

# THE SCENT OF A (£16 MILLION) HOME

The UK is the largest candle market in Europe, but when it comes to London's grandest homes, developers are hiring expert noses to create a smell that sells, says **Zoe Dare Hall**



What does a few million pounds smell like? At Buxmead, a new development of apartments ranging from £6.9m to £16m on The Bishops Avenue, Hampstead's "billionaires' row", it is a combination of fir needle and petitgrain – the scent found in the young leaves and twigs of the orange tree. In the spa, the hidden

ingredient is coriander seeds, while patchouli and aged vetiver enhance the sultry sophistication of the screening room. The bespoke scents at Buxmead, which is being marketed by Savills, have been created by Alexandra Soveral, a woman with one of the best noses in London. Paradoxically, she thinks it may be a tumble she took as a toddler, which left her with a broken nose and no upper sinuses, that has lead

her to have such a heightened sense of smell. It's a skill she has honed to create bespoke skincare products and perfumes for individual clients, but Buxmead represents her first foray into infusing a residential development with a signature scent. The sense of smell is so personal and so connected to our memories and emotions that Soveral has left the apartments' aromas to their future owners to >>>



**SWEET SUCCESS** Bespoke candles and diffusers add the finishing touch to Buxmead, a complex of penthouses, apartments and duplexes on The Bishops Avenue, for sale through Savills. From £6.9m for a three-bed apartment



## AROMATIC ORIGINS

THE RAW INGREDIENTS



VETIVER



AMBRETTE



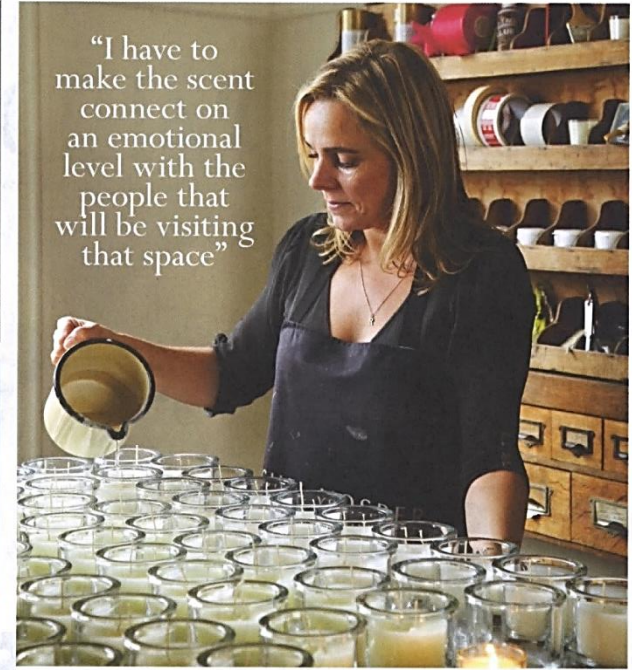
PETITGRAIN



CORIANDER SEED



**HEAVEN SCENT** Clockwise from above: These Rachel Vosper scented candles, in ceramic bowls made by Thomas Hopkins-Gibson, are priced from £73; the Chelsea Island development, where apartments are for sale through Knight Frank, from £925,000; Rachel Vosper hand-pouring wax candles in her workshop; the Stadler Form Mia diffuser dispenses the scent of your favourite pure essential oil. From £32



"I have to make the scent connect on an emotional level with the people that will be visiting that space"

choose (some of whom have already commissioned her to design them a bespoke scent). She has focused her attention on the communal areas, including the corridors, whose smell is inspired by the pine trees in Buxmead's 2.5 acres of private gardens.

"They feel like alpine woods and I wanted to bring the Christmas tree element into the building with balsam fir, which smells of freshly cut wood from the pine trees," says Soveral. "I didn't want to do a perfume that would be exhausting. The smell is so fresh and natural, as if someone has opened the window."

With nothing built at first and carte blanche when it came to the budget, Soveral imagined what buyers – who will most likely own multiple properties around the world – would want from their home at Buxmead. "I wanted it to be their favourite home, where

their heart is," she says. "I wanted it to feel lived in already, with character and sophistication, to bring the feel of an old leathery chair to a brand new concept."

Home scents is a booming industry and one that goes into overdrive as Christmas approaches and London takes on an aroma of cinnamon and clove. Britons spend £90m on candles a year, making the UK the biggest candle market in Europe. And luxury property developers must account for a sizeable chunk of those sales, with many having latched on to the seductive power of smell – partly to pander to wealthy buyers' love of the bespoke and artisan, but also in their attempts to trigger that subliminal urge to spend.

The increasingly blurred lines between luxury hotel and high-

end apartment are seeping into the world of scent too. "Clients who buy luxury residences in London stay at the world's finest hotels such as Armani, which all have a signature Privé Collection scent that you immediately associate with the brand. Developers are adopting this hotel approach for residential spaces," comments Meriam Makiya from Knight Frank's prime new homes team, who cites Amazon Property's use of Jo Malone Pomegranate Noir at The Park Crescent overlooking Regent's Park, where apartments cost from £3.95m.

"Many of our clients from the Middle East, North Africa and Asia come from countries where there is a strong culture of rooms being scented with fresh flowers, herbs and oils. Having scents in luxury developments appeals to these international

buyer markets," Makiya adds.

Jo Malone candles have almost become a staple feature of most £500,000-plus show flats these days. But when it comes to selling Belgravia townhouses or £10m penthouses, the olfactory offering needs to be stepped up a notch. As Sam McNally of the Echlin design studio points out: "The success of brands such as Jo Malone or Diptyque has meant that they are no longer as special and, as ever, people are looking for something more personal and unique."

It's not just about the smell, but the way you use it. Buxmead has "multi-layered diffusion action", says Soveral, who spreads the scent with candles, reed diffusers and special Swiss diffusers by Stadler Form that release tiny particles. New technology makes it possible to time your scent emissions. You can even diffuse it through the air

conditioning – not that Soveral will be doing that. "I'm not a fan of air con anyway, and scent shouldn't be diffused constantly," she says.

Or you could go for a bespoke perfumed chandelier like the one being designed for a private client for around £150,000 by Clive Christian, he of the lavish kitchens and the world's most expensive perfume (his special edition No. 1 costs £143,000 a bottle). Christian's own home, his daughter Victoria reveals, smells of burning logs from its many fireplaces.

You can never put a price on the power of smell (although estate agents may have something to say about the artist client of Alexandra Soveral who wanted his home to smell like a rotting pond). But there does seem to be a shared sense of what luxury smells like.

Like Soveral, Rachel Vosper, the doyenne of fancy candles, has harnessed notes of woody, citrus petitgrain and uplifting bergamot in her bespoke scent for the communal areas at Chelsea Island, a new development of 89 apartments, with prices from £925,000 through Knight Frank. Buyers will also get a bespoke candle for their property.

Vosper says she chose a fragrance that "evokes the personality" of the space and location. Her favourite scents are those with hints of musk, such as vetiver, ambrette or labdanum. "I have to be mindful of capturing the right scent for a luxury brand while remembering to try and make that scent connect on an emotional and memorable level with the different kinds of people that will be visiting that space," she says.

A similar blend of wood and

citrus will infuse the penthouse at Beau House in Jermyn Street, a new boutique development of eight apartments, costing from £2m through Carter Jonas.

The design is influenced by the location's tailoring heritage – and by its local namesake Beau Brummell, the Regency-era dandy. So, too, is the bespoke scent created by the perfumers Floris London – a Jermyn Street institution since 1730 – and Oliver Burns, the penthouse's designers. They have sought to capture a sense of Regency elegance and classic British styling with a fragrance that combines fresh citrus and orange blossom with lingering undertones of frankincense and myrrh. Let's see if it persuades any passing kings to hand over upwards of £15m for the aromatic penthouse this Christmas season. ■