

# BEAUTIFUL BASEMENTS

LONDON'S SUBTERRANEAN HOMES ARE COMING UP IN THE WORLD, DISCOVERS **CHERYL MARKOSKY**



## HARCOURT TERRACE, CHELSEA SW10

£1,850,000

Contemporary two-bed, two-bath, lower-ground-floor home with a private garden designed by Randle Siddeley that backs onto communal gardens.

[www.kayehandcarey.co.uk](http://www.kayehandcarey.co.uk)

Once regarded as the property world's poorer relation, the basement flat is enjoying a renaissance as people discover the many advantages of living down under.

"Basement flats aren't what they used to be," explains Felicity Walker from Foxtons in South Kensington. "They're no longer dark, damp and dingy now that we have good artificial and natural lighting, and clever materials."

She reckons if someone wants to do up a basement home properly they should check out an airy, two-bedroom apartment she's marketing in Cornwall Gardens.

"It has floor-to-ceiling glass doors and an incorporated courtyard at the back with a large skylight to admit natural light. Apart from coming off the pavement and down the stairs, you wouldn't know you were in a basement."

One way to convince yourself you're not underground is to ignore the 'b' word. According to Penny Ewing at Finlay Brewer Brook Green, instead it's fashionable today to refer to 'lower ground' or 'raised ground floor'.

"The main benefit of living on the lower ground floor is that it comes with outside space – a patio, terrace or garden – which is gold dust in London," Penny remarks. And if you're really lucky, you get direct access to a communal garden, too.

Tom Tangney of Knight Frank Kensington is a fan of basement apartments. He's currently hunting for one in Pimlico or Battersea for his student offspring, with the main driver being good outdoor space to use in the summer.

He thinks most negatives associated with

basement dwellings, such as security, can be easily remedied with decent locks, laminated windows as robust as car windscreens, and bedrooms facing the garden.

Another major plus is cost. Tom's found that in Pimlico flats on the top two floors cost in the region of £1-1.2 million, while flats below ground are £750,000-950,000. "On average, you're saving about 10%, if not more," he says.

Matthew Kaye, of Kaye and Carey, agrees. "In prime central London a buyer might pay as much as £3,000 per sq ft for a first-floor flat, whereas a basement flat could be only £1,500 a sq ft – a discount of 40-50%."

The benefit for a pet owner's obvious, he adds, with the ability to easily go walkies enhanced by having your own garden.

Alex Taniewski-Elliott of Fyfe McDade thinks basement flats can be a good investment. "I'd buy a three-bedroom flat with a living room that could be turned into a fourth bedroom for students."

He also rates basements as a good way to get on the property ladder. "First-time buyers who can't quite afford a ground-floor flat might be able to run to a cheaper place on a lower level."

A number of people like the fact that your lower-ground-floor home is self-contained with its own entrance, argues Abigail Frankish of Savills Notting Hill. This concept appeals to downsizers who don't want to share 'communal' indoor space.

She likes what she calls her 'hybrids' on Chepstow Villas, with only a few gentle steps



## CAMPDEN HILL COURT, KENSINGTON W8

£2,500,000

Lateral three-bed apartment on lower-ground level of a mansion block, with two bathrooms, reception, kitchen/dining room, porter and communal gardens.

[www.knightfrank.com](http://www.knightfrank.com)



## CHEPSTOW VILLAS, NOTTING HILL W11

£1,575,000

In the heart of Notting Hill, this two-bedroom basement flat has a private entrance and south-facing garden.

[www.savills.com](http://www.savills.com)

down and large French doors onto gardens, "so it feels like a ground floor". Currently, Abigail's selling a two-bedroom hybrid there for £1.575 million.

"Be open-minded and think about the street you're in rather than the flat level," she advises. "Lower-ground flats on certain roads don't feel very basement-y."

Abigail also notes that frequently lower-ground abodes are more spacious. Flats higher up in a building can be smaller, due to staircases, corridors and communal hallways taking away some of the area.

Roomy basement apartments have acquired a certain cachet in prime central London, suggests Jamie Hope, managing director of Maskells.

"In this neck of the woods, we refer to 'grounds and lows' – smart maisonettes ranging over raised ground and lower storeys with the reception room and bedrooms overlooking green spaces," he says.

If you want a prime address, plenty of room and direct access to a prestigious communal garden, one way to afford it is to opt for a less costly home in the lowermost part of a building.

Jamie's selling a five-bedroom apartment on the raised and lower levels of a building in Gledhow Gardens, South Kensington for £3.95 million. Key selling points are direct entry to the communal gardens and a 20ft-wide drawing room overlooking it.

Philip Eastwood concedes that buyers will overlook the fact they're in a basement if

there's a nice garden or patio space. As a result, so-called 'garden flats' – those that are half basements – have risen in popularity.

He says: "Watch out for anyone doing a basement dig nearby, as the noise is likely to travel to neighbouring basements. And listen out for the Tube – it's surprising how far down train rattling noises can travel."

Where damp's historically been a concern, "it is less so in the greatly advanced world of modern treatment and maintenance techniques," points out Robert French, head of Knight Frank's Clapham office.

It's advisable, however, to ensure the flat's been tanked properly, because damp and mould can cause substantial damage to the interior of the flat and affect air quality, comments Marina Filichkina of Tranio.

"Open up rooms wherever possible and stick to light, neutral and minimalistic décor and furnishings," recommends Lisa-Jane Stratton at Benham and Reeves Residential Lettings.

She counsels her landlords to make sure the kitchen and bathroom are of the highest possible specifications, and install 100% halogen ceiling lights, modern wall lights and mirrors to reflect light and visually double the width of rooms.

It's worth looking beneath the surface at basement flats, or combined 'grounds and lows', for better value, additional interior space and your very own garden. For this rediscovered property type, things are definitely looking up. 🏠



#### GLEDHOW GARDENS, SOUTH KENSINGTON SW5

£3,950,000

Five-bed lower- and raised-ground-floor flat with three bathrooms, two reception rooms, 20ft-wide drawing room and direct access to communal gardens.

[www.maskells.co.uk](http://www.maskells.co.uk)



#### FIELDING ROAD, SHEPHERD'S BUSH W14

£660,000

Two-bed garden flat with its own entrance, reception with fireplace and south-facing garden, near Shepherd's Bush Tube and Westfield Shopping Centre.

[www.finlaybrewer.co.uk](http://www.finlaybrewer.co.uk)



#### CORNWALL GARDENS, SOUTH KENSINGTON SW7

£1,750,000

Roomy, two-bed, lower-ground-floor flat with wooden floors, patio, private courtyard and access to communal gardens.

[www.foxtons.co.uk](http://www.foxtons.co.uk)

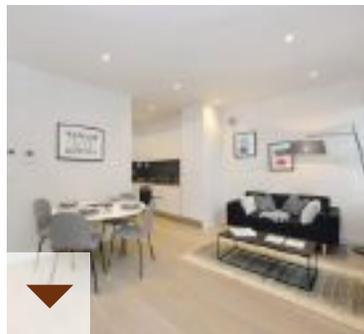


#### HANDEL STREET, BLOOMSBURY WC1

£849,999

Two-bed period Georgian conversion with large reception room, rear conservatory, patio garden and under-pavement storage.

[www.fyfemcdafe.com](http://www.fyfemcdafe.com)



#### MALVERN HOUSE, LONDON FIELDS E8

£795,000

New three-bed, lower-ground-floor flat in a converted building with Bosch appliances, and minutes from the eateries and bars of Kingsland Road, Broadway Market and London Fields' railway arches.

[www.currell.com](http://www.currell.com)



#### DALLING ROAD, BRACKENBURY VILLAGE W6

£525,000

Modern one-bed maisonette in light open-plan style, with its own front door, double bedroom, shower room and study area.

[www.finlaybrewer.co.uk](http://www.finlaybrewer.co.uk)

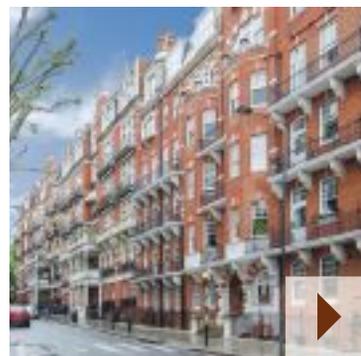


#### BATTERSEA PARK ROAD, BATTERSEA SW11

£460,000

Lower-ground-floor flat with open-plan kitchen/reception, one double bedroom and private patio garden.

[www.savills.com](http://www.savills.com)



#### AIRLIE GARDENS, KENSINGTON W8

£2,650,000

Airy four-bed apartment on lower-ground level with reception and dining rooms, private patio garden and access to communal gardens.

[www.knightfrank.com](http://www.knightfrank.com)