

Can't cook, won't cook

(Filed: 05/10/2006)

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.

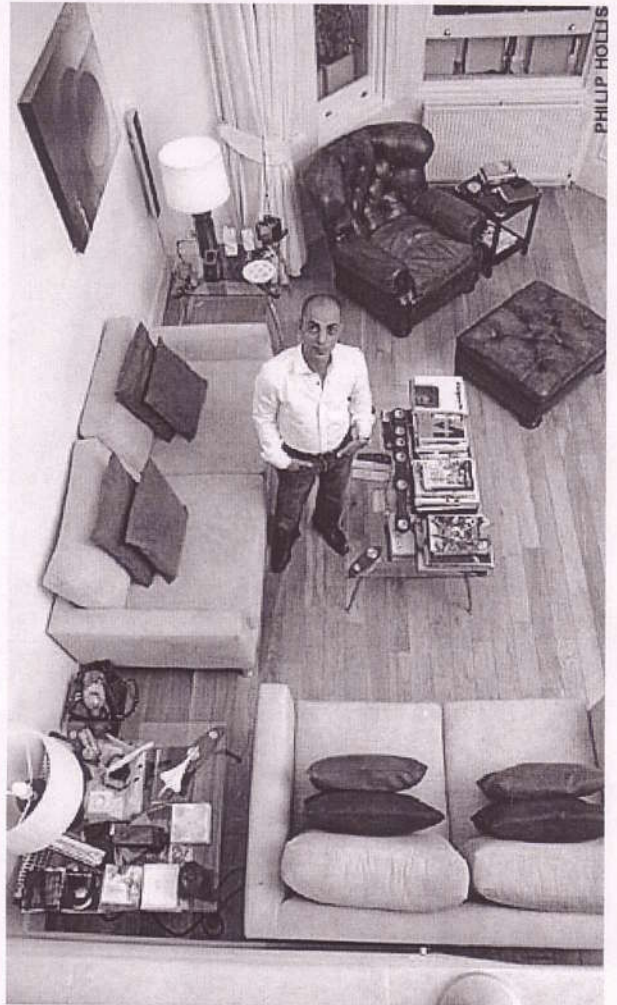
With oak flooring, Ralph Lauren furniture, revealing glass-walled bathrooms and a mezzanine kitchen/breakfast room decked out with the latest SMEG appliances, Alon's contemporary pad is exactly the kind of place a City bachelor or professional couple would love to inhabit.

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

blocks," he says.

House finder Robert Bailey applauds developers such as Barratt and Berkeley Homes, who are creating the kind of lofty apartment spaces and services his buyers like. "If your Bose stereo system goes up the creek, the hall porter can let the maintenance person in," he says. "You can't do that with a house in Fulham." Bailey finds it ironic, however, that the architecture is spectacular in schemes like Montevetro and Albion Riverside in Battersea, "but in reality, the lifestyle isn't there. You can't just pop around the corner for a decent meal. And central developments like The Knightsbridge are not architecturally exciting".

Art curator Tara Howard opted for a central location rather than grand vistas of the Thames, but she hasn't skimped on space.

Three years ago, she bought an exceptionally large one-bedroom apartment on the first floor of a converted Georgian house in Craven Street, between the Strand and the Embankment, for £340,000. Charing Cross station is a minute away, Covent Garden is across the street and the river bus takes you to Canary Wharf and the City.

"If you think in terms of cubic feet you get more for your money," 42-year-old Tara says, adding that high ceilings can make all the difference to the feel of a London apartment. "Besides the unusual height here, this is a wonderful place to be." Tara says she walks everywhere, to the galleries for work and to the theatres. And she is undoubtedly an expert on eateries, from her local, the Ship & Shovel pub down Craven Passage, to Sheekeys in Cecil Court "and the very eccentric bar on the first floor of Simpsons on the Strand".

Having bought her flat from a traditional professor from Cambridge, she removed the gold and red silk damask and modernised the place. The only catch is the tiny kitchen, which has a sink that is so small it had to be sourced from a ship's suppliers.

But cooking is not high on the list of priorities for Tara or people like her in London apartments today.

"If I stay in, I microwave things from M&S," she admits.

"As my brother also doesn't care about having a kitchen, neither of us do Christmas lunch. We go to The Crown pub." By doing without a large kitchen, Tara has benefited from a grand dining/living room and good-sized double bedroom. She is now selling to move in with her boyfriend.

"It is more about quality of space than number of rooms," explains agent Martin Bikhit from Kay & Co, who is selling Tara's apartment for £495,000.

He explains: "People don't always want loads of small bedrooms and I advise investors to go after large one-bed flats rather than medium-sized two-beds. They are far better value."

Living in an apartment in the centre of London appeals to people who are out a lot, adds Bikhit. "It is a time thing, and if you are a hard-working professional working nearby you can save hours."

Contacts Alon Mahpud's apartment is for sale through John D Wood (020 7835 0000); for Tara Howard's apartment, Kay & Co (020 7636 2000); Robert Bailey Property (020 7352 0899).

Try these...

£750,000

The Parliamentarian, SW1

This one-bedroom apartment is just under 1,000 sq ft. It has a large reception room - for the young parliamentarian's soirées, perhaps. Douglas & Gordon (020 7931 8200).

£1.7m

Butlers Wharf, Shad Thames

Riverside apartment in warehouse conversion with 31-foot living room/kitchen, balcony with views of Tower Bridge, lift, parking and 24-hour concierge. Cluttons (020 7407 3669).

£10m

Kensington Palace Gardens, W8

As good as it gets, this David Chipperfield-designed three-bed second-floor flat has two studies, a salon with 18-foot ceiling, resident porter, staff room and wine room. Aylesford (020 7351 2383).

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