

# Can't cook, won't cook

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**Kitchens are out. Convenience is in. Cheryl Markosky enters the world of the cash rich, time poor**

You could be forgiven if you thought you had strolled into a Ralph Lauren showroom with a dash of Prada thrown in at Alon Mahpud's tastefully understated apartment in De Vere Gardens, opposite Hyde Park. It helps, of course, that Alon is the former managing director of Prada and now runs a company blending fashion with interior design.

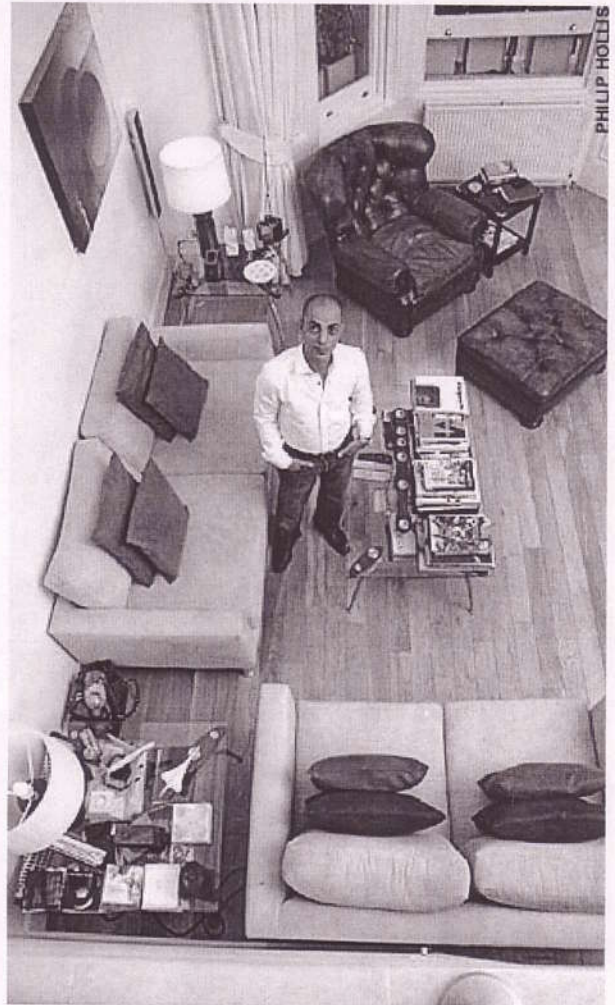
With oak flooring, Ralph Lauren furniture, revealing glass-walled bathrooms and a mezzanine kitchen/breakfast room decked out with the latest SMEG appliances, Alon's contemporary pad is exactly the kind of place a City bachelor or professional couple would love to inhabit.

Three years ago, he gutted the three-bedroom flat and created two large bedrooms, both with en suites, and the lofty spaces that are de rigueur these days for sexy apartment living.

"It is all about keeping it simple," insists Alon, 38, who has stuck to elegant taupes, browns and beiges. But he has also installed desirable toys such as the 42in plasma screen and new Sony DVD system in the living room. The screen can be moved forward and turned round if you are in the kitchen, and there's another plasma in the bedroom.

"A lot of my friends who are American, French or City boys want bigger practical spaces, which means well-designed apartments. The last thing they want is to come home at 8pm to maintain a house," he says.

People aged 25 to 40 want to hang out in spacious apartments with state-of-the-art kitchens, although they probably eat out most nights. They surrender some bedrooms in exchange for extra living space. Being close to the action is crucial. Alon is five minutes from Chelsea, 10 from the West End and 20 from Heathrow Airport.



Simply elegant: Alon Mahpud in his central London flat designed to create a feeling of space

Figures from the Institute for Public Policy Research show we are fast turning into a nation of singletons, with 29 per cent of all households consisting of only one occupant. These figures are predicted to rise to 35 per cent by 2021.

Wise developers chase these changing demographics. Some 40 per cent of the 14,000 new homes built by Barratt Homes last year were flats, compared with 20 per cent a decade ago.

Tastes have changed too, with apartment living often the first choice of the latest generation of homebuyers, according to Barratt's chief executive David Pretty. "These people want to live in stunning modern buildings, unlike earlier generations, who were put off by the failure of 1960s tower