

Property Market

London's most surprising homes

London adapts to change, and many of its homes now stand out from the crowd. Caroline McGhie visits a few.



Image 5 of 8
 One for time travellers: Wardour Mews, on five storeys, rare 17th-century Soho with a futuristic interior - glass staircases, three bedrooms, three bathrooms, two wine cellars ? at £1.65m through Greater London Properties (020 7734 4062)

By **Caroline McGhie** 9:00AM BST 19 Oct 2010
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If you sit in Flora Daneman's second-floor glass conservatory and look down across her lawn you can see the outdoor swimming pool, and beyond it the Thames flowing by. You could be forgiven for thinking you were in the Home Counties, but this is Putney and London throbs all around. "When people come across the footbridge from the Tube, we all go out into the garden and wave," Flora says.

The house has suited her because she is a children's book illustrator who has recently finished work on *That Dog*, written by the actress Nanette Newman and due to be published next year. This year in her riverside haven, Flora has also been working on pictures of artists as animals - Vincent van Gogh became Vincent van Goat and El Greco became El Gecko - for a book called *The Ark Gallery*, which introduces young readers to great artists.

Her studio above the reception room is a blaze of light. "I believe there are only 18 houses in London that have direct access onto the river," she says. "Most have a road separating the garden from the water,

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unlike this one. We have a wonderful ever-changing river scene, people with boats at high tide and with metal detectors at low tide."

She lived in the same street, Deodar Road, as a small child with her family who are all artistic (her father was an actor, her mother a novelist and ballet dancer with the Royal Ballet, her sister a soprano) and when she first viewed the house she felt that she had been there before. It turned out there had been a nursery in the basement that she had attended as a toddler. She is selling at £3.25m through Savills (020 8780 9900) and Knight Frank (020 8946 0026) as she has fallen in love with a Wiltshire house.

This is what is so extraordinary about London. The ebb and flow of people, the elasticity of the city as it adapts to change, the juxtaposition of trade and culture, the melding of history, fashion and modernity. One minute Clerkenwell is full of clockmakers, the next it is all graphic designers and restaurants. One day the Docklands is a no-go area, the next it is full of city suits. Take a walk through Bermondsey and you feel the ghost of Dickens at your shoulder. London will always have the capacity to surprise.

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Here it was that the Beatles knocked four houses into one in the film Help!. People have been horizontally converting ever since. Here the craze for rooftop hot tubs took off in the last property boom – outdoor safari-style showers, glass extensions, basement dig-outs and warehouse conversions too. Excess, eccentricity and adaptation erupt in the crucible of the city. Anything can happen.

Take a peek through a pair of discreet electronic gates on Battersea High Street, for instance, and you will find a house made of bricks placed on end like books on many shelves, the whole thing curved in the shape of an egg. It is surrounded by high walls but there is plenty of space inside, with two bedrooms and curved kitchen-sitting room leading out onto a sunken patio. John D Wood (020 7228 0174) is asking £575,000. "It is one of a pair built by a developer in the Noughties, which we call the Round Houses. In terms of space and light it is the equivalent of a mansion flat," says Alex Oppenheim at John D Wood.

So much is hidden behind closed doors. Where space is at a premium, every inch must be squeezed from it. Just off Battersea Bridge Road, a tiny three-bedroom mews conceals a huge double-height reception room, with a mezzanine dining room leading to a roof terrace. Pop downstairs to the cellar and it opens out to reveal a heated swimming pool, sauna and party space. "The cost of excavation is about £300 per square foot, but the cost of finished space is £700 to £800 per square foot, so it is worth doing even in Battersea," says Alex, who has valued the house at £1.245m.

Why, these days, shouldn't a mews house turn from stables to a bijou home to a party pad? Even boat-owners are transforming their floating homes into exotica. At Chiswick Pier, a four-bedroom boat called the Victory has been restored with a big woodburner in the living room and three deck patios. A deck-top hot tub means you can bubble away in the company of the ducks, plus there is a sauna. Faron Sutaria (020 8994



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In London, anything goes. A Gothic lodge in Barnes with rainwater harvesting system and underfloor heating, a designer modern pad in historic Dulwich village, a futuristic interior behind a classic Soho facade – this is the city of surprises.

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