

# Bricks & Mortar



## A solid investment

WHY DETACHED HOUSES ARE  
A BRIGHT SPOT IN THE MARKET  
pages 8-9

The drinks trolley makes a comeback [page 9](#)

Surrender to flower power [page 14](#)

## LUXE

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Stroll down Piccadilly, admiring the trees that line Green Park, the hustle-bustle of the street and the varying forms of architecture, and you could easily fail to notice Clarges Mayfair. This is exactly as intended, since unobtrusive smartness rather than ostentation is a key aim of this development of 34 apartments. The Portland stone façade of the apartment block was chosen to blend with the surrounding buildings, rather than shout that multimillion-pound homes lie therein.

It's only if you stop and look that you begin to perceive that Clarges Mayfair may be something special, a 21st-century homage to the mansions that lined Piccadilly in previous centuries. The entrance to the block, which is situated a little way down the side turning of Clarges Street, is designed to evoke the grand driveways of these aristocratic residences. The Clarges owners pass through the gates into Ashburton Place — a new street built as part of the development — and enter the building, which is when the level of luxury moves up a notch, with elements of art deco style that remind you of the 1930s café society scene in Piccadilly. A spiral staircase rises up from the lobby and light floods down from the oculus of a dome decorated with glass engravings of Mayfair trades and pastimes, such as tailoring, gambling and driving around in an Aston Martin.

This detail makes you focus more on the craftsmanship involved in the making of the dome than on the cost of adding such a feature, which is what British Land, the developer, desired. James Taylor, the head of residential at British Land, explains that since the global economic crisis the tastes of the wealthy have changed, meaning that you have to offer stealth luxe rather than bling. He says: "Clients want discretion and elegance, which means that, as a developer, you have to bring it back. You can oversaturate a building."

However, although the target market has a new preference for understatement, this does not mean that their demand in other areas has changed. Business is a key requirement, which Clarges caters for with a gym, pool and hot tub — again, this facility is an exercise in toned down, but expensive, style. People shopping for



## Say bye to bling and hello to stealth luxe

A new development in Mayfair is mixing understated chic with premium services, reports **Anne Ashworth**

a luxury place in London also favour a level of historical connection, which Clarges has. The building may stand on the site of a 1960s office block, but it celebrates the grand houses of the past and hints at the industries that once flourished in this part of the capital, such as lace-making. The brasswork on the balconies mimics an intricate lace collar called the picadilly, an accessory so popular in the early 17th century that it gave its name to Piccadilly. Towards the middle of the 17th century the area became a fashionable residential address, made more attractive by the tract of parkland that we know today as Green Park. The flats, which start at £4.25 million, all of which Clarges Mayfair have views over



**Apartments in the Clarges Mayfair development in central London aims to provide understated luxury. One-bedroom apartments start at £4.25 million**

this space and beyond to Buckingham Palace, where Lisa Carlman, the deputy director of the Clarges concierge operation, was formerly employed as the head of the Royal Household.

This mix of less-is-more and premium service has worked well for British Land, which also pioneered the use of prefabrication as the method of construction for the building to lower disruption and ensure quality. The company has received £350 million from

the sale of 24 flats. The buyers are "predominantly UK-based" and two thirds are owner-occupiers. One investor is said to have snapped up two flats with a view to knocking them together, and Taylor says that there has been interest from families who see acquiring several flats close together as a multi-generational accommodation solution. The company is about to launch the ten remaining flats, which will prove whether the Clarges formula is effective in testing conditions — buyers have become even more picky thanks to the availability of upscale rentals.

Taylor is hoping that the show flats will overcome such hesitations. These homes, like the rest of the building, have been designed by Martin Kemp, a creator of hotel and private home interiors in an aesthetic that manages to be sumptuous, but subtle. About 40 people from one village in Portugal were involved in every aspect of the selection and fitting of the marble in the bathrooms, but the finished effect is sleek and minimal. The first show flat is a pied-à-terre with two bedrooms — a pad for a singleton, or a couple. The second is a four-bedroom home with a sitting room, study, kitchen and breakfast room and a hall large enough for the overspill from a big party. In quieter moments the inhabitants could gaze out across the park, enjoying a view that is inspiring, whatever the season. There is also a certain fascination in watching the comings and goings on Piccadilly, where people head for the Ritz or to Green Park Tube, the proximity of which is seen by Clarges buyers as a plus — the possession of a Rolls-Royce Phantom does not preclude the use of public transport.



## Ding-dong... where's the doorbell gone?

Property developers are building rental homes without doorbells because millennial tenants and their guests don't see the point in ringing a bell when they can send a text to say that they've arrived.

The habits of millennials in relation to doorbells is a subject much discussed on Twitter and in American newspapers. *The Wall Street Journal* reports that members of Generation Y find the sound of a doorbell so alien that when one unexpectedly goes off it surprises them. It quotes a Twitter poll answered by more than 11,000 people that found 54 per cent of respondents agreed that "doorbells are scary and weird". It is a trend also evident in UK homes. Fizzy Living, a developer of rental flats

in London, has chosen not to include doorbells on the front doors of its homes. Instead, its onsite managers sign for packages, and greet guests and send them up — these guests then knock or text.

Older homes are forgoing doorbells too. *A Times* reader renting a house in Islington, north London, while the owner lives abroad, discovered soon after moving in that the doorbell was missing. When she inquired as to why, the letting agent replied that her millennial landlord felt that a doorbell was not necessary. There was a box outside where Amazon couriers could leave their deliveries, and this was enough, the landlord felt. Meanwhile, in Nottingham, Jess Goodridge, a

22-year-old who works for the website [landlordnews.co.uk](http://landlordnews.co.uk), reports that she shares a doorbell-less three-bedroom house in Nottingham with two 29-year-olds. "It's a rented home and it didn't come with a doorbell. We haven't asked the landlord to provide one as we don't need it — people just text or knock."

Older homeowners are still using doorbells, but are upgrading them to smart ones. Last month Amazon spent more than \$1 billion (£736 million) buying Ring, a video doorbell that allows you to see who is at your door via your phone when you are out.

With video doorbells, if someone is trying to deliver a parcel, you can talk to them over the phone and agree another

time when they can come back. You can also see if there is someone trying to burgle your home and call the police.

The downside to smart doorbells, according to Christian Warman, the director of Tedworth Property estate agency, is when they don't work. "They are often linked to someone's smartphone, which means that people can't hear the doorbell if the phone is on silent. It is very frustrating for visitors to ring a doorbell, only to hear a voicemail message." The situation can get so bad, Warman says, that the visitor has to resort to a truly ancient solution: the door knocker. Heaven knows how a millennial would cope with the shock of hearing that. **Jessie Hewitson**

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