers are also introducing a high fashion element, bringing in celebrated designers to give their properties the edge. The exclusive partnership with Versace Home has put the Aykon Nine Elms skyscraper ahead of the game when it comes to opulent interiors, while on Greenwich Peninsula designer Tom Dixon lends his name and distinctive British style to the apartments at Upper Riverside.

The cost of luxury branded apartments puts them beyond the reach of all but the wealthiest buyers, usually from abroad, and who aren’t put off by sky-high service charges either. Mark Dorman, head of Strutt & Parker’s London Residential Development estimates that they are worth 10-20% more than developments with no services or big-name hotel association.