



STARS AND STRIPES

The statue of Gen Eisenhower in Grosvenor Square, in front of the former US embassy, right; 20 Grosvenor Square, below, and inside, an apartment, left



'We wanted to build the best building, on the best square, in the world's best city'

Live where the D-Day mission was devised

Anna White takes an exclusive tour of General Eisenhower's Mayfair HQ, which has been turned into a block of ultra-luxurious flats

DEOX: ALAMY; SIMON LUPTON

In Twenty Grosvenor Square sits a large stone table covered in 4,000 polished tiles. Around the rim of the table are the words 'COMMANDER IN CHIEF - UNITED STATES NAVAL FORCES EUROPE,' and in the centre is an eagle and anchor, the emblem of the US Marine Corps. At the behest of the developer Finchatton, a team of stonemasons painstakingly lifted every tile off the floor of the building to create a tribute to its military heritage. The mansion, which dates back to 1731, was the US Naval Eu-

ropean Headquarters from 1939 to 2007, a run broken only when it was requisitioned during the last two years of the Second World War by General Dwight D Eisenhower, the supreme allied commander. He occupied the corner office on the first floor overlooking Grosvenor Square gardens. It was from here and a bunker in Bushy Park, near Richmond, that plans were hatched for Operation Overlord, otherwise known as the D-Day landings, which took place 75 years ago on Thursday. During the war, Grosvenor Square was dubbed "Eisenhower Piazza" and "Little America" by Lon-

doners (the old embassy building on the west side of the square is now being turned into a Rosewood Hotel).

In keeping with its past, the latest redevelopment of Twenty Grosvenor Square has been a seven-year covert operation, and *The Daily Telegraph* took an exclusive tour as it opened to buyers. The Finchatton duo, Alex Michelin and Andrew Dunn, bought the site for £15million in 2012 in the

wake of the global financial crisis, with backing from the Abu Dhabi Investment Council, a sovereign wealth fund. "Timing was everything. It's been a labour of love but we've never looked back," says Michelin.

The pair have signed off every detail, from the art work - including a life-size racehorse etched on a black leather canvas hanging behind the reception desk - to the children's books in the crèche.

In terms of luxury and amenities it's London's finest. Apartment 101, formerly Eisenhower's office, has 10ft (3m) high ceilings and five bedrooms with en suites. De Gournay hand-painted chinoiserie silk wallpaper lines the master bedroom, and there are statuario marble fireplaces with pale grey veining. In the bathrooms, Japanese Toto lavatories have been installed that can sense the difference between genders and react accordingly (the seat lifts up or stays down).

The whole place is operated by the Four Seasons hotel group: of the total

250,000 sq ft, 100,000 is dedicated to behind-the-scenes service. As well as the wine cellar, spa and crèche, there is also a library, swimming pool, cinema room, games room, garden room and courtyard. Four Seasons staff from baristas to valets are on hand 24/7. "We want to deliver homes that will stand the test of time and give this listed building a beating residential heart. This isn't going to be a development that no one lives in," Michelin says.

Although materials were shipped in from all over the world, such as stone from South Africa and Turkey, all of the bricks, external stone work, joinery, dry walling and timber flooring were sourced in Britain. The windows were made in Yorkshire and the billiard table came from Worcestershire.

The building is 65 per cent sold, including the two 8,000 sq ft penthouses, with prices ranging from £17.5million to £38million. But tough market conditions were the other cause of sleepless nights for the duo, who specialise in boutique central London restoration projects. "The days are gone when luxury buyers gravitated to Knightsbridge or Mayfair without question," says Michelin. "We wanted to build the best building, on the best square, in the best city in the world. That's why it has sold well."

So far, Twenty Grosvenor Square has appealed to a mix of buyers including Brits, South Americans, Indians and Europeans. "North American buyers have not been in the market for a decade but we have seen a resurgence," says Michelin. This is not surprising given the weak pound against the dollar and the ties Grosvenor Square has to the American military. The square itself, now run by Grosvenor Estates, is also being redesigned to beautify the jewel in Mayfair's crown.