

COOL POOLS

As temperatures rise, a pool's essential. But does it help sell a house, asks Cheryl Markosky

A luxury villa in Puerto Banus near Marbella is expected to fetch millions at auction – thanks to the pool highlighting a Picasso drawing signed by the artist during a visit in the 1960s.

Not every pool has such a claim to fame, but for some purchasers the right pool can make all the difference as to whether they'll sign a contract making them the new owner of a property.

James Cleland, regional head of Knight Frank Surrey, believes pools are as popular as ever on his patch. "People have a rose-tinted view. When the sun comes out, they all want one."

At the top end of the market, James reckons a pool is a critical part of the picture. "It definitely heads the list of must-haves, compared to cinemas and games rooms."

A few years ago, pools were like Marmite – you either loved or hated them – according to Simon Ashwell, who runs Savills in Weybridge. "But more people are asking for pools now, as our summers are becoming hotter."

He believes it's also part of the current inside-outside trend, with bi-fold doors opening onto gardens with exterior entertaining zones. This relaxed way of living makes pools more flexible beasts.

"I've seen pools that can function as a fountain or water feature when you're not actually swimming in them. It's nice to sit out at night and admire the moon's reflection on the surface of the water," Simon says.

There's also a fashion for weird and wonderful pool linings in copper or black, but Charlie Wells of buying agency Prime Purchase doesn't think they're very attractive and won't appeal to everyone.

"Stepping into a pool with black tiles is a bit like stepping into an oily pit," he declares. "Thankfully, blue will always prevail, as you can't beat a deep blue turquoise when it comes to a beautiful pool."

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Niccolo Barattieri di San Pietro, CEO of Northacre, has just had an inviting, David Hockney-style pool installed at The Broadway in Westminster, along with a gym, and games and treatment rooms.

He takes the view that a pool has to be a happy place and the colour of the water's important – "it must create vibrancy. Some people try to be a bit too cool, but a black pool just looks like a sad lake."

Interestingly, Niccolo isn't sure he would include a pool in his project if it was aimed at singletons who he thinks care more about art and furniture collections.

As target buyers at The Broadway are families – and families mean kids who like to swim – a pool's an important marketing tool. But it has to be "authentic", he surmises.

Now, more people expect hotel-type amenities beyond the basic offering in developments, creating increasingly sophisticated pool facilities that attract a premium.

CBRE Residential's Jack Hudson, who's selling homes at White City Living in west London, points out that residents benefit from "generous swimming and hydrotherapy pools opening onto a sun terrace, making the most of indoor-outdoor living."

Don't think of a pool in isolation, urges Simon. "You might have heat – a chimera or fire-pit – comfortable seating and good lighting taking the whole pool experience to another level."

James is a big fan of alfresco "dining loggias – a fireplace, dining table and outdoor kitchen in an appealing environment where you can spend a decent amount of time".

The way forward is to add wellness areas with hammams, ice plunge pools, sauna and steam rooms, and incorporate dining and entertaining facilities to enhance pool spaces, suggests Trevor Kearney, director of Savills' country department.

"Certain high-end buyers view a pool as a must-have feature, reflecting the premium lifestyle they lead," he remarks. "And yes, a pool can add value, although it's difficult to quantify."

Rosy Khalastchy, senior negotiator at Beauchamp Estates, argues that "a pool definitely adds value for the person who wants it, but it's not a tool to help sell a property".

She thinks a pool can be a nuisance sometimes. "It can be expensive to run, at around £50,000-£60,000 a year, and you can end up hosting a swimming club for your kids' friends."

International buyers from warmer climes are used to having a pool, regarded as a status symbol in their home countries. At the end of the day, however, a number of people want a pool purely for exercise.

"Recently, I had a lettings inquiry from a woman who said she had to have a 10-metre pool in her rentals home for health reasons," explains Rosy.

Like a transformer, a pool with the facility to transmute into something else is growing in popularity. Swimming pool bases – that are hydraulic and can rise up to create a party room when not in use – are all the rage.

Charlie's had a glimpse of one with "a glass floor at the bottom so you could see the water while dancing above it, which was a nice touch".

Daniel Dagers from Knight Frank's super-prime team is about to launch a house with a glass-sided pool. "You can see people swimming in the pool from the games room."

He also notes that pools are getting bigger – 25 or 30 metres – and fingerprint-activated security systems to gain access solve security and safety fears.

Which pool you favour – indoor, outdoor or even wild – is down to individual taste. But even Picasso liked lounging near the water; that is, when he wasn't busy creating a masterpiece inside it. 🏠



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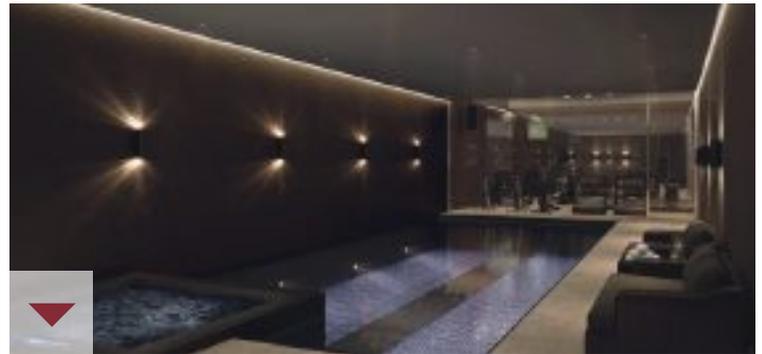
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