

THE  TIMES

# bricks & mortar

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Property  
Supplement  
of the Year



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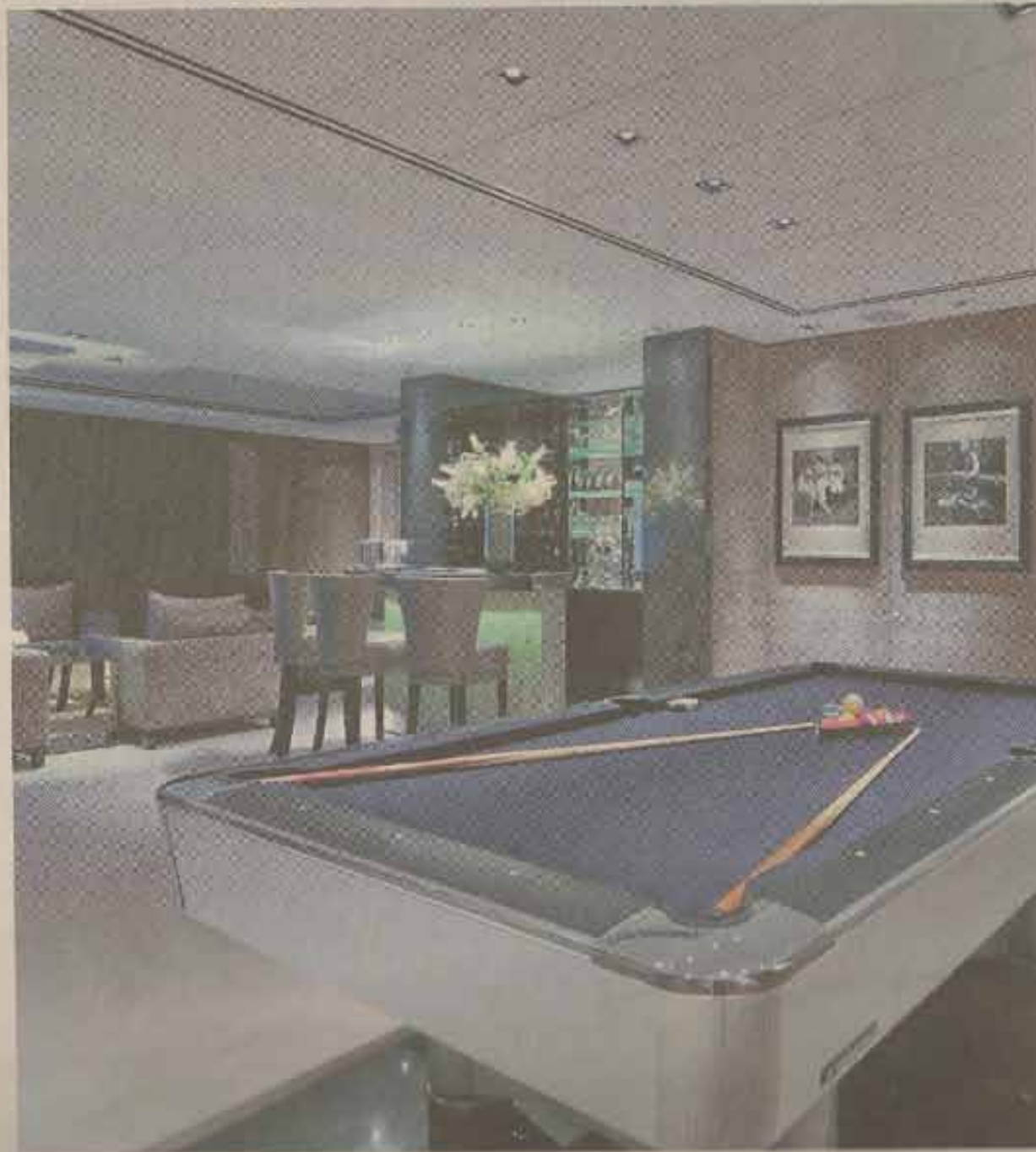
## Market report

# 10 things you need to know about luxury living

**1** The property must be dressed to impress. Wealthy househunters will no longer consider homes that do not come fully furnished and replete with artworks, gadgetry, food in the fridge and even clothes in the wardrobe. At One Hyde Park buyers could request pre-stocked libraries. These "turnkey" properties have always appealed to overseas buyers who don't want to furnish from scratch. But now private homeowners are trying to replicate this effect. "It's not just setting the table with glasses and plates, it's having the right DVD playing and the Nespresso machine making fresh coffee," says James Bailey, of Henry & James, the Central London estate agent.



**2** Everything must be über-bespoke. Developers are jostling to outdo each other in the rarity stakes. One, Luxlo, had the marble for its new £19.5 million penthouse (wetherell.co.uk) at Fountain House on Park Lane (above the BMW showroom) "handpicked from quarries in Carrara." Carrara marble was what Michelangelo used for his statue of David. You also don't get any more bespoke than





the "incredibly rare fossil, carved from an Indonesian fossilised tree", that adorns the lift lobby. Long Lea, a new £3.95 million house in West Sussex (chesterthorntonhumberts.com), has a "pietra dorata Tuscan sandstone hearth... mined, shaped, polished, delivered and installed to exacting specifications". "People are lining their garages with leather," says Bailey, "and spending £12,000 on hiding their TV behind artwork. It's a case of making the buyer think that they have something better than the man next door."

**3** **A 21st-century housekeeper.** Someone's got to dust all that pietra dorata. The London Management Company (020-7193 9979) has been set up to offer "the modern Upstairs, Downstairs" for wealthy homeowners who don't want the hassle of actually employing anyone. According to its founder, Rupert Collingwood, services range from "popping in once a week to check that the house hasn't been broken into" to

preparing for its owner's return: "We stock the fridge, turn on the heating, make sure there is fresh linen and send a car to the airport. When they leave they can shut the door and leave it in a pit and we will clean it up."

**4** **A hydraulic swimming pool.** Long Lea has a reception room with a hydraulic floor that sinks down and fills with water to create a swimming pool, as do Windsor House, an £18.5 million new-build mansion on the Bishops Avenue, North London (complete with "starlight bar area", "automated sliding-glass doors to connect indoor pool to outdoor pool" and an eight-seater Jacuzzi) and Principality, a neighbouring £30 million house in which the pool floor rises to create a ballroom (both glentree.co.uk).

**5** **Engineered views.** "Lines of sight are becoming more important," says Paul Frost, a search agent with The Buying

Solution (01344 206070). "People like to be able to see the back garden when they open the front door — it gives a feeling of space and balance." It's the view of the garden rather than the garden itself that matters. "These people are not digging out the wellies at the weekend. There have to be trees to hide the neighbours, but the garden doesn't have to be big. With new-builds in the Home Counties you often have a 10,000-sq-ft house on a three-quarter-acre plot."

**6** **A "man cave".** Gender-specific room allocation now goes beyond "his and hers" bathrooms. One £35 million house for sale via Aston Chase (astonchase.com) in St John's Wood has "ladies' and gentlemen's offices" and what Mark Pollack of Aston Chase describes as a "man cave" — a bar and pool table in the basement. Pollack says "male space" such as "sushi bars, wine-tasting rooms, bowling alleys and mock opium dens" are on the increase in high-end homes. "His and hers everything is now relatively standard in houses over £10 million," says Frost. "It's all very sexist — his will be in dark wood with a steam room and hers will be lighter with a bath to lounge in. It's for the Russian market really — they love their steam rooms."

**7** **Giant skirting boards.** Overseas buyers hate the tall, thin design of traditional London townhouses. Anything with space is coveted. "Developers are now marketing houses on volume as well as square footage," says Frost. "The scale becomes massive, so you get 2ft-high skirting boards and huge doors with 35 layers of lacquer. These are the bones of the house and they have to be right."

**A Carrara marble bathroom on Park Lane, top left; the "man cave" in St John's Wood, above; the hydraulic swimming pool in Windsor House, bottom left; the concealed kitchen on Park Lane, above left**

**8** **A kitchen in demand.** The kitchen where every function is so heavily disguised that it represents some sort of culinary existential crisis. Fountain House has a battery of Gaggenau appliances "concealed behind full-height cabinetry" and an island with an "electronically controlled marble surface that will conceal built-in hotplates, a teppanyaki plate and a separate sink at the flick of a switch". Even the taps are invisible. The (concealed) noiseless, industrial-strength extractor fan eliminates all food smells. "I had a Middle Eastern client recently who wanted to put in a sealed spice kitchen because he liked to eat curry but didn't want the house to smell of it," says Frost.

**9** **Or even four...** One kitchen is so yesterday. At Long Lea there is a staff kitchen in the basement that connects to the "luxury kitchen" on the ground floor via a (concealed) dumb waiter, so the hostess can play the chef, Marie Antoinette style. Windsor House has four kitchens — a main one on the ground floor, a mini one for staff and two off the playroom and the cinema.

**10** **With an oversupply of appliances.** "There are now always two of everything," says Frost. In its main kitchen alone, Windsor House has two ovens, two microwaves, two dishwashers and two freezers — all by Gaggenau. "The aim is for entertaining on a grand scale but really it's just something to differentiate the top of the market from everyone else," says Frost. "A lot of people can buy a Gaggenau oven now, but not many would buy two."

Lucy Alexander

**“** People are lining their garages with leather and are spending £12,000 on hiding their TV behind artwork

