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What's really happening in residential real-estate?

We've curated five of the most common considerations raised by the industry below.

By Lorna on 17.9.2019

We've been asking designers what the future of the residential real estate landscape looks like, both in London and globally. At various events such as the [Leadership Lunch](#) and The Property Panel discussion in our London office, industry leaders have been forthcoming with their predictions, along with how they can adapt to the changing landscape.



'Big' room at the new co-living building in Canary Wharf by The Collective.

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Think about how difficult it is for millennials to buy a property. It's nigh on impossible. -Eleanora Cunietti, Co-founder of Carden Cunietti

Rental Society

Buying in cities has quite frankly never been harder, the repetitive hamster wheel of spending money on rent instead of saving for a deposit has people caught in the no man's land of renting. Then there is the growing number of super-wealthy renters who are actively choosing to rent instead of buy, maybe because they are jetting from city to city, or perhaps their home is outside the big smoke. Whatever the reason the rental market is vast and developers are responding accordingly.



Interiors of an apartment in One Crown Place, interiors by Bowler James Brindley. Image Via One Crown Place.

The London build to rent market was worth [£2.6 Billion in 2018](#), that's anything from skyscrapers to co-living offerings, and there is money to be made, with the average rent for a one bedroom apartment in London soaring to over [£1,300](#), in New York it's around [£2,375](#) and [£3,735](#) in Hong Kong. Such exuberant rent is expressive of a society that doesn't want to miss out on the action, where proximity and vibey neighbourhoods define expenditure. And as Dara Huang, Founder of Architects [Design Haus Liberty](#) and creator of several co-living spaces explained, developers have to build properties which live up to those expectations. "I think that right now, what you see across the board are developers having to kind of kit up their spaces to a turn-key level."



Two example rooms from Co-living provider Vivahouse.

But what exactly is a turn-key level for this new clientele? "Even if you're renting, you want it to feel personal, and the ability to provide that is a new sort of luxury." - Rajdeep Gehir, Founder of co-living provider [Vivahouse](#), goes on to voice how the design of developments are being used to provide "democratised access for someone living in the city to experience the best of the city."

It's a tough balance to strike, as to win a renter over in the first place spaces need to have personality, they expect more from a property than white walls, and unfinished light fixtures, as renting is either a choice or circumstance with an indefinite ending to it. However, that design also has to be broad enough to appeal to others too.

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It's much more about individuality, quirkiness, the uniqueness of their personality and translating that into their interiors," - Sharon Lillywhite, Founder and Creative Director, Oliver Burns.

Personal Choice

Speaking of individual tastes, the most successful developments, both for rentals and sales, are created with a particular clientele in mind. Crafted to captivate them as soon as they walk through the door, the more personalised the product, the greater the results. Many of our designers have voiced that this process starts with research, no more so than Rajdeep who explains that the process at Vivahouse is heavily research-based. "We're thinking, gosh, we need to do surveys, and focus groups, to ascertain things like the percentage of our demographic that want an en-suite versus those that aren't too bothered? What can our audience afford to pay? Do they want their room coloured? We're approaching the process from a consumer first perspective."



Living room design by Bergman & Mar for the Beecham 1 development.

For BTR and saleable properties alike, it was considered to be one of the most significant value-adds of having a designer on the development project, their ability to understand a client and interrogate the brief. Their knowledge of similar projects and the ability to source perfect items which flick the buy switch. "Most of my clients are interested in the journey of what interior designers can bring," Petra Arko, founder of [Bergman & Mar](#) noted at the Leadership Lunch. But designing for multiple generations and tastes all housed in one congruent scheme can be tricky, Kim Partridge, Founder of [Kim Partridge Interiors](#), suggested that "narrative is very important as storytelling transcends the generations. There has to be an authentic experience felt through the interiors."



Project Perfect Pieces...

Swoon Chair by Fredericia. Available on eporta

Discovering the narrative behind the item, and conveying that as part of the story is also a highly profitable trick. "Property developers are interested in seeking artisans and artists working locally. Smaller individual creatives, young makers who will lend their furniture and in return, their work is showcased. They are particularly interested in small individuals who want to change the world for the better." Petra's comment also highlights a more significant consideration, a development's context, and she should know having worked on developments like [The Gasholders](#) and [One Crown Place](#).

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It's about selling the dream from the community upwards. –Dara Huang, Founder of Architectural studio, Design Haus Liberty.



Maria Speake x Bella Freud's Living Room design for The Television Centre Wood Lane Development in London. Photography by Michael Sinclair.

In a bid to target the perfect resident, developers are collaborating with big names in the design world, such as the highly popular and Instafamous interior designer, [Sophie Ashby](#) for Hexagon Apartments and One Crown Place. Or even significant partnerships like Roksanda Ilinčić for the Gasholders or Bella Freud x [Maria Speake's](#) design for The Television Centre Development in West London. Who a developer partners with speaks into the aspirations of their desired audience.

Amenities Arms Race

Renting or buying, we want more for our money, and as prices rise, so do the expectations of what you get in return. That doesn't inherently mean a desire for more space; it can be the level of the finishes, the aesthetics, level of service or amenities.



Business Lounge at The Gasholders Development near Kings Cross, London. Image via Gasholders.

As Dara said, "The design is about a lifestyle, the lifestyle is about the tenant...you're never going to attract somebody with just a building. It always needs to be more than that". And more than that it shall be! We have entered into an amenities arms race in high-end residential developments. Designers are no longer just creating beautiful apartments and penthouses, but floors of amenities too.

The Gasholders in Kings Cross London is an excellent example with cinema, 24hr concierge and spa, to name just a few. Or the new Collective co-living space in Canary Wharf with spa, swimming pool, gym and mindfulness zone. This sort of amenities race has been going on in cities like New York and Hong Kong for a long time; however, for London, it's relatively new. Petra explained one of the reasons for its emergence. "Developers are struggling – even though it may not seem like it – they are struggling to sell at a premium. They fit these extras as part of the perks."



Swimming Pool at The Collective's new co-living building in Canary Wharf.

But just building in amenities doesn't mean people will flood in, they only work as a selling point if they're relevant. As [Savills](#), luxury real estate agency, explains, "when providing amenities on schemes, BTR developers need to think about what residents will value as opposed to headline-grabbing novelty."

A trend we've seen in cities such as New York and LA is that the space planning of buildings is changing. As we've touched on, great design is no longer perceived to be a luxury, but a necessity and these developments reflect that. Prime floors of real-estate, the top storeys with the money views [aren't reserved for penthouses](#). Instead, they house shared amenities such as roof terraces, gardens or gyms as seen in [77 Greenwich](#) in New York. The idea is that the community within the building should have equal access to the best.



The Fitness Centre in 77 Greenwich development in New York designed by Binyan Studios.

Part of this democratisation is about allowing people access to the best of their city, so developments have to consider their surroundings too as Eleanora Cunietti, Co-founder of [Carden Cunietti](#), pointed out at the Leadership Lunch. "There have to be cool shops and restaurants, not high street brands but cool, unique ones and great food right on the doorstep". [Curbed magazine](#) goes one step further pointing out- "Successful developers need to create things that tell a story and tie together the community."

The proximity of a building to a vibey part of the city, brimming with things that excite residents will ultimately bring people through the door, even if it's then the design and amenities that get them signing on the dotted line. "You're seeing developers looking at community engagement as central to their schemes. That in terms of longevity, it's not necessarily the materials it's how people change." As noted by Siobhan Kelly, Associate Director at the renowned [David Collins Studio](#), if you understand the client and the community, that building will remain an attractive option for years to come.

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Wellbeing' is the mantra in amenities right now. -Business Insider

And Breathe...

When getting down to the details of what residents want from their design across any sphere, wellness is a recurring theme. Residential developments are [no exception](#). Martin Goddard, Co-founder of Goddard Littlefair, is an expert when it comes to designing for hospitality and residential developments, he's noticed a significant change in demand. "We're finding a trend with clients and some of our staff that the wellbeing piece is becoming more important to understand. We've been doing some thinking on how we encourage spaces where technology can be downplayed or replaced by calmness."



Vast windows and layers of tactility give a sense of wellness and grounding to this scheme by Elicyon for the Chelsea Barracks by Qatari Diar. Photography by Ray Main on behalf of Elicyon

Let's start with amenities, in cities around the world we have seen a growing demand for the inclusion of green spaces, for example, [77 Greenwich](#) in New York offers several gardens, including a park on the roof. [Chelsea Barracks](#) in London is based around 12.8 acres of parkland, with communal gardens galore. Green space is a luxury in any city, so leaving room for the grass to grow is a huge selling point of any development.



Chelsea Barracks Gardens by Qatari Diar and Jack Hobhouse on behalf of Squire & Partners.

But there is a more significant shift occurring, particularly in the high-end rental and ownership markets as noted by the [Business Insider](#). "The trend is part of a movement toward inconspicuous consumption. Discreet wealth has become the new status symbol as elite consumers eschew symbols of materialism like logo handbags in lieu of intangible investments, with a focus on health and wellness in particular."

Making it even less surprising that there is a growing demand for dedicated communal and wellness spaces within developments. "I think the biggest change to come in the next ten years might be wellness, spirituality, and individuality. In terms of the way that the way we live our lives and the rooms we're living in...whether its meditation rooms or communal spirituality areas, there will be a change." Sharon Lillywhite, Founder of [Oliver Burns Studio](#), made this prediction at our Leadership Lunch and having worked on developments such as 12 Park Crescent in London, it's a market she understands.



This is the beautifully designed Screening Room at The Gasholders development in Kings Cross, London.

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More clients are asking for sustainability to be a large part of the design process. –
Jo Littlefair, co-founder of Goddard Littlefair.

The idea of community has crept in again, with spaces being open to other residents, collections of like-minded people enjoying communal lounges and dining areas. Throughout the market, residents are looking for ways to break down the barriers between each other, whilst having the ability to close the door on the outside world when they want to. This is one of the reasons why there's a growing number of co-living offerings. Community is good for our wellbeing, and to quote [The New York Times](#), "Human contact is now a luxury good."

Accountability for sustainability

Another across the board requirement for design today is the consideration of sustainability. Martin Goddard, Co-Founder of [Goddard Littlefair](#) discussed this point at The Leadership Lunch. "We're asked to track the supply chain. That's part of our commitment to the client when we take on a project. Take any of the materials that we're looking at or any of the suppliers and do the relevant background research. We're in that supply chain ourselves as we have to be able to stand in front of the client and say 'we know what the provenance is.' It's essential. Otherwise, we wouldn't get the job."



What a view! This communal rooftop garden at The Gasholders development in London offers residents a space like no other to soak up the city around them.

As commercial projects are under tighter scrutiny for their ecological footprint, there is accountability on the designer too to undertake best efforts to make theirs a conscious scheme. The driver also comes from the end user too, as Martin continued. "The next generation is very interested in an eco ethos... You've got to start building that into design concepts because people are beginning to make choices based on those things."

The high-end market has been slow to respond to this changing tide, often considered to be at odds with a high end aesthetic, so overcoming that notion is essential. As suppliers increase their offerings and demand grows from clients, sustainability will become a deal breaker.