

What's luxury now? An 'argument suite'

Technology is out — luggage rooms, cryotherapy chambers and separate master bedrooms are in



The designer Dara Huang used smart glass to create a two-way cinema screen in the South Bank Tower

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The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines luxury as “a state of great comfort or elegance, especially when involving great expense”.

At the top end of the housing market it might well add the words “eternally evolving” to this description. Luxury, in property terms, is a state that is always changing. Over the past decade, for example, the simple wardrobe has progressed to become a walk-in wardrobe, then a dressing room, then his-and-hers dressing rooms and, most recently, dedicated summer and winter clothes storage rooms with separate luggage areas.

Here we outline the things that push a house into the high-end luxury class.

Subtle technology

At the start of the century, developers threw every piece of kit they could think of at top-drawer houses, but Nigel Mitchell, a partner at Knight Frank, believes hi-tech boys' toys have proved onerous to use and maintain.

"I would say there has been a move towards simplicity in ultra-luxury homes," he says. "The iPad controls and Lutron lighting systems are too confusing for a lot of buyers and are rarely used."

While overcomplicated technology is out, smart materials are in. Nobody likes the look of a giant flat screen in the living room. The solution? Install a mirror that at the click of a button can transform into a TV, and back again. This trickery can be seen above the mantelpiece of a two-bedroom apartment in Dove Mews, South Kensington SW5 (£1.495 million via Foxtons).

Dara Huang, the founder of the architecture and design studio Design Haus Liberty, is a fan of smart glass. "This is one of the most expensive materials to buy right now and illustrates high-net-worth individuals' desire for ultra-technical yet minimalist design features," he says.

Huang used this glass in the redevelopment of South Bank Tower, on London's South Bank, creating a screen between the master bedroom and bathroom that doubles as a two-way cinema screen.

And if you live in a townhouse there is no reason you should not be afforded the conveniences of a grand country home. At 83 The Avenue, West Ealing W13, a development of five houses by Simon Scott Homes priced from £2.495 million, a dumb waiter has been installed to spare residents from having to carry plates from the kitchen to the dining room.

Bespoke everything

Whether your style is minimalist or overtly bling, quality is key. “Developers are dedicating time and money to sourcing the best materials for new luxury homes because top-end buyers care about quality,” says James Cleland, a partner at Knight Frank, based in Surrey. “They want the best marble, the best glass, the very best silk woven carpet – the quality and rarity of the materials seems to be of more importance than the cinema rooms and spas that have become commonplace.”



This mirror in Dove Mews, a two-bedroom flat (£1.495 million) in South Kensington, doubles as a TV screen

Alex Newall, the managing director of the Hanover Private Office estate agency, agrees. “One of our clients has commissioned custom-made Murano glass chandeliers by Mazzega, in Venice,” he says. “They went to one of the oldest glass companies in the world to get the highest quality of craftsmanship. When selling a house, it is all about telling a story of how each element has been sourced and brought together.” The house is in Wentworth, Surrey, and it is on the market for £16.995 million through Hanover.

Savills is selling a neo-Georgian house in Lurgashall, West Sussex, that has low-key interiors except for its showpiece Indian-inspired sitting room. This snug is lined with ornate, antique Haveli stone and features an LED night-sky effect ceiling display. The property is on the market for £19.5 million through Savills.

The Bishop's Avenue in Hampstead, north London, has long been an epicentre of luxury. Stratheden, a nine-bedroom house on the market for £24.995 million with Glentree International, fails the low-key test; it has a ballroom, an art gallery and some spectacular bespoke features, including a cantilevered spiral staircase and hand-drawn silk-screen panelling.

Chilling out

As Cleland says, a house with a pool and a gym is no longer deemed luxurious by those who buy the UK's most expensive homes. "An in-house spa is still a draw, but needs to be more than a sauna and steam room," he says. "We are now seeing massage rooms, nail spas and later this year we will be launching a house with a hair salon."

Not to be outdone, Martin Kemp, of Martin Kemp Design, reports a rise in demand for cryotherapy chambers — ice-cold spaces used by athletes to speed recovery from injury and with reputed anti-ageing powers.

While these types of frills are primarily a London thing, Luke Morgan, of Strutt & Parker's country house department, notes a ripple effect into the shires.



This house in Lurgashall, West Sussex, has a sitting room with a night-sky effect ceiling. It is on sale for £19.5 million (Savills)

"A few years ago buyers would request a swimming pool for their country retreat, now it must be an indoor leisure complex with the full works," he says.

That's entertainment

When selling flats, developers are aware that their clientele may be downsizing. At Buxmead, in Bishop's Avenue, the developer Harrison Varma has compensated for this in its development of 20 apartments, ranging in price from £6.9 million to £17 million. Owners will have the use of a private dining room seating 18 guests and a reception space accommodating 100 people if a planned soirée is too large for their new home.

The little extras

Clothes storage is a key area in which developers try to up the ante. "It is not enough to have his-and-hers dressing rooms, these need to have intricate and bespoke designs with compartments for belts, rings or handbags," says Simon Tollit, the sales director of Sotheby's International Realty. "We've also seen dressing rooms installed with watch winders to keep watches ticking — all of these small touches make life hassle-free.

"Luggage rooms have also been key this year. Those purchasing a multimillion-pound home will undoubtedly travel a lot. The luggage room allows owners to stow their bags until they or their staff unpack them."

Rachel Thompson, a partner at the property consultancy The Buying Solution, has seen homes with temperature-controlled rooms for furs and expensive handbags, and in one instance a luggage room with Louis Vuitton leather wallpaper.



The South Bank Tower apartments with luxury touches by Dara Huang

In the Chelsea Island development, near Chelsea Harbour SW10, the penthouses (costing up to £12 million) include 130ft of hanging space for clothes. Meanwhile, at Rathbone Square, a development in Fitzrovia W1, the three penthouses include a cosmetics fridge designed to keep make-up at the optimum temperature. The penthouses start at £4.475 million.

It is not only ladies who shop who require indulgences. “I have seen bachelor houses that have slides between games rooms and the master bedroom, climbing walls and even a full-size squash court,” Thompson says.

The concept of having two kitchens is embedded in the national psyche after revelations about the catering arrangements at Ed Miliband’s north London home. Peter Brookes, an associate director of Savills in Hampstead, says many houses also include two master bedrooms. “They are referred to in a number of different ways, officially as ‘the second master bedroom suite’, but often ‘the quiet room’ or ‘the snoring room,’” he says. “My personal favourite is ‘the argument suite’. Regardless of its name, it is a feature for which there is a great appetite among buyers, who are beginning to expect it in luxury properties.”