

Looks good on paper

This east London penthouse dazzles, but it's the lavish brochure that makes the jaw drop

BEYOND THE BROCHURE

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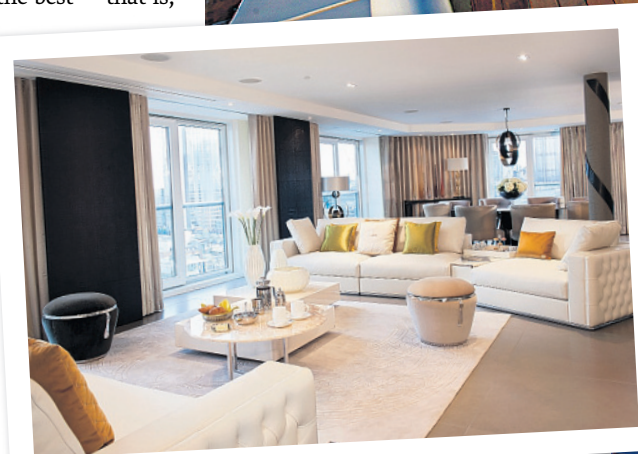
For obvious reasons, we didn't call this column "all about the brochure". But linger with me on the marketing material before we get stuck in to today's actual property. For the boat has been well and truly pushed out in an effort to entice prospective buyers up to Penthouse 127, on the top floor of Bézier, in east London. Of the 127 units in the project, which comprises two bow-fronted, 15-storey white towers, most have been sold. The cheapest studio was £325,000. But the developer, Tudorvale, has kept the best — that is, the most expensive, at £5.75m — for last.

The location is crucial: it's right above the traffic feature known as Silicon Roundabout, signifying Old Street's position at the epicentre of London's lively digital industry. I used to work round there, in the pre-internet age, and, based on my abiding memory of the place, they should be calling it Silicon Dark, Scary, Piss-Stained Pedestrian Underpass.

These days, though still hardly the capital's loveliest neighbourhood, it's chock full of bright young entrepreneurs making millions out of the next big tech thing — and these minted, dressed-down clever clogs are the target market for Penthouse 127. But just in case none of the dotcom tycoons goes for it, they're spreading their aim to old-school moneybags who work in the nearby City of London.

And for them, a lavish brochure is needed, because the 2,639 sq ft of indoor space, with a 1,372 sq ft "pleasure deck" (translation: terrace), is, as one of the marketing bods admits, "Knightsbridge prices, but not in Knightsbridge". So they'll have to be lured into this gritty bit of City hinterland — avoiding the underpass — by the brochure, which will be couriered round to interested parties following a financial vetting.

If you pass the test, stand by for the arrival of a large parcel swathed in cream and gold paper, like a present at a society wedding — and weighing almost as much as a canteen of Sheffield plate. Tear off the wrapping and marvel at the 18in by 12in shallow box covered in a pearly faux-alligator material — which is what's also on some of the penthouse walls. Open it up and three books nestle within, cocooned in a honey-coloured suede, the



Penthouse 127, Bézier, London EC2, £5.75m

What you get A luxuriously kitted-out three-bedroom duplex flat on Old Street, with a 1,372 sq ft outdoor 'pleasure deck'

Who to call Currell Residential; 020 7226 6611, bezierlondon.com



fabric they've used on the dining chairs in the fully furnished flat. So, before you visit the duplex penthouse, the penthouse has visited you. (The developer would not be drawn on how much his elaborate publishing exercise cost, beyond saying that you could get a Rolls-Royce for the price of the print run of 250.)

At this point, turn off your phone and Sky+ your favourite telly — you've got a lot of reading to do, although the first book, a gold-bound hardback, is mostly glossy pictures, double-stitched at extra expense to allow the full glory of the snaps to run cleanly across two pages. Shot from the roof of a black glass office block on the other side of the roundabout are day and night views of the wraparound terrace: the interior shots all include the panorama of London's unique jumble of architectural styles through floor-to-ceiling windows.

Volume two, bound in some silvery stuff that apparently puts in an appearance somewhere in the pad (guest-room curtains?), offers so much detail that, after a few hours, you would ace Mastermind with the specialist subject of "world's poshest fixtures and fittings".

Read all about the wenge (pronounced "wen-gay", we are helpfully told) and ipe ("ee-pay") woods on the highly polished floors; Italian Poliform fitted wardrobes; Orinoco granite and marbles of Portoro Gold and Crema Marfil, used in the three ensuites; Fendi designer homeware; bespoke Villiers furniture; Bulthaup kitchens. The tech boys would probably be more interested in the spec for the Legrand system that controls the audio system, security, lights, heating and computer networks,

all activated by an iPad. Book three is a pamphlet-sized guide to London.

What would you be missing if the lure of this box of property porn failed to arouse you enough to pay a visit? Well, you'd really want to take in the full extent of that "pleasure deck" — with a six-person spa bath, a fully functioning wet bar and gas barbecue, and dining, sun-lounging and "sitting room" areas (this last with a telly in a weatherproof wooden cabinet, and a real-flame gas fire in a glass box), each demarcated by curved metal fins.

And you wouldn't get the thrill of the moment in the main living area when the estate agent does something with an iPad that causes the curtains to swish shut, the lights to turn off, a cinema screen to unfurl and a projector to descend from the ceiling. Your very own home cinema, before you can say Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines.

And the views — you have to see those. And that lovely traffic hum that tells you you're still in the heart of the city, but elevated from the scrum of the streets (and the underpass). As they didn't quite say on the old TV gameshow, open the box — then spend the money.

➔ If you would like Karen to cast her critical eye over a property you are selling, email btb@sunday-times.co.uk

ASK THE EXPERTS

The solicitor

My husband and I recently viewed a three-bedroom semi, which we loved — but there is subsidence at the back, caused by a pipe that burst under the house 10 years ago. The owner's insurance company will rectify everything, but what guarantees should we ask for, and will there be a problem if we want to sell?

AV, by email

Any sign of subsidence, even if it is historical, can seriously affect a property's marketability and value, as well as your ability to get a mortgage: there is a stigma attached to subsidence, even if remedial works have taken place. It's difficult to obtain insurance; if an insurer will cover subsidence, the premium and excess will be high. You must check if your mortgagees will lend against this property, as many are reluctant to do so if subsidence has occurred. You will also need a surveyor and structural engineer to examine the property; your solicitor needs to investigate the validity of warranties or guarantees in respect of the remedial works. The saying "the day you buy a property is also the day you sell it" applies here: you, your mortgagees and your advisers must be satisfied with the property's structural integrity.

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The rural consultant

We've just bought a house that has a postbox in the roadside wall. What, if any, conditions are there for this, and will Royal Mail pay a rent?

LB, by email

I'm afraid that it won't pay any rent, but Royal Mail is responsible for the box, its maintenance and any repairs. If you are doing any work to the property that might affect the wall where the box is situated, then you will need to advise your local delivery office. If scaffolding or works might prevent access to the box, you will also need to discuss this with them beforehand. Contact the customer-services department, quoting your address and postcode, as well as the number for the postbox in question. They will then be able to advise you best on how to proceed. For more information, visit royalmail.com.

➔ Philip Eddell is head of the country-house consultancy at Savills; savills.co.uk

Do you need help from one of our experts? Email your questions to propertyexperts@sunday-times.co.uk. Advice is given without responsibility