

WHAT YOU WANT NOW

Home spas, touchscreen automation and chef's kitchens are some of the features today's wealthy homebuyers look for. But ultimately, whether it's a compound estate in the Hamptons or a condominium in central London, location and security still top the list.

by Sophie Kalkreuth

EARLIER THIS YEAR A HOUSE ON A PREMIER 18-ACRE BEACHFRONT LOCATION IN THE HAMPTONS sold for US\$147 million, making it the most expensive sale to date in the United States.

The Hamptons, a cluster of seaside villages on Long Island has long been a favoured second-home destination for wealthy Americans. For Zach Vichinsky, a partner at Bespoke Real Estate Hamptons, the sale demonstrated that uber wealthy buyers are willing to pay premium prices for rare, perfectly situated properties.

"In the super high-end, the principle feature of importance is location. It's cliché to say, but we are seeing record-breaking sales this year on the ocean. There is tremendous demand and very little supply."

Vichinsky, who deals solely with properties priced US\$10 million and up, sees the greatest demand for oceanfront and compound-style homes on large plots. "Land is so scarce," he says.

Beyond location, Vichinsky says he is seeing a trend toward cosmopolitan architecture. "People are becoming a lot more well travelled, they're going to exotic locations, and service providers are stepping up their game and showing what true luxury is." As a result, he says, the architectural essence of luxury residences is transcending the traditions of place and becoming increasingly more modern — with a particular emphasis on seamless indoor-outdoor spaces.

Seamlessness in general lies at the heart of many buyer requests. Homebuyers also want it all when it comes to technology — and builders that cater to the tech-trend are more likely to stay at the top of the real estate market, experts say. Five years ago, home automation was considered unique, but today homeowners expect to be able to lock their doors, >>

The Lancaster offers a range of luxury residences in a choice location facing Hyde Park



The uber wealthy pay premium prices for perfectly situated properties with bespoke elements, confirms Bespoke Real Estate Hamptons



>> control their home's climate, lights and alarm system all from the touch of an iPhone. "A lot of people are becoming more savvy and will hire technology consultants," says Vichinsky. "They want to be able to set the pool temperature while in the chopper from Manhattan."

Top brokers in Manhattan are noting another trend: professional chef's kitchens. In the luxury market, a kitchen fully loaded with the latest and greatest appliances and gadgets is a strong selling point – even for the wealthy buyers who rarely cook. "The trend that I'm seeing is that when people entertain in these apartments they hand the kitchen over to a hired chef or a hired caterer," says John Burger, an agent with Brown Harris Stevens who is currently selling a US\$85 million apartment that comprises the entire 18th floor of Manhattan's Sherry-Netherland on 5th Avenue overlooking Central Park.

Luxury brokers say that the most important features buyers want in a kitchen are an open layout, quality appliances, and also integrated smart home technology that allows owners to control their homes via an iPad in the kitchen. Also popular: multiple dishwashers, refrigerator drawers, warming drawers that keep food hot, and gadgets like in-wall cappuccino-makers and wine-pouring devices.

Such attention to detail now also extends into the rest of the home's fixtures and finishes, brokers say. And developers are starting to cater to the demand for homes that feel customized with only top-of-the-line materials. "Door handles can cost up to US\$1,500," says Zach Vichinsky. "People are really showcasing these properties as their pride and joy. Quality trumps everything."

This is what developer Jared Kushner had in mind when he refurbished the historic Puck building in Manhattan's SoHo neighbourhood. Kushner is creating six penthouses, ranging from US\$21 million to over US\$60 million, and each is intended as an artisanal masterwork, right down to the limited-edition La Cornue stoves from France; H. Theophile door hinges, and custom Kolbe mahogany-framed windows with built-in UV protection for



art and furniture. The units are also technologically up-to-date, with everything hidden behind walls including 19-inch TVs that hide behind bathroom mirrors.

Buyers are becoming more detail oriented says Doron Zwickel, Director of Sales at CORE in Manhattan. "In the past, people mostly cared about location, layouts and views. Today they ask about heating and cooling systems, sound proofing, quality of the windows, smart home, etc. Basically the buyers are willing to pay a lot more but really care about every detail."

CORE's latest project, 15 Renwick, was re-designed halfway through the process in order to include more specialized amenities and meet buyer demand. Designed by ODA-Architecture, the 31-unit building features a unique mix of three town homes with private yards, penthouse duplexes and two- and three-bedroom units with wide-plank walnut flooring, eight-foot windows, waterworks fixtures, Bosch washer and dryers and Crestron home automation.

Across the pond in London, buyers of luxury homes have many similar demands. But according to David Forbes who sells property to wealthy clients around the globe through Savills Private Office, these demands are often

In urban locations, buyers want a doorman, secure underground parking and lift that takes you directly to your apartment.

culturally specific. "What an American buyer might look for is diametrically different from what a Singaporean buyer might want," he says.

Whilst many buyers from America and around Europe look for London's grand, historic houses with high ceilings and large rooms to hang their art, wealthy Asian buyers choose to buy flats in new buildings, he says. "90 per cent of the Asian market only buys new build. They simply don't want to live in a Georgian house with several floors and old plumbing. They might live in a converted house, but principally what they want is security, parking, concierge, a club room, a business centre, a spa and gym and so on."

On the more extreme end of the spectrum, Forbes' clients have requested million-acre estates in Africa or private islands with runways long enough to land a private A-380 jet, but for the most part, wealthy international investors are looking for something a little more practical: amenities and security.

Security, Forbes says, is top of the list for families moving into a world capital. In rural or seaside locals like the Hamptons where security is also a central concern, the average mansion will start with at least five cameras and sometimes include bunkers or safe rooms under the garage. Some owners will also employ house watchers or house monitors. In urban locations, buyers want a doorman, secure underground parking and a lift that takes you directly to your apartment. >>



Modern architecture suited to an exclusive lifestyle appeal to wealthy buyers, but location trumps everything, according to Vichinsky





>> Safety and security can also translate into a preference for smaller, tailored developments. “We’re noticing that today people are looking for the ‘boutique’ type building and not necessarily the very large ones,” notes Doron Zwickel. “They appreciate the personal touch of the staff, and other features like a keyed elevator, having only one apartment per floor.”

In London, when it comes to security and amenities, One Hyde Park continues to be the ‘Gold Standard’ for property. At over US\$10,000 psf, it also remains the most expensive. It exemplifies the type of seamless, secure lifestyle that buyers expect from a new building. “At One Hyde Park you’re connected to the Mandarin Oriental, you have 24-hour service, you can do anything you like,” says Forbes.

Billed as the world’s most expensive apartment building, with more than US\$3.37 billion in sales to date, One Hyde Park has been setting real estate records since it launched in 2011. At that time, residences in the 86-apartment building were selling for around US\$11,270 psf, nearly three times the typical price of luxury London real estate. Earlier this year, a penthouse apartment was sold to an unnamed Eastern European buyer for US\$295 million.

One Hyde Park maintains its reputation as the gold standard for London luxury homes, but The Lancaster is a worthy challenger



Building security reportedly includes panic rooms, bulletproof glass, and guards trained by British Special Forces. Buyers also enjoy temperature-controlled wine cellars, valet service and basement parking. There is also a club room and entertainment room that residents can rent out for parties, as well as a range of fitness facilities. According to Forbes it shows a trend toward new expectations at the high end of the market.

“Nobody believed that developers of One Hyde Park could achieve US\$5,000psf, never mind US\$10,000,” says Forbes. “But they went ahead and created this extraordinary building. Not everybody likes it, but it is being duplicated. We recently sold the Canadian Embassy in Grosvenor Square, and it’s being converted into super luxury properties. There are a number of high-end schemes under construction.”

One such building is the Lancasters. Located facing Hyde Park, the restored historic building offers a range of luxurious residences in a secure gated environment policed by a 24-hour concierge service. There is also a range of facilities for residents including a 15-metre swimming pool, gymnasium, steam and treatment rooms and valet parking.

But at the end of the day, no amount of fancy finishes or extra amenities will matter if the property is not located in a prime position. “Buyers want to be as close to the shopping district as you can get,” says Forbes. “These sales are driven by being really central close to the best shops and restaurants in London and all of the facilities.”

And the same goes for holiday homes. Location trumps all. “The single most expensive sale took place this year on the ocean,” Zach Vichinsky says. “There have been much larger properties that traded for much less – it’s about tremendous demand and very limited supply.”