

These new homes set the gold standard for London

Stingray-skin tables, exquisite gold-leaf ceilings, champagne cellars and iPad controls – there are no limits to luxury, says **David Spittles**

BUILDERS are competing to offer ever more opulent and exotic finishes and designs sourced from faraway places, pushing luxury in the home to new levels. At **The Lansbury** development in Knightsbridge, stingray skin from Indonesia is used to clad a desk in the master bedroom, while **The Walpole** in Mayfair – neighbouring The Ritz – has walls covered in gem-like seashells from the coastal waters of the Filipino province of Capiz.

Developer Candy & Candy provided a super-bling form of luxury for a certain kind of wealthy buyer, often from overseas, its vastly expensive beige palaces setting a benchmark for absentee owners with stables of sports cars.

Technology is the driving force behind modern luxury. Home cinemas are required, as are home-automation systems giving total control of heating and lighting, security and audiovisual creature comforts, all programmed via iPads, and now these features are turning up in mid-market homes, too: kitchens come with boiling-water taps, steam ovens, wine and champagne fridges,

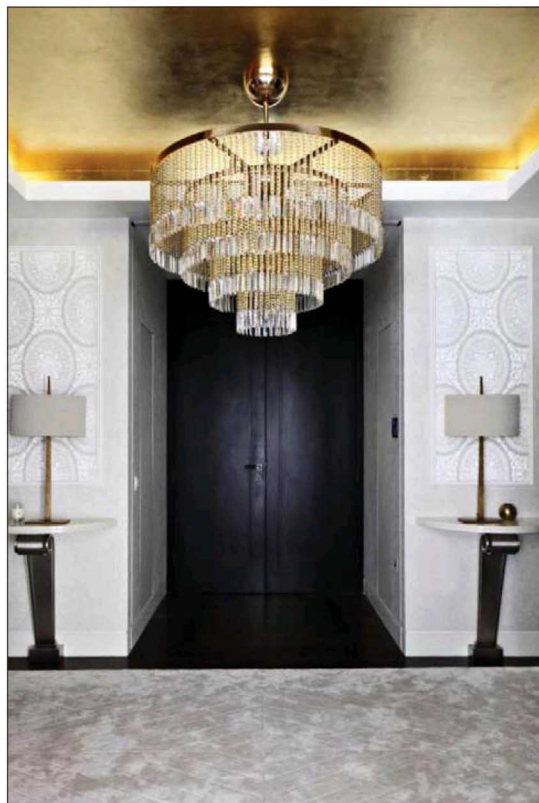
while bathrooms have flat-screen water-resistant TVs on the wall and an endless variety of mood lighting.

However, Richard Cutt, partner at estate agent Knight Frank, says: "Luxury is an overused term, which is evolving as we become more accustomed to what is genuinely luxurious. Luxury is an aesthetic – a look and a feel, as well as the provision of amenity and comfort.

MORE CRAFT, LESS BLING

"We are seeing a backlash against anything-money-can-buy bling and a move towards craftsmanship, restoration, and thoughtful architecture," adds Cutt. "Buyers appreciate homes that offer the subtle and essential designs that allow them to live in the city – and to enjoy their London life. Basic needs such as peace, space, light, landscape, energy-saving utilities, clean-air filters, and space that caters for families as well as fashion-seeking singles, are paramount."

Genuinely bespoke design and individually crafted pieces, whether an architectural creation or a commissioned item of furniture, provide a true sense of luxury. At a townhouse project in St James's, interior designer Oliver



Burns used a bespoke waterfall chandelier as an arresting focal point in the entrance hall. Elsewhere, traditional Chesterfield sofas are upholstered in sumptuous Kediri silk, while a bathroom is enclosed in glass that goes opaque at the touch of a button.

TAKE DESIGN TO THE LIMIT

When redesigning a listed Mayfair house, architect Squire and Partners came up with the idea of cladding a roof terrace pavilion in 4,080 individual metallic leaves in varying tones of bronze, to mirror the organic growth of a Virginia creeper on a facing building. The concept was designed over a three-year period and won plaudits from Westminster planners for "raising the bar for design within the borough". The same architect is the creative force

behind Berkeley's **Ebury Square** development in Belgravia. Prices from £3.5 million. Call 020 7118 9111.

Berkeley has made a conscious decision to use British design talent at all of its London schemes and has opened a "luxury collection" showroom in Mayfair, allowing buyers to view specification details and room layouts, and choose homes from across the developer's London portfolio.

Computer software simulates exact views from high-rise apartments such as the 5,266sq ft penthouse at the developer's **Fulham Reach** scheme. The penthouse has a "terrace lounge", an extension of the living space, while inside is a temperature-controlled wine cellar that stores up to 1,000 bottles.

For many, space is perhaps the ultimate luxury. If you can afford a home



with double-height voids, you can take a less-is-more approach by leaving the interior modestly designed and instead luxuriate in the voluminous space around you. This is the joy of authentic factory lofts and warehouse conversions.

"There are two types of luxury – the tangible and the intangible," says Alan Waxman of developer Landmass. "We like to stir an emotional reaction in buyers and appeal to their subconscious. Often buyers don't realise what they want until it is offered to them."

The firm's latest project involved transforming a traditional Belgravia mews house into a spectacular but spare contemporary space with roof terrace. "The feedback from buyers is that they love the use of colour, yet ironically, all the walls are white," says



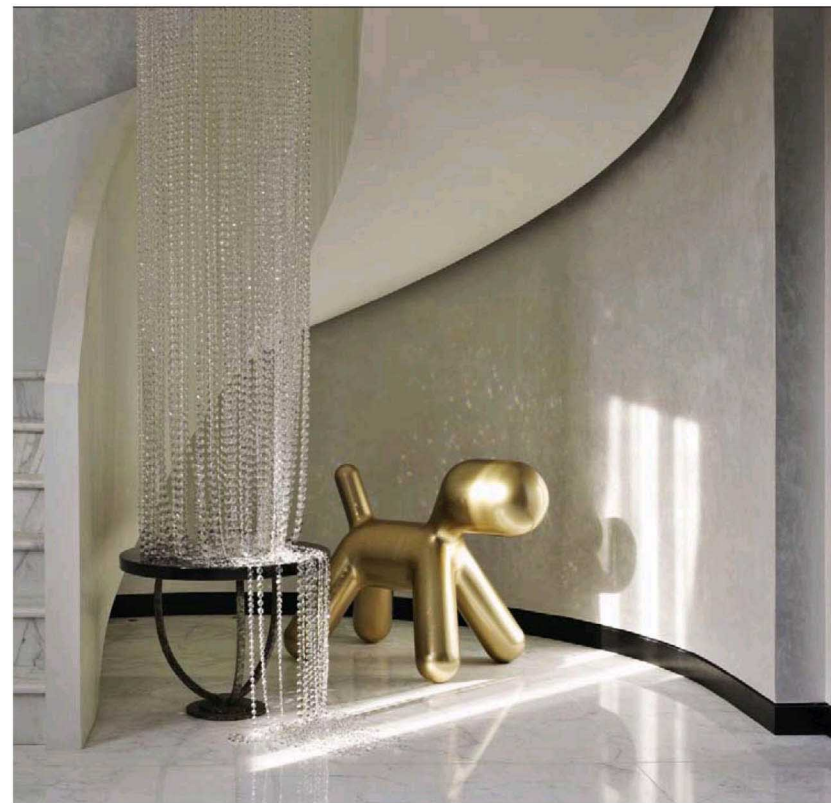
From gym to concierge: The Corniche by St James, launching soon on Albert Embankment, will offer lifestyle services on tap to cash-rich, time-poor residents



£7.5 million: for a spectacular Belgrave mews house, by developer Landmass



From £3.5 million: for homes in Ebury Square, Belgravia, by architect Squire and Partners. Through Berkeley, which has a "luxury collection" Mayfair showroom



Focal points: a gold-leaf ceiling panel in a lateral apartment, left, and a crystal waterfall chandelier at a St James's townhouse, both by interior designer Oliver Burns

Waxman. "Simplicity and subtlety creates a sense of luxury as much as ultra-expensive accessories." The house is on the market for £7.5 million. Call 020 7235 8345.

LIVE THE LIFESTYLE

Yet luxury is not just about space planning and design, says Sean Ellis, managing director of developer St James. "Lifestyle services" are now an essential part of his company's luxury package. "Many buyers are cash-rich and services have to be on tap – gym, spa, private cinema, club-lounge, 24-hour concierge – and delivered to a high standard." So St James came up with a

"Designed for Life" brand at two upscale London developments, **The Corniche** and **Merano Residences** on Albert Embankment, which are launching soon. Call 020 7870 9620.

Commuter-belt developers are also combining practical design and luxury. The highlight of a house on the **Moor Park** private estate in Farnham, Surrey, is a spiral staircase of steel, glass and walnut with a curve that matches the glass dome above, in the double-height entrance hall. This provides a spectacular sense of arrival but the house is a functional, family-friendly space too, with a laundry chute on the upper floors, a "servery" between kitchen and dining room, a boot room

and garden toilet, even an outside "dog shower". The price is £3 million. Call Lusso Homes on 01932 858580.

Yoo, the London developer with projects from Miami to Moscow, has trademarked the term "Human Luxury", which founder John Hitchcox says is "about creating a space that delivers whimsical desires and meets the practicalities of the real world, like the very best boutique hotels do." Yoo has sought to bring The Hamptons to Gloucestershire with a development called **The Lakes**, backed by Philippe Starck and Jade Jagger. Individually designed homes are sprinkled around the 650-acre estate. A-list owners include Liz Hurley, Kate Winslet and Elle Macpherson. One of the Australian supermodel's whims was for walls covered with timber from dismantled Amish barns in the US.



Inspired by nature: Squire and Partners "raised the bar" in Westminster with its redesign of this Mayfair house, said borough planners. The roof terrace pavilion, left, was clad in bronze leaves to mirror Virginia creeper on a facing building

