

Safety first on wish list when the wealthy go house-hunting

Most of us have a house-hunting wish list. It must have an eat-in kitchen perhaps, or a small patch of garden. But it would never occur to the normal Londoner to insist on viewing only flats above the first floor, in case a photographer taped his camera to a broom handle and poked it up at a window to get an unguarded shot of the occupants.

Robert Bailey, a buying agent at the top end of the market, assures me this has been done. It really is different for the rich. "The ability of people to get to

the front door is an increasing concern," he says. "The house must have front garden or curtilage so people can't get close and bang on the windows."

Security is the prime concern. Celebrities demand property with a number of points of access, preferably where they will be able to drive into a garage and get into the house without being seen. Secure off-road parking used to be all about protecting an expensive car from theft or damage. Now, says Simon Barnes – another property consultant to the

super-rich – the main concern is personal safety.

"In Holland Park you could pay £20 million for a house and not be able to park outside," says Barnes. "In the short distance between car and front door, you are exposed."

Whether this fear is justified is debatable. There are well-documented cases of home owners in wealthy areas being targeted by muggers. But Simon Barnes recalls spending three hours at a property waiting for model Naomi Campbell. When she did arrive, she was convinced



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she was being followed and shot off again without stepping out of her car. The vehicle behind was a black cab, delivering someone to an address in the same road.

There are properties where you can drive into a gated development, such as Wycombe Square in Kensington, park in the underground car park and take a lift into your home. Or in Chester Square – where Lady Thatcher and Roman Abramovich have homes – mews houses at the back allow access to the main house.

Trees in front of houses are another no-no, again

thanks to the agility of the paparazzi. Cutting edge interior design goes without saying – although, says Robert Bailey, some old rockers still cling to their Gothic fantasies.

It can come down to what you are used to. Americans like security, Europeans favour period and will consider mansion flats, Middle Eastern buyers demand lots of parking and the Russians like lateral conversions in white stucco.

But there are some bizarre demands. One high-worth woman insisted on a property with an angel over it, and

another needed room for her two enormous parrot cages by Joseph Paxton, designer of the Crystal Palace. "Buyers have changed over the past five years," says Simon Barnes. "A well-fitted gym and a dedicated media room are what people expect."

Wiring, communication cabling and practical technology is demanded as standard, down to a security system which lets the owner view the property from anywhere in the world, so they can see what the staff are up to in their absence.

"It does become very anoraky," says Barnes.