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LONDON CALLING

A former US embassy, a Paris-style boulevard and an outpost of Blakes hotel are among the capital's properties being fought over, says **Ruth Bloomfield**

The London property market may be bearing the brunt of Brexit malaise, but even in straitened circumstances there are homes that sell fast – and sell well. In key hotspots across prime central locations there exist unofficial waiting lists as buyers hold out for the sale of homes on coveted streets – in itself, a rare event. London's "best in class" ranges from charming mews to verdant avenues and, of course, garden squares. Some, such as Chelsea's Egerton Crescent, have been considered top notch for generations. Others, like Grosvenor Square in Mayfair, are enjoying a new lease of life thanks to a perfect storm of developments.

KNIGHTSBRIDGE ENNISMORE GARDENS & ENNISMORE GARDENS MEWS

Set within the "golden triangle" between Brompton Road, Exhibition Road and Knightsbridge, Ennismore Gardens and its mews offer privacy, peace and incredibly short distances to London's museum district and the twin retail meccas of Harrods and Harvey Nichols. Its white stucco buildings with classical columned entrances are pure elegance, and the best properties directly overlook the square. The mews has a charming aspect with cobblestones and just the right amount of planting, overlooking the grounds of the Anglican church, the Holy Trinity Brompton.

Most of the houses on the square have been divided into apartments. "There have been some significant sales here, with values of £4,000 per sq ft-plus being achieved," says Will Watson, head of buying at The Buying Solution. "This is a price point normally associated with new-build developments, not period conversions." James Watts, associate director of buying agency Prime Purchase sees the same trend. "The garden square is beautifully tucked away south of Hyde Park, off Kensington Road, and its proximity to the park and the fact it's essentially a dead end makes it something of an oasis," he says. "Ennismore Gardens offers so much access to green space and is so quiet, yet it's slap-bang where most people want to live."

But not all properties are equal on this square. The most sought-after "level" is the first floor – away from the hubbub around the front door but with only a single flight of stairs to ascend. Savills is selling such a property – a 290sq m three-bedroom flat priced at £11.95m, with 4m ceilings, stunning original cornicing and two balconies.

Left and above: No 1 Grosvenor Square in Mayfair (once the site of the US Embassy) and its library – it has been converted into 45 residences, from £8m to £40m

KENSINGTON VICTORIA ROAD

Kensington Palace Gardens is one of the most expensive streets in the world, but its vast and rather ornate Italianate mansions with their huge subterranean leisure suites are not to everyone's taste.



ist south of Kensington High Street, however, is what he Buying Solution's Watson describes as a "special pocket of excellent family houses". Victoria Road runs south from Hyde Park and – despite its proximity to Kensington, Knightsbridge and South Kensington – is surprisingly quiet.

The best houses are those south of Prince of Wales Terrace (away from noisy Kensington Road), where there is a choice of tall, slender townhouses and low-built villas that are in particular demand with those who prefer lateral space. "Houses here rarely trade, which means when they do become available, competition from multiple buyers is commonplace," says Watson. Those keen to secure a family home here will need to dig deep. Knight Frank is offering Victory House – a double-fronted six-bedroom villa with 92sq m of living space, spa, swimming pool, garden and roof terrace – on Victoria Road for £24m.

IAYFAIR GROSVENOR SQUARE

Five years ago, the heartland of the Grosvenor Estate would probably not have been considered a top Mayfair address, but a series of major projects on the square is transforming its fortunes. Crucially, the US Embassy has relocated to Nine Elms, taking its visa-applicant queues and ugly concrete bollards with it, while No 1 Grosvenor Square – a former US Embassy, later used by the

Canadian High Commission – is being transformed by Indian property company Lodha into 45 residences (priced from £8m to £40m). The site will be finished next spring, complete with a "lifestyle floor" comprising a pool, gym, spa, screening room, bar, restaurant and a library, and around 15 of the residences have already been sold. Meanwhile, the US Embassy's most recent Mayfair base – the landmark brutalist block with its 10.5m golden eagle – is in the throes of being transformed into a new hotel, with interiors designed by David Chipperfield, which will be operated by Rosewood and is due to open around 2023.

In June, high-end boutique developer Finchatton completed its conversion of the former headquarters of the US Navy into the first standalone Four Seasons Private Residences – named Twenty Grosvenor Square and offering an on-site spa, wine room, pool, fitness centre, crèche and cinema. Prices start at £17.5m and, to date, 24 of the 37 apartments have been sold. Gordon Ramsay opened his new dining room Lucky Cat on the square in the same month to replace his old stager Maze, and the slightly tired Millennium Hotel London Mayfair has had a £50m facelift and relaunch under Hilton's new LXR Hotels & Resorts brand.

Above: Victory House, a 592sq m villa on Kensington's Victoria Road, £24m through Knight Frank. Below: Ennismore Gardens in Knightsbridge, where a 290sq m flat is on offer for £11.95m through Savills

The future of the square looks interesting too. Back in April, a planning application was lodged to use 38 Berkeley Square – the former Indonesian Embassy – as an educational "academy". In addition to lecture rooms, it will feature a restaurant, a members' club, library, gallery and café, making it possibly the smartest students' union on the planet. The eternally hip boutique hotel Blakes, founded by Anoushka Hempel, also plans to open an outpost at 22 Grosvenor Square. The Edwardian office building will be repurposed as a hotel with 32 guest rooms plus a brasserie, bar and private members' club, although the time frame for the project is still to be confirmed.

And the estate is gearing up for a revamp of the garden square itself, and is organising an international competition to find a new design for its 2.5 hectares. "Grosvenor Square is about to reclaim the crown as London's number one address," says Peter Wetherell, chief executive of Wetherell estate agents. It's a sentiment echoed by Paul Pavlides, sales director for Chestertons. "All of this work on the square means that in three years it will be a sought-after destination for visitors and residents alike," he says.





BELGRAVIA CHESTER SQUARE

It is smaller than both Belgrave and Eaton Squares, but Nat Wilde, manager of Hamptons International on Sloane Square, says: "It has some of the most handsome architecture in Belgravia, with beautiful gardens at its centre. In contrast to Eaton Square, it's also a lot quieter and benefits from the immediate proximity of Elizabeth Street with its plethora of shops and restaurants."

Elizabeth Street is very much the icing on Chester Square's cake. It has been slowly and quietly curated by the Grosvenor Estate over the past decade and is now a hub lined with quality gastropubs, cafés, boutiques and bakeries. Brendan Roberts, a director at Aylesford International, also rates Chester Square – or, at least, particular parts of it. "The southeast end has a couple of outstanding houses," he says. "The ones between 50 and 64 Chester Square have more width than numbers 66 onward, and the houses in the end corner are bigger again. The point being that not all property in the street is the same." Of course, this all comes at a price, and currently buyers will find a lavishly renovated Grade II-listed house on the square with six bedrooms, lift, spa and a media room for £25m through Knight Frank.

NOTTING HILL LANSDOWNE CRESCENT

Set at the epicentre of the Ladbroke Estate – Notting Hill's garden-square hotspot – and developed on the site of the former Hippodrome racecourse, Lansdowne Crescent is lined with both substantial villas, overlooking its half-moon-shaped gardens, and white stucco townhouses. The ample size of the detached homes – around 465sq m, excluding basement extensions, according to Saul Empson, director for London of Haringtons – ensures they remain hugely popular with families. "They offer a lovely way of life: leafy, a little off the beaten track and totally uncompromised," he says.

Louisa Brodte, head of private clients for Banda Property, also points to the crescent's low-build houses, which back onto communal gardens and are particularly sought-after due to the security offered by overlooking the private open space. Although the vast majority of property on the crescent is original, The Modern House is listing the former home of architect Jeremy Lever – a contemporary terrace completed in 1973 within a small gap between two Victorian houses. On sale for £3.45m, it offers four bedrooms, has fabulous midcentury interiors and was given a Grade II listing in 2012.



ON THE FRINGES... MARYLEBONE PORTLAND PLACE

Wide, elegant and a perfect staging post for Regent's Park at its north side, the restaurants and cafés of Fitzrovia to the east and Marylebone to the west, Portland Place is "a true boulevard reminiscent of New York or Paris", according to Simon Hedley, director of Druce estate agents.

Claire Reynolds, co-head of Savills' prime central London team, points to the imposing architecture in the area. "The buildings are very elegant with wonderful period features and are often manned with porters," she says. "You'll find some of Marylebone's largest and most impressive period apartments on this street, some with access to the private Park Crescent Gardens at the north end of Portland Place."

REGENT'S PARK CHESTER TERRACE

Although its townhouses are more compact than those on Hanover Terrace on the other side of the park, this Grade I-listed terrace has some key advantages. First and foremost, it is a private road, fronted by communal gardens, which means leafy views and no through traffic. The triumphal arches at its entrances are rather glorious and, although it looks authentic, the road was badly bomb damaged during the second world war and subsequently

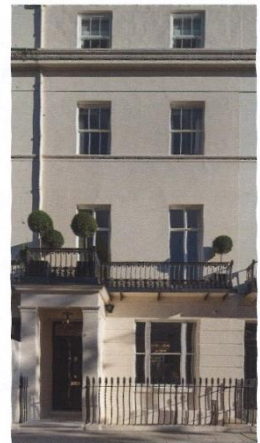
rebuilt. Thus it is the only terrace in Regent's Park where all the houses have lifts, while there is a precedent here for planning consent for the addition of roof terraces. When houses go on sale, they tend to buck market trends – the actor Sacha Baron Cohen sold his home on Chester Terrace last December for a record-breaking £15.5m, more than £3,500 per sq ft.

ST JAMES'S CARLTON GARDENS

Small and secluded – and therefore super-exclusive – St James's has been gaining traction as a residential location, in particular at Carlton Gardens, a cul-de-sac that occupies the sweet spot between Pall Mall and The Mall and has some wonderfully discreet Georgian mansion houses. The standout London sale of the year so far has been hedgefund-billionaire Ken Griffin's purchase of a 2,320sq m Georgian mansion here for a reported £95m.

CITY SLICKERS

Aylesford International, aylesford.com. **Banda Property**, bandaproperty.co.uk. **The Buying Solution**, thebuyingsolution.co.uk. **Chestertons**, chestertons.com. **Druce**, druce.com. **Hamptons International**, hamptons.co.uk. **Haringtons**, haringtons-uk.com. **Knight Frank**, knightfrank.co.uk. **The Modern House**, themodernhouse.com. **No 1 Grosvenor Square**, 1gsq.com. **Prime Purchase**, prime-purchase.com. **Savills**, savills.com. **Twenty Grosvenor Square**, 20gs.com. **Wetherell**, wetherell.co.uk.



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