

MANSSION EXPANSION



LONDONERS LOVE
MANSSION BLOCKS
- AND SO DO THE
DEVELOPERS
CREATING INSPIRED
21ST-CENTURY
VERSIONS, DISCOVERS
CHERYL MARKOSKY



Originally envisaged as city boltholes for 19th-century middle- and upper-class households, mansion flats are back in the limelight. While period redbrick and stucco-fronted dwellings have always been popular with a certain segment of buyers, housebuilders are now recognising their value and introducing manor homes with a modern twist to a new generation.

Capital & Counties Properties PLC (Capco), the company behind Lillie Square (A), one of London's largest and most high-profile developments as part of the wider Earle Court scheme, examined what makes certain streets popular. The answer? Mansion blocks surrounding garden squares with services buyers covet, such as a concierge, 24-hour security and private residents' club with pool.

Transforming a 7.4-acre car park on Seagrave Road into a one million sq ft community of 808 high-end homes around a new garden square, Capco's captured the zeitgeist for gracious and generous mansion living. The one- to three-bedroom apartments start at £595,000 (020 7381 9800).

Nicholas Ayre of home-buying agency Home Fusion suggests the principles of mansion block living have been upheld and even improved upon in new developments. "With the 24-hour concierge replacing the porter, and the installation of a modern version of the centralised hot water system, where you only pay for what you use and can control the temperature of your radiators".

Prices for mansion flats rose by 60% since 2007, outperforming 52% growth by non-mansion flats,



according to new research from Kay & Co. The study also reveals the bedroom count is higher, with 46% of mansion apartments encompassing three or more bedrooms, compared to 26% in non-mansion flats.

James Bailey at Henry & James in Belgravia and Chelsea (020 7235 8851), who's selling a two-bedroom mansion apartment in Cadogan Gardens (B) for £1.75 million, believes the allure of mansion blocks is mostly due to their location. "They're typically found in the most central 'in' areas of London."

As well as location, location, location, the overall draw is an exceptional use of space. Because accommodation's lateral (all on one level), there's no wasted square footage, with 100% of the living area completely useable, argues Simon Godson from W.A.Ellis.

"A lot of overseas buyers - especially those from cities such as Hong Kong and Paris - are used to living in blocks, so efficiently configured lateral flats interest them greatly," he points out.

Mansion blocks are purpose-built, Godson explains, and designed to keep sound levels to a minimum, "which means there's less noise compared to thinner-walled houses". Other benefits include lofty ceiling heights throughout the building, "so it doesn't really matter which floor you choose to live on".

And yet, high service charges to cover amenities can be off-putting. Ed Mead from Douglas & Gordon comments: "A lift and somewhere to park at a mansion block can make life less stressful, if you can afford to pay for them. However, service charges might appear high in the short term, but don't produce as many one-off, unexpected bills in the long run."

Caroline Takla, managing partner of The Collection LLP, suggests checking how heating and hot water are run and whether bills are included in the service charge. "It's also important to determine the size of the sinking fund."

If you think first impressions count, a mansion apartment is worth shelling out for, believes Guy Meacock of buying agency Prime Purchase. He notes some mansion blocks, such as Ambrosden Avenue near Westminster Cathedral, or Albert Court by the Albert Hall, have wonderfully grand receptions and entrance halls. You might not get underground

parking, as you would with a modern flat, but the historic features more than make up for that.

However, once you're inside the flat, you might have to surrender some modern conveniences. Meacock advises buyers enquire about en-suite bathrooms, as "mansion apartments don't normally have them and some, like Rivermead Court in Fulham, have regulations forbidding their installation".

With or without en suites, mansion blocks are well liked by tenants. Renters adore the beautiful exteriors, large bedrooms with fitted wardrobes and grand Downton Abbey-style dining rooms, observes Marc von Grundherr of Benham and Reeves Residential Lettings. "Mansion rooms flow far better than in equivalent period flat conversions.

"And if you're very lucky, there may be a resident porter. Sadly, porters are slowly disappearing, as freeholders realise they can sell a porter's flat for a small fortune and replace him with a less-expensive day porter instead. We see happier tenants in blocks where there's one firmly in situ," he adds.

With renters seeking out period properties and more and more developers jumping on the bandwagon, it's just the beginning for London's most stylish craze. It's onwards and upwards for the city's mansion blocks.

MANSION BLOCK CHECKLIST

- Has the building been regularly maintained? If not, you could be hit with a bill for tens of thousands of pounds as soon as you move in.
- Is the flat nicely situated? Often, less-desirable units are found in awkward or dark corners of the building.
- Is the porter helpful? A porter can make or break a property - some make you feel like a god, others like you're in hell.

David Radstock
Marsh & Parsons Marylebone



MANSION FLATS FOR SALE

PRIORY MANSIONS, DRAVTON GARDENS SW10 - £2,000,000
DOUGLAS & GORDON - 020 7225 1225

Third-floor, three-bedroom mansion flat with two linked reception rooms and a balcony.



MANSION FLATS FOR SALE

ALBERT COURT, KNIGHTSBRIDGE W8 - £7,750,000
W.A.ELLIS - 020 7306 1600

Five-bedroom flat on the sixth floor of a landmark Victorian mansion block next to Kensington Gardens, with 24-hour porter and a striking entrance hall.



MANSION FLATS FOR SALE

YORK HOUSE, UPPER MONTAGU STREET, WESTMINSTER W1 - £1,450,000
MARSH & PARSONS - 020 7595 1175

You can put your own stamp on this well-proportioned two-bedroom mansion apartment, as the kitchen and bathroom are a bit dated.

