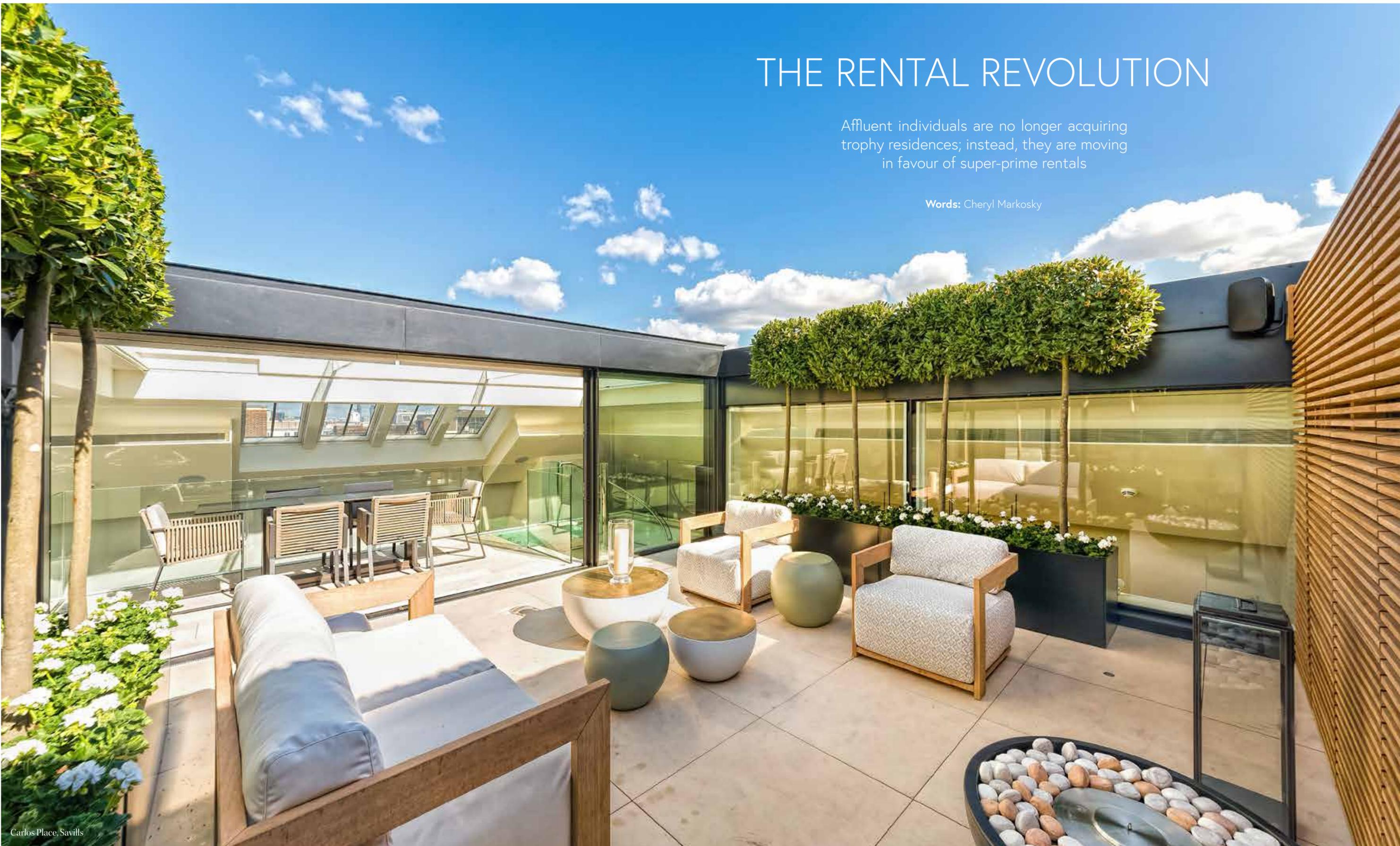


THE RENTAL REVOLUTION

Affluent individuals are no longer acquiring trophy residences; instead, they are moving in favour of super-prime rentals

Words: Cheryl Markosky



Renting is the new buying for millionaires. According to research from Knight Frank, demand for £5,000-plus a week super-prime property is the highest it's been for seven years, as short-term tenants and would-be buyers wait and see what will happen with Brexit and the global economy. There were 153 super-prime tenancies agreed in the year to June, up 20% on the previous 12 months.

Houses on the sales market not attaining guide prices – like a smart home on Notting Hill's Clarendon Road – are being quietly rented. "There were offers in the late £20 millions, but the owner wanted to get £30m. So we let the property at £17,500 a week to a Swiss fund manager for three years," explains David Mumby, Knight Frank's regional lettings manager.

The emergence of this uber-tenant is also in part a disguised stamp duty savings scheme, points out Trevor Abrahmsohn at Glentree Estates. "If you buy and sell a super-mansion, stamp duty and other fees amount to 20% of the purchase price – £6m alone for a property worth £30m. This gives the canny renter a budget of £1.2m per annum (or £23,000 a week) over five years."

Many top-end tenants treat this as a 'try before you buy' scheme, with an option to purchase or first refusal written into the rentals contract, says Isabella Birch Reynardson, director of Savills Super Prime Lettings. "Some high-end clients rent while building work's carried out on their homes, while for others it's a way to get into good school catchment areas," she says.

SETTING THE STANDARDS

Landlords can profit from sky-high rentals, but the wealthy can be exacting, cautions James Wyatt of Barton Wyatt in Surrey, who has let homes to actors Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt and Russell Crowe. "They want new, fully-furnished, luxury homes with pools, high levels of privacy and security, underground parking and staff accommodation."

Among the company's rental properties is a gated country mansion in leafy Surrey available at £32,000 a month, featuring 10 bedrooms, 10 bathrooms and seven reception rooms, as well as highlights such as a pool, gym, steam and cinema rooms, and chandeliered kitchen for the ultimate in opulent entertaining. Often, tenants' exacting needs require a little remodelling. Knight Frank converted a tennis court into a pop-up gym with 40,000 lbs of equipment for Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson at a nine-bed Richmond mansion while he was filming a *Fast and Furious* spin-off.

Similarly, in the sports world, touring athletes often want the comforts – and personalisation

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– of homes to aid their training regime. For example, tennis star Novak Djokovic needs space to accommodate an oxygen chamber to enhance recovery after playing grand slams.

"Elite athletes wanting a good night's sleep demand blackout blinds and comfort cooling," explains Stephen O'Kane, associate director of Savills corporate services department. Another leading player wanted "a garage large enough to hold God knows how many cars. It was odd, as he was only there for a short time," says O'Kane. "When would he have time to buy them?"

Jo Eccles of Sourcing Property recalls: "One young footballer demanded an entire room to house his collection of cartoon character memorabilia. It was like a section of Hamleys."

PRIME PRIVACY

Signing a non-disclosure agreement is *de rigueur* at this end of the market, adds Black Bricks' Camilla Dell. Private gyms – "the super-rich aren't comfortable working out with everyone else" – massage rooms and space for trainers and nutritionists is also vital.

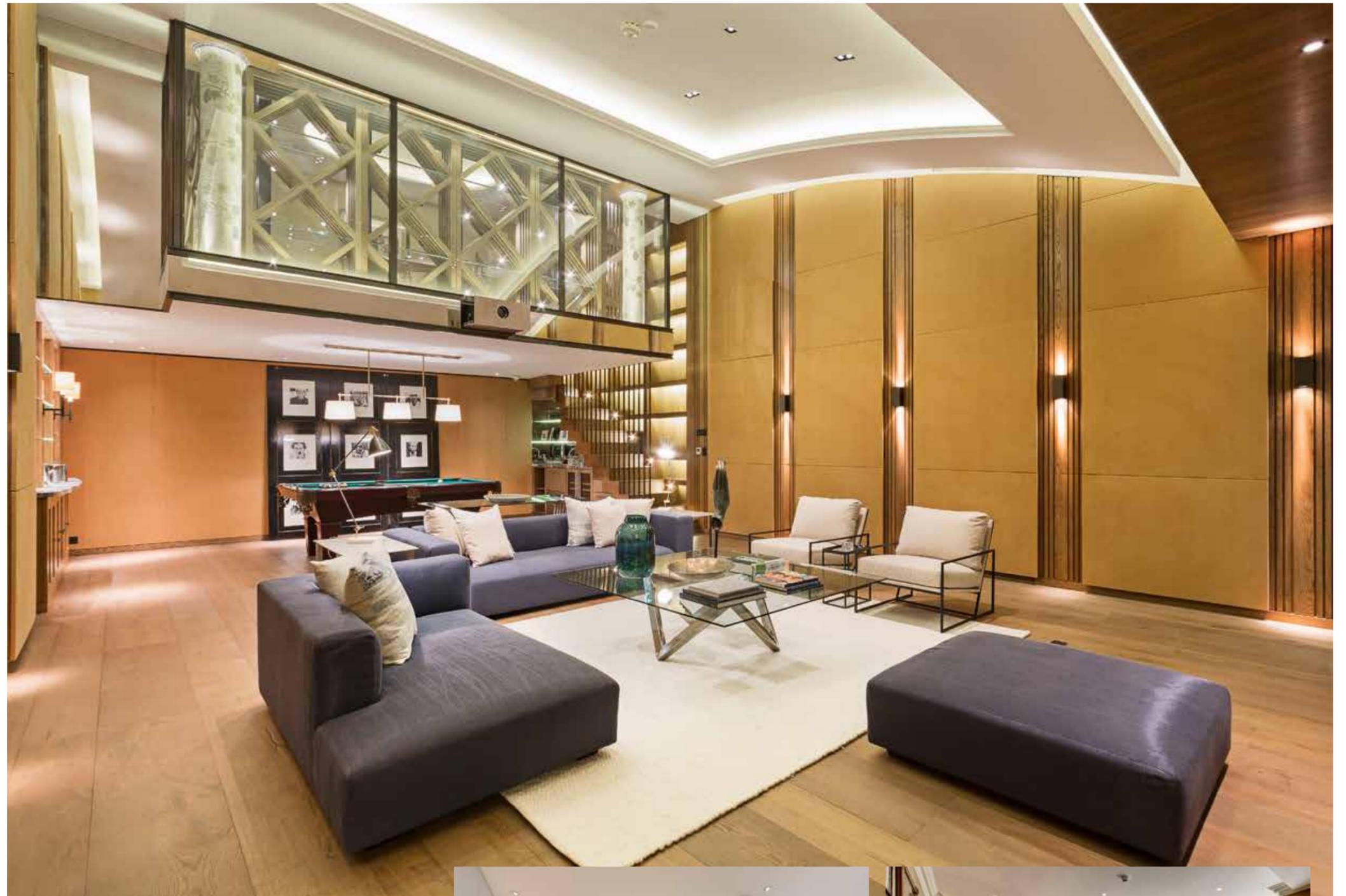
However, while the temptation to mimic the trend of fully-serviced residences to lure high net worth individuals in might be irresistible, Martin Bikhit of Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Kay & Co believes landlords shouldn't try too hard.

"Will a home with a 200-metre wine cellar opposed to a 100-metre wine cellar really rent better?" Bikhit asks, suggesting that landlords should instead focus on providing good-sized rooms, storage, and quality kitchens and bathrooms to keep upper echelon renters happy.

Grand examples of these rental properties can be found both in the capital and home counties, rivalling serviced hotel residences for their built-in but utterly private amenities.

Sotheby's International Realty offers a contemporary-meets-period home in Tilney Street with a dining room for 12, ornate fireplaces, winding staircases and services available from the nearby Dorchester Hotel – all from £12,000 per week – while in Chelsea's Drayton Gardens, discerning tenants can have it all in a £8,250-per-week family house close to Fulham Road's bars and shops, available from Aylesford International. The master suite covers the entire first floor, a reception/dining room leads onto the garden and keeping fit's easy in a private gym.

In Bayswater, a remodelled period house let by Kinleigh Folkard & Hayward allows renters to maximise modern luxe living with a large gallery, spacious gym, cinema room and landscaped gardens. A big bonus of this £14,000-per-week property is electronic off-street parking for two cars, ensuring that this home-to-rent is as future-proof as it comes. **T**



Clockwise from left: The Bishop's Avenue, Knight Frank; Kensington Park Gardens, Knight Frank; Drayton Gardens, Aylesford International; Tilney Street, Mayfair, Sotheby's International Realty