



HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

Should you buy a home in the run-up to December 25? Cheryl Markosky gets seasonal advice from the experts

At a time when the focus is on parties, shopping and carol singing, you might think it best to avoid house-hunting. However, purchasing during the period leading up to Christmas could mean the perfect Noel for a dedicated seeker.

Marsh & Parsons sales director Alex Lyle believes it's genuinely a great time to make a purchase. He says there's often a sheep mentality with property – when people are hesitant to buy, others follow them.

"Potential purchasers can do well when there's less competition," he explains. "Motivated vendors need or want to sell, so if you make an offer now, you could be in your new home for Christmas."

Robin Chatwin, Savills' head of south-west London, points out that Christmas marks a line in the sand. Many sellers want to know their house has sold by then, so it's advisable for buyers to take action.

They could take advantage of a 'soft launch' – when a home is informally shown before officially going onto the market in the New Year – and be one step ahead of the crowd. "It's good to have a feel for the upcoming spring market," he suggests.

Robin also urges vendors to welcome yuletide visits from particularly keen purchasers. "One guy contacted me to say he's coming to London for four days over Christmas to see some property." Scrooges unwilling to admit him could lose out.

Property developers with financial years finishing at the end of December like to close deals before their deadlines, says Paul Cosgrove of Finlay Brewer. Some say that the last units aren't always the best units, but Paul doesn't agree.

He recalls an investor getting a good price on a final apartment that he later managed to resell for 40% more than he'd originally paid. "You might think that a grey November day isn't the best time to view, but there are opportunities out there."



EATON MEWS SOUTH, BELGRAVIA SW1

£4,350,000

If he's making a list and checking it twice, you might want to add this three-bed mews house with integrated music system, roof terrace and reception/kitchen room with wood floors.

www.foxtons.co.uk

Garrington Property Finders' Nicholas Finn reports that over the past few years he's clinched some outstanding new home deals just before Christmas.

"I negotiated 18% off the price of a property at One Tower Bridge that exchanged on December 18 and completed on December 21," he remarks. He also had the price reduced on a unit at South Bank Tower by 19%.

Despite such gains, buyers must be careful when selecting the last one or two homes on a new-build site, cautions Nicholas. "You don't want a property over a bus stop or near a noisy junction."

In order for a sale to go through smoothly before Christmas, everyone involved – notably solicitors, agents and removal companies – needs to cooperate, he adds.

Elaine Stratford, sales and marketing director at Bewley Homes, says that long holidays give buyers a chance to move without having to take unnecessary leave from their employment.

She's observed customers, including those with small children, pushing to relocate quickly just ahead of Christmas. "Having a brand-new kitchen in which to cook that turkey inspires them to get out there and combine a move with wrapping presents."

Elaine's customers have generally been happy with their Christmastime moves, even though the weather can cause issues. "Laying turf's impossible in cold conditions and more care is required from removal teams to protect new carpets."

And yet, Elaine wouldn't recommend everyone rushes to move at Christmas when staff members are stretched to capacity. "Consistent and thorough moving processes offer the best possible experience for our customers, and that's a far greater focus here."



LONDON SQUARE, CANADA WATER SE16 FROM £670,000

Only four apartments left at this new scheme minutes from the station and with views of Canary Wharf and the City. Buy now and you can move in by Christmas.

www.londonsquare.co.uk



BATTERSEA HOUSE, BATTERSEA SW11

£10,500,000

Naughty or nice? Definitely nice. A six-bed, six-bath house with walled garden and separate coach house with parking, gym and study.

www.aylesford.com



DUNSTABLE MEWS, MARYLEBONE W1

£2,750,000

Close to Marylebone Village boutiques for last-minute shopping, this two-bed, two-bath mews house could top most Christmas wish lists.

www.lurotbrand.co.uk



James Greenwood of Stacks Property Search sensibly advises bringing the date forward to the end of November if you want to move by Christmas, in the event that best-laid plans will almost certainly break down.

“Also, give consideration to why you want to move by Christmas. Add unpacked boxes, unfamiliar boiler, no telephone or internet and the difficulties of understanding a new house to the usual Christmas chaos and you have a recipe for total meltdown.”

James recommends instead exchanging contracts before Christmas with the completion date set some time near the end of January.

Knight Frank’s Tom Tangney warns sellers to make sure no Christmas decorations appear in photographs shot for brochures during the Christmas season. “When buyers look at the details in the New Year, it will look like last year’s stock.”

Tom believes you can tie a ribbon around a Christmas deal with added effort. He once had a sale that was dragging on. Both vendor and purchaser were keen to complete, as both wives were expecting babies and wanted to move before they arrived.

“It did mean two sets of solicitors working very closely to get the deal done, which they did with only 24 hours to spare. A close-run thing,” he recalls with relief.

Year-end can be a good time to negotiate favourable deals, both in the second-hand market and new-build sector, sums up Guy Meacock from buying agency Prime Purchase.

“But you still have to be led by the product and buy a property because it’s good quality, not just because of the discount.”

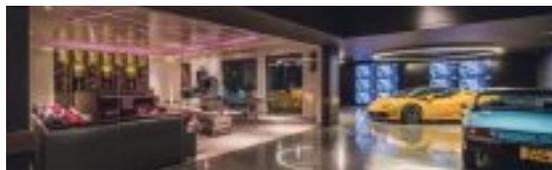
And remember, no one will look a gift horse in the mouth. After all, “a new home is a nice Christmas present for a husband or wife,” Robin declares wryly. Perhaps it’s time to post that note to Santa. 🏠

ASHCHURCH GROVE, RAVENCOURT PARK W12

£3,250,000

Plenty of room for everyone to open gifts and enjoy Christmas lunch in this restored period five-bed house with high ceilings and open-plan spaces.

www.finlaybrewer.co.uk



WINNINGTON ROAD, HAMPSTEAD GARDEN SUBURB N2

£15,750,000

Santa, take note: games/entertainment room overlooking eight-car garage/showroom for him, and a cinema and large master bedroom suite for her in this contemporary house behind the original façade.

www.arlingtonresidential.com



THURLEIGH ROAD, BETWEEN THE COMMONS SW12

£6,000,000

Make someone’s day by popping the keys to this double-fronted house with gym, hot tub, steam shower room and three-bed pavilion in their Christmas stocking.

www.savills.com



CANNING PLACE, KENSINGTON W8

£6,500,000

Excellent entertaining space in a double-height kitchen/family room in this five-bed, three-bath period house.

www.knightfrank.co.uk

ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS A...

- Roomy townhouse with a dining area to accommodate the family for dinner, a high ceiling for a tall tree, and underfloor heating to keep everyone cosy.
- Thatched cottage with an Aga big enough to roast the goose and a blazing fire in the living room.
- Brand-new apartment where everything works and that comes with a balcony where you can sip champagne and watch the New Year fireworks.
- Country home with a field and perhaps some stables for the pony your daughter has on her Christmas wish list.
- Waterfront holiday home with a mooring for a boat so you can get away from it all.