

**P** rime central London has always been a magnet for the world's wealthy, but now more foreign buyers than ever are after a slice of the property pie. International buyers in areas such as Mayfair rose to 59 per cent of the market over the course of 2011 and the first quarter of 2012, compared to 46 per cent in 2007, according to Savills – with European, Russian, American and Middle Eastern buyers leading the way.

"The more central and the more expensive property is, the more the market is dominated by overseas buyers," says Yolande Barnes, head of Savills residential research. "It's the 'safe haven effect' – London is first of all a world-class city, so it's behaving much more like Hong Kong or Singapore than it is the rest of the UK, because of all the business and financial factors. And it's favoured as a place to buy property because of things like rule of law and secure property title, as well as the cultural attractions and architecture. It's a very strong business hub, in the right time zone, English-speaking, and a very cosmopolitan city – it doesn't restrict purchases by overseas buyers like other places do."

There is also a greater range of nationalities buying property than ever before. Knight Frank's Mayfair office was selling to 30 different nationalities in London at the peak of the market, but last year sold to in excess of 60. "There's been a real growth in the international appeal of central London," says office head Richard Cutt, "and each nationality has different expectations. As we're seeing more countries in the Asia Pacific and South America regions, for example, air conditioning is becoming a prerequisite."

And while some nationalities would die for a piece of classic British style, others are all about shiny new apartment blocks. "Those in the Asia Pacific region are used to new-build," says Cutt. "To them, buying a home is about buying new properties that come with guarantees. Whereas Americans want the period houses."

According to Knight Frank, the top five countries that prime central London buyers came from during the year to April 2012 were Russia, India, France, America and UAE – and, as you might expect, their ideas about what constitutes prime property are rather different...

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**MORE INTERNATIONAL BUYERS THAN EVER BEFORE ARE COMING TO CENTRAL LONDON – BUT THEIR IDEA OF THE PERFECT LONDON PAD VARIES CONSIDERABLY. FOLLOW OUR GUIDE AND FIND OUT WHICH KIND OF BUYER WOULD PAY BIG MONEY FOR YOUR PROPERTY**



#### ▲ FRANCE

The French tend towards Belgravia or South Kensington – where the Lycée Français is situated. "But we do have some very nice French restaurants in Mayfair, so that attracts them," says Mayfair estate agent Peter Wetherell. Agents say they have been getting more enquiries from French buyers since the Socialist president François Hollande was elected, as the wealthy look to move their money out of France. "We've seen a mixture of enquiries, from people wanting to buy their main home here right through to people looking for a pied à terre or simply an investment property," says Knight Frank's Richard Cutt. Some are looking to replicate the Parisian apartment approach to living. "In terms of architecture, they are interested in the more traditional, period buildings, and they like to have high ceilings, like Paris apartments," says Cutt. "In terms of interiors, they like the 'contemporary classic' look – a fusion of traditional and modern design, more layered luxury than minimalism."

#### ▲ RUSSIA

For Russians, it's all about the blue plaques. "Russians love Mayfair, because they love history," says Caroline Takla, of Brook Street buying agents The Collection Acquisitions LLP. "They tend to buy things with a story behind them. That's why Mayfair in particular is so popular, because it's hard to turn a corner without finding a blue plaque." They also have deep pockets. "They like the trophy properties, and they're not afraid to pay for them," says Wetherell. "Most of the ones we deal with have non-disclosure agreements, but let's just say they're the bigger properties." But the idea that Russian taste is all about gold-dripping opulence is passé, according to Takla: "There will always be a market for Candy & Candy-style, opulent finish, but we're seeing more Russian professionals coming over who are a bit more down to earth than the oligarchs. A lot of them are extremely sophisticated, so they employ very low-key interior designers, many from Paris, and the feel is very light and bohemian."

#### ▼ UNITED STATES

"American buyers haven't really featured in any great way in the central London market previously, but now they are starting to appear," says Knight Frank's Richard Cutt. "It's about savvy investment – they've realised the central London market is so short of supply and has such broad international reach that it makes it a good asset class, and Americans are very investment savvy." Mayfair has a head start because of its links with the American government during the Second World War, and the fact that the American embassy is here. It tends to attract older American buyers, without children in tow, who are after apartments, whereas Belgravia and Kensington attract families buying houses. "You'll predominantly find them in the £10 million and under market," says Cutt. "Americans are very keen on history and like a more traditional-style property. They like very traditional interiors, too – nothing too cutting edge."



#### ◀ INDIA

In Mayfair itself, Indians are now the biggest buying group, overtaking Russians and Middle Easterns, according to Wetherell. Thanks to the rapid growth of the country's economy, a whole new class of super-rich has been created, who see owning a Mayfair property as the ultimate status symbol. "We've been working with the Indian market regularly for the last two-and-a-half years, and they're very Mayfair-centric," says Takla. "They almost don't recognise any other part of London as worth buying in." A property in London is a second home, or a holiday home for the family, and they're after serviced, portered apartment blocks that are functional rather than steeped in history. They're budgeting in the £3.5 million to £8 million mark, according to Takla, and for many, the most important consideration is Vastu – an ancient doctrine dictating which direction buildings face. Interiors-wise, they like the old-English, colonial style. "It's not hard to see why, when you look at their houses in Delhi and Mumbai, which have big columns and paned windows."

TOP LEFT: HIGH-CEILINGED APARTMENT ON MOUNT STREET (£7 MILLION, KNIGHT FRANK, 020 7499 1012)

TOP RIGHT: LARGE LATERAL FLAT IN A PORTERED BLOCK AT 48 GROSVENOR SQUARE (£5.75 MILLION, CARTER JONAS, 020 7492 0676)

MIDDLE LEFT: FIVE-BEDROOM PERIOD HOUSE WITH BLUE PLAQUE ON CHESTERFIELD STREET (£3.95 MILLION, FOXTONS, 020 7973 2000)

MIDDLE RIGHT: THE MANOR, DAVIES STREET (POA, KNIGHT FRANK, 020 7499 1012)

BELOW: PARK LANE PROPERTY CONTAINING FIVE RESIDENTIAL FLATS (£14.95 MILLION, FOXTONS, 020 7973 2000)

## Multicultural Mayfair

