

THE  TIMES

# bricks & mortar

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Property  
Supplement  
of the Year



Country grandeur and urban style *Pages 16-17*  
Why parquet adds panache to this renovated house

## The rise of the residents' only club

The residents' lounge at The Highland Club



1 of 5

*The residents' lounge at The Highland Club*

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### **A private members' club is the latest must-have feature in residential developments from Hammersmith to the Highlands**

Private members' clubs have been an important part of British life for centuries, although many of the archaic gentlemen's clubs have now given way to more modern variations that aim to provide spaces in which switched-on young professionals of either gender can work and socialise. Ever since White's was set up in 1693 — as Mrs White's Chocolate House by Italian immigrant Francesco Bianco — clubs have been an extension of our homes, somewhere to network and relax.

Clubs still try to market themselves as homes-away-from-home and many have bedrooms so you don't have to go home. Although, in their latest incarnation, the club isn't very far from home at all. This is because a private club is the latest must-have in residential developments.

On the sixth floor of The Heron, a 35-storey City residential tower, is a private member's club as sophisticated as anything in Shoreditch or Soho. There is a cocktail bar, a brasserie, a billiard table, seating areas including a snug and library, meeting rooms for hire, concierge, a cinema and gym, plus a large terrace with sofas, fireplace and amazing 360-degree views across London.

The club is exclusive to residents and paid for in their service charge. "We believe it is the first residential development to have a private club like this," says Lisa Ronson, commercial director of developer Heron International. "It is well used by all the residents. I have been in here when people have been Skyping relatives in the snug. It is all very casual, like your extended living room."

Other developers are following close behind The Heron. Just outside the City, in Islington, the newly launched Canaletto building will also include a private residents' club, Club Canaletto, with lounge, bar, games room, gym and terrace.

A cynic might think that residents might only need facilities like these because the living space in modern apartments is so woefully small. However, the apartments in The Heron, including the newly launched two duplex penthouses (priced from £12million), are more than generously proportioned. The reason people do venture down to the club is simple — to socialise.

Nick Hutchings, managing director of St George's Central London division, part of the Berkeley Group, is quite clear about the role of resident's clubs. "It is about creating a sense of place and community. These are places that bring people together, places where they can network. It is about establishing a community within the development."

St George's Fulham Reach development, which is just about to launch its third phase of homes, has a lounge, cinema, snooker room, golf-simulator, pool, gym, concierge and communal wine cellar for residents. No food or drink is served here but residents are free to bring their own. There is also a community boathouse, which is open to residents and non-residents who wish to try their hand at rowing on the Thames.

"People lead busy lives and want to have facilities on their doorstep. It all started with developments having a small gym but now we are providing more and more lifestyle features and buyers expectations are higher than before," Hutchings says.

Across the city, Berkeley's Goodman's Fields and One Tower Bridge developments also include business lounges. Berkeley markets the lounge at Goodman's Fields as a "space inspired by the traditional panelled library and the feel of a private members' club". After a meeting in the lounge, residents of the apartments at One Tower Bridge will have the added bonus of being able to go and play a round in the virtual golf room.

In an added twist on the theme, Nick House, co-owner of trendy bars and nightclubs such as Mahiki and Whisky Mist, has said he plans to develop what sounds like a cross between an exclusive club and residence for "ad agency partners and tech start-up founders". The young, rich, members (residents hand-picked by House himself) will reportedly have their own café, climbing wall and underground party room. Homes with a members' club or a members' club with homes?

However, you don't have to be particularly young or rich to enjoy the feeling of having a private club down the corridor. Where there aren't exclusive residents' clubs, many urban developments — such as Beetham Tower in Manchester and The Cube in Birmingham — incorporate hotels, bars, spas and restaurants as well as apartments into the mix, giving residents on-site access to a wide range of facilities.

Once away from town, City gentlemen used to gather in country clubs. This, too, has had a modern makeover. One of the most beautiful of which is The Highland Club, a converted abbey in Fort Augustus on the banks of Loch Ness.

Humphrey Kelsey, a director of developer The Santon Group, says: “The Highland Club's residents' lounge has sofas, a snooker table, a games cupboard and books. It is quite old-school, really. It is based in the old abbey church and still has all the panelling, stained glass and a pulpit. It is used a lot by residents, particularly around Christmas time when they have drinks parties and get-togethers.”

The Highland Club, where homes sell from £195,000, also has a pool, spa and event space to hire. There is also a restaurant, The Boathouse, on the banks of the loch, which is open to the public as well as residents. “We built the facilities because we thought we would need to attract people with extras, as we are an hour away from Inverness airport.” It is a strategy that has paid off. Whether in the town or country, people want to be able to socialise close to home.



5 of 5

*The exterior of The Highland Club*