

One for the filthy rich

This converted church would be stunning — if only someone cleared up the mess

BEYOND THE BROCHURE

ELEANOR MILLS



It's nearly the end of May, so why, bar the last few days of blistering heat, have the streets been awash with people in sturdy boots and woolly coats? Back in March, I went out with bare legs and a summer dress to buy bright-coloured jeans and summer tops. Since then, they've been accessorised with thermals; I recently put on sheepskin gloves. Something is seriously awry.

Nature knows it, too. This is the paradox of the wintry non-summer: glowering grey clouds against bright yellow rape fields, peerless peonies battered by great globules of hail. I know two people who got caught in the "Bicester twister" — one saw her garden table hurled across the shrubs.

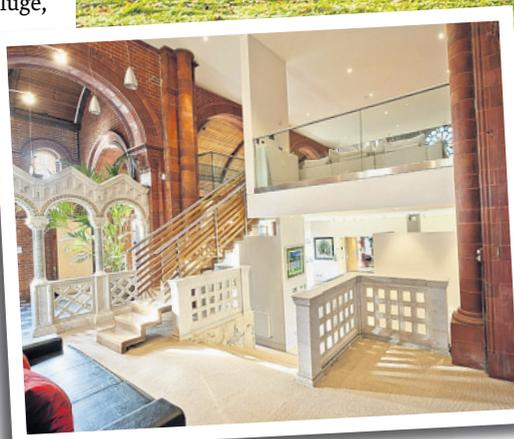
The only possible ray of light is that, because we've had the deluge, we might escape the August monsoon. It's becoming a regular fixture. I know because, every summer, we go to the same festival in Devon, in the same week, and five of the past six years have involved a torrential washout.

Camping in the British summer always involves ankle-to-neck waterproofs, wellies and a broly. All I can hope is that things have been so topsy-turvy, summer will come late. But I reckon we should resign ourselves to a wet jubilee weekend.

Whatever the weather, you won't find me rejoicing — I'm afraid I am allergic to pomp. My father is a staunch republican, given to shouting "Up the revolution" whenever the Queen hoves into view. I reckon that royalism, like religion, is probably only absorbed by osmosis during childhood, which means I am a lost cause.

Still, there are positives for those of us left cold by the monarchy: in Richmond a week ago, Sainsbury's was deserted as the borough's entire population popped to the park to say "What ho!" to Her Majesty. Every cloud has a silver lining.

I found myself chanting that same cliché as I marched round this week's house. The brochure is one of the most impressive yet — acres of glistening surfaces in 15,000 sq ft of converted Victorian red-brick church. This is a real A-list pad — Sandra Bullock rented it when she was in Britain last year. It's the kind of place that is designed to make us lesser mortals feel our own shortcomings. After all, it is slap in the middle of some of the classiest real estate in the country; kings' mistresses once resided in the elegant Georgian lodges that inhabit a green oasis 'twixt



360° See the converted Victorian church in all its glory (with none of the clutter) at thesundaytimes.co.uk/360

All Saints House, London TW10, £9.5m

What is it? A converted red-brick church with seven bedrooms

Where is it? Petersham, in Richmond upon Thames

Who is selling? Knight Frank (020 8939 2800, knightfrank.co.uk); Savills (020 8614 9100; savills.co.uk); Whirlybird Property (01494 358133, whirlybirdproperty.co.uk)



Thames and park. Their modern successors — Jerry Hall, Annabel Goldsmith — now live there in semi-rustic splendour.

I expected to be wowed and seduced — selling this kind of top-end pad is all about what is called in the trade "dressing the property". To you and me, that means piles of fluffy towels, impressive flower displays and scented candles. This house is being sold by Mark Penrice, a property developer (although this is his family home), and I thought he'd know all the tricks — but I couldn't have been more wrong.

Dressing? Pah! I have never been to a filthier house: in the huge sitting room on the mezzanine level — all cream, glass panels and heavenly views up to stained-glass windows — was the dried-up remains of someone's supper, complete with stinky plate and ketchup bottle. At the top of the church tower — stupendous views over the park — the effect was ruined by a wooden floor thick with dead flies.

Beds were unmade, sinks stained and grotty; in the "guest suite", I found smashed plastic champagne bottles and an old can used as an ashtray. Through the squalor, it was hard to focus on the generous proportions and views through the internal window down to the 60ft-high, 60ft-long Great Hall.

Everywhere it was the same story. The £10,000 treehouse in the garden was full of sweet wrappers and old sleeping

bags, the lawn treacherous with dog poo. The swimming pool and spa in the catacombs were clean, but that's because, as the owner admitted, they haven't been used for a year. The grand modernist kitchen, cleverly designed to feel cosy, lacked fruit or flowers to sell it; the coffee on offer was instant.

The church is a bit of a warren. There are seven bedrooms, but three of them are windowless cells in the tower. The old marble baptistry was filled haphazardly with Harry Potter books and gym equipment. The master bedroom is handsome, under a vast wooden dome, with a grand upstairs ensuite. Again, though, the presentation let it down: the bedspread was cheap and shiny brown; clothes spilled out of the wardrobes.

I didn't understand what was going on. Usually, wherever I go, grand or modest, everything is sparkling clean. Everyone takes pride in their home and wants to show it to the world in its best aspect. It seemed sad to me that someone with so much, including a house of which most of us can only dream, could treat it so callously. Or maybe this lot are so rich, so spoilt and so used to others clearing up the mess, they don't notice or care. There you have it, another paradox, like the wintry summer — a beautiful house, disgustingly kept. For shame, for shame.

✦ If you'd like Eleanor to cast her critical eye over a property you're selling, email btb@sunday-times.co.uk

ASK THE EXPERTS

The solicitor

I own a flat on which I had a buy-to-let mortgage, which I redeemed last year by paying it off in full. I was charged a security release fee of £195 by the bank for returning the deeds (although the list of tariffs I have seems to indicate I should have been charged £55). I have still not received them, but the bank tells me that it is only necessary for it to inform the Land Registry that it no longer has an interest in the property. Is this correct? I imagine I would need the deeds in order to sell the property.

John Hart

The Land Registry electronically stores details of the title to your property, including copies of any relevant deeds, so you will not need to provide the original title deeds for a sale. If you still want your original deeds, check with the solicitor you used when you bought the property to see whether they ever had the original deeds during the transaction, and, if so, whether they still hold them. Some mortgage companies do charge administration fees on redemption, but you should seek reimbursement of any overpayment if the release fee was specific to releasing title deeds to you.

✦ Donall Murphy is a partner at Russell-Cooke LLP; russell-cooke.co.uk

The home technology expert

What's the best way to control my home audiovisual system with my iPad?

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Loewe has a free app that lets you control its latest televisions and other AV products from your iPad. A TV with a control system starts at £1,300 (loewe-uk.com). If you want to control a range of brands, BitWise Controls (bitwisecontrols.com) has an app and interfaces that can do this, although you will need a dealer to help set it up. The system starts at £3,000.

For whole-house iPad control, covering lighting, heating, air conditioning and AV hardware, Savant (savantsystems.com) supplies powerful systems based on Apple technology. Prices start at £3,000, and you will need a dealer to install it: try RGB Communications (01488 73366, www.rgbcomms.co.uk).

✦ Iain Brown is cofounder of the custom installation company Kensington Home Technology; www.k-ht.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