

LUXURY



Into the depths: the house in Grosvenor Crescent Mews has been gutted and a basement dug out. A four-storey house will arise, with an indoor waterfall (see plan) that can be viewed through a glass floor



RICH DIGS IN BELGRAVIA

High design unlocks hidden depths in a tight corner of London, says Susan Emmett

VISITING 21 Grosvenor Crescent Mews in Belgravia is a bit like going on an archaeological dig. Behind the Victorian shell of the building is a gaping hole going down almost two floors and held together by steel joists. There is a sandy brick wall on one side, layers of bare earth on the other, and a superhighway of lead pipes everywhere. The best bit, according to the builder, is the sheer size of the 19th-century drains the builders have dug up.

This is London as you rarely see it. But out of this rubble will rise a sleek, four-storey house with three bedrooms, a gym/media room, garage and an indoor waterfall that will descend through three floors from the living room to the basement along the back wall of an open atrium. All behind the traditional mews façade.

The revamp is designed to let in the maximum amount of light and make the most of the space on a tight corner of a private mews just behind The Lanesborough hotel, off Hyde Park Corner. Most of the old internal walls have been torn down and will be rebuilt only where strictly necessary. Otherwise the space will flow up and down a very modern house.

There will be no separate dining room but a square table set in a corner on top of a glass floor overlooking the waterfall. The drawing

room will take up most of the first floor and the master bedroom will dominate the second floor. Tucked behind the headboard of what can only be a king-size bed is a dressing room that leads into the main bathroom suite.

Every inch of this 3,216 sq ft home is meticulously planned and the subject of impassioned discussion between architect, structural engineer, interior designer, building contractor, estate agent and the developer Landmass.

This house will be bigger than the one that stood before

“Rather than dealing with each expert separately, I get the group together to brainstorm all the details and make decisions out of that,” says Alan Waxman, of Landmass. “The meetings can get quite intense, but you get a better result this way.”

In a world where everything is standard and mass-produced, having dedicated experts fighting over their creative differences in the pursuit of the perfect home must be the ultimate

luxury. It does, at least, explain the £5.25 million price tag on this property.

Although impossible to judge at this stage, the finish will presumably be immaculate and the fittings the best of their kind. So far the developer is thinking of solid walnut floors with glass, marble and limestone here and there. But as the building work is not scheduled for completion until May next year, anybody buying now can have whatever he or she wants. Bathrooms, kitchens, flooring, wall colour — it is all up for discussion.

You decide and others get on with it. In other words, those who move fast enough can have all the joy of doing up a new home with none of the usual hassles.

But this hands-off approach does come at a price. London, particularly Belgravia and Mayfair, has plenty of rundown poky mews houses just waiting to be loved. The energetic are snapping them up for £2 million to £3 million, giving them the loft treatment and selling them on for double the purchase price.

At 21 Grosvenor Crescent Mews value has been added by digging down another floor and creating a basement with decent ceiling height and some natural light. Overall this house will be bigger than the one that stood there before.

There is a little Zen-style garden in the corner of the basement. There is no outside space elsewhere and the occupant of the house will be living cheek by jowl with the neighbours. Such is the building density here that, before changing anything, the developer had to draw up four party wall agreements.

But this is pied-à-terre territory. Despite the price of property in this part of the capital, many of those living here do so sporadically. When in town they can walk to Harrods (Harvey Nicks is even closer) and jog round Hyde Park in the mornings. Although right in the hub of things, this private gated mews is calm and quiet. The only cars you will hear are your neighbours' 4x4s pulling out in the mornings.

Waxman thinks this is the perfect house for someone who would normally opt for a flat but does not want to pay the four-figure service charge some of the top developments command. A similar-sized home at The Knightsbridge just up the road would come with a £25,000-a-year charge for the type of service you might expect in an hotel. Those who do not need a spa downstairs will pay just £1,400 a year to live in Grosvenor Crescent Mews. In the world of luxury, that is what one might call a bargain.

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