

POST-LUXURY

Alex Michelin, Valouran: 'Buyers of luxury homes are a lot younger, and a lot more demanding'

Home » Alex Michelin, Valouran: 'Buyers of luxury homes are a lot younger, and a lot more demanding'



Valouran Co-founder and CEO Alex Michelin assesses how the future of super-prime real estate design must consider the highly curated lifestyles of next-generation buyers.

Time was, those lucky enough to have the purchasing power to buy a super-prime residence in London were members of a very small, easily identifiable group. Mostly male and grey around the temples, they came from a handful of countries, were parents if not grandparents and, if they didn't know each other directly, they may well have known each other's families.

When it came to their residences, they were equally homogenous. Owners were comfortable displaying their wealth, especially in their homes. Space to entertain was prized, room for the kids and staff a necessity, and when they said London, they really meant Mayfair. But times have changed. Today, the biggest driver in London's super-prime residential market is age. Buyers of luxury homes are a lot younger, and a lot more demanding. In fact, Millennials and Gen Z now account for 45 per cent of the global luxury market. That's not to say Generation X and Baby Boomers aren't buying; there's simply a new 'kid' in town. In fact, nearly 20 per cent of all buyers at The Whiteley are either Millennials, or Gen Z.

It wasn't so long ago that marketing events organised by the manufacturers of private jets were 'invitation-only'. No more. Like many suppliers of luxury, they learnt fast that today, you never turn away a 20 or 30-something dressed in jeans and a t-shirt.

A lot has been written about the new generation of young, ultra-high net-worths, and some of it is even true. Yes, many still inherit their wealth but, increasingly, they are the men — and women — who are tech entrepreneurs, cryptoinvestors, influencers, pop stars and sporting icons for whom globalisation, and all that has come with it, has delivered an incredible dividend.

Those catering to this market have had to adapt quickly; none more so than those designing the homes demanded by the next generation of ultra-high-net-worth individuals. Just as the sources of their wealth differ significantly from the generation of buyers who preceded them, so too does their vision of what makes the perfect home.

For the majority of young buyers of super-prime, wealth really is stealth, and getting that right is an art form. Exceptional design has shifted from a need to impress, which was easy to do, to the bigger challenge of accommodating highly curated lifestyles. Modern super-prime residences must use smart design to maximise spaces that facilitate lifestyles often centred on personal health and well-being.

Gone are the cigar terraces and the enormous dining rooms. In are spas, cryotherapy chambers, and meditation spaces, and a near obsessional focus on the bedroom, the one space that can deliver the commodity prized by successful people above all others — quality sleep.

Out, too, are the staff kitchens and living areas. If the new goal is to maximise every inch of liveable space for work and relaxation, staff living areas are dead space. To a generation that is comfortable with outsourcing almost every service imaginable, what they really crave is impeccable service.

Top hotel brands like Four Seasons and Six Senses, the latter a new entrant into the UK with fully serviced apartments at The Whiteley, remove the need to house your own cook and driver, garage your car, and travel across town to collect your dry-cleaning. With five-star services provided on your doorstep by the world's best in hospitality, you don't need those staff and you don't need a spare bedroom with a hotel in your building.

As Knight Frank reported this year, despite significant recent economic turmoil, the demand for branded residences is powering on, driven by buyers who want to *maximise their lives, and the spaces they live in*.

It's a dynamic market, driven by a broad spectrum of buyers with the means to command the best there is in quality, service and design, now no matter the demographic. And there's something to be said that, for a generation too often derided as solipsists with a desire to impress others online, those that are successful — and lucky enough to afford the best — know what makes a house, a home.