

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Section 10

Home



The £1m makeover

How to put a glass box on a Grade I-listed house



The (second) great escape

The family who fled to Scotland for peace and quiet when Devon got 'too suburban'

pages 10-11

Toffs turned builders

The noble Italian family with a smart line in Umbrian farmhouse conversions

pages 24-25



Nick Kane/Arcaid.co.uk/Stuart Clarke



How do you improve on the work of the great Regency architect John Nash? HUGH PEARMAN finds out in Regent's Park

Regent's Park, London. Not just a park, not just a zoo, but a sublime exercise in Georgian town planning — the Prince Regent in question being “Prinny”, later to become George IV. His architect-developer of genius, John Nash, laid out the park and the stately terraces and villas that surround it. I've long wondered what it was like to live behind one of those imposing facades. Well, it's just as I thought: very agreeable. And very expensive.

Regent's Park was conceived in 1812. Nash connected it to central London by a sequence of new roads including (naturally) Regent Street. The clever thing about Regent's Park, however, is that while it might look like a big open space, it is, in fact, a surprisingly dense housing development — though not as dense as Nash had planned. The scheme ran out of money, and his royal patron died before he could build up the park much more.

Of the 460 private properties there today, one of its best parts is Hanover Terrace. Built in 1823, it was designed by Nash himself rather than handed over to other architects.

And this is where I find myself ringing one of the doorbells to look at a Grade 1-listed house that has been discreetly modernised (it has to be discreet, the landlord round here being the Crown Estate) by a Bostonian family in the banking business. It's a £1m-plus renovation and glass extension to a house that cost — well, that hasn't been divulged. But other houses in the terrace are today valued at more than £5m, so this one is likely to have been at least £4m when it was bought in 2002. This takes into account the cost of extending the lease from 40 to 130 years, which is not something the Crown Estate does on a property like this for less than £800,000. Oh, and it also includes the little mews house at the end of the garden, now a gym with a guest flat above.

Then there is the cost of maintenance. Talking to the owners, who want to stay anonymous, I find that you have to keep Nash's cream stucco in tip-top condition or the Crown Estate will be after you. This means repainting the entire front of the house to the approved formula every four years — at about £20,000 a



Modernising the master

time. Think how much money and paint could have been saved over the years if Nash had finished his buildings in plain brick.

But buying a complete house in a Nash terrace overlooking Regent's Park is like buying a Rolls-Royce Phantom — if you're in the market for that kind of

thing, then you're not going to be too bothered about the running costs.

So what do I find? A five-storey, four-bedroom house with a semi-basement nanny flat. Where the main interiors have been done up in ultra-conservative, big-banker style (though with giant plasma-screen televisions and

a built-in sound system throughout). The main reception rooms have amazingly high ceilings, but feel a bit dead — signs of life appear when you get to the upper floors and encounter the joyous mess of the children's bedrooms. The real heart of the house has now moved backwards, into a two-storey,

glass-box extension designed by Shahriar Nasser of Belsize Architects.

Although this represents only about £130,000 of the overall renovation cost of £1,050,000, it is clearly where Nasser has had most scope: it's the part he wants to show me. And with the wife and mother of the house stationed

there making coffee and banana bread, while children come and go, we soon gravitate there.

“We more or less live in the back of the house here,” she explains. “Even when the big games are on television.”

No problem watching the big games on all those screens everywhere — there's an even



A rear view, left, of architect Shahriar Nasser's £130,000 extension at 5 Hanover Terrace. Above, left to right: the row designed by Nash in 1823; the view from the extension; the remodelled kitchen

bigger one, a proper roll-down cinema screen, in the bottom half of the glass box, with folding doors behind the glass to provide blackout. There's pinball and table footy down there too, plus a bar. As for the kitchen on the level above, it's sort-of-modern but, with its conventional joinery, far

from high-tech. "We're American," says my hostess firmly, "and we take the view that if you have a kitchen, it should look like a kitchen."

Nasser happily admits that he lost a few small battles with the forces of conservatism when it came to his ideas for the house, but why should he

worry? They were very happy with the glass box. Rightly so — it is neatly done, right down to a frameless, double-glazed glass door leading out to the paved garden yard at the back (Nash was not a great one for big gardens in town, particularly with his stonking great park out the front). Since

it faces west into the sun, it's got quite a lot of reflective tint on it, but there's a back-up air-conditioning unit in the kitchen as well.

Looking at the backs of this Nash terrace, the glass box is positively reticent — certainly much less domineering than the earlier extension efforts of

some of the neighbours. "It's a neighbourhood here," says our hostess. "There are other children living to both sides, the kids can run about in the park. It's a family house, not a show place."

And yes, that's exactly how it feels. Just a London terraced house with families in it.

Nash would have liked that. And the speculator in him would have just loved today's Regents Park house prices, too.

Belsize architects, 020 7482 4420, www.belsizearchitects.com; The Crown Estate, 020 7210 4377, www.thecrownestate.co.uk

The Pimlico Apartments Westminster SW1

Superb new show apartment now open

OVER 65% SOLD IN FIRST PHASE



- Ideal investment opportunity
- Luxuriously appointed 2 & 3 bed apartments
- From £505 per square foot
- Concierge service
- Carpets and flooring included
- Granite worksurfaces
- Video entry system
- CCTV for added security
- Secure underground parking with electronically controlled gates
- Just a few hundred yards from Pimlico tube, the Tate Gallery and the River Thames
- Within walking distance of Parliament, Victoria Station, St James's Park and the South Bank
- First phase now ready for occupation

VISIT OUR NEW SHOW APARTMENT FOR DETAILS OF OUR SPECIAL INCENTIVES*

Prices from £420,000 including parking
Call today for details of this exciting opportunity
020 7630 5785

SHOW APARTMENT OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK
60 VAUXHALL BRIDGE ROAD
10AM - 6PM WEEKDAYS 11AM - 5PM WEEKENDS
NEAREST PARKING VINCENT SQUARE

*Incentives apply to selected apartments only, subject to terms and conditions. Prices correct at time of going to press.

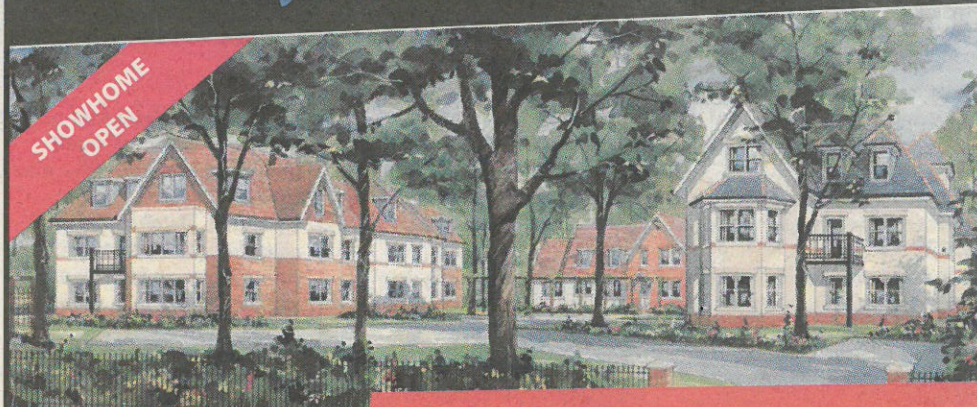


CHARLES CHURCH
www.charles-church.co.uk

Charles Church

It's a whole lot easier

with Easymover



Plot 13 – 2 bedroom apartment at £249,000 – simply amazing

Like to live in one of the most sought-after locations in Poole but got a property to sell first? Or maybe you fancy a holiday home close to Poole Harbour and the beach, within easy reach of Bournemouth's shops and restaurants! Easymover* can help you out. In fact we've got a range of offers* to ease your move. Call now and let's talk.

POOLE
BARRINGTON GATE, Branksome Park, Poole, Dorset
2 & 3 bedroom apartments from £249,000
Sales Centre open daily 10am – 5pm

01202 769806

www.georgewimpey.co.uk

*Offers available on selected plots, subject to status and George Wimpey's normal terms and conditions.

George Wimpey