

Ed O'Donnell: Resi developments must pull out all the stops to make a great first impression

The easiest – and often most overlooked – way for resi developers to outdo the competition is through characterful and distinctive design, says Ed O'Donnell.



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Even in a seller's market, you can have a cracking property in a coveted location and still not bag a sale – all because your interiors fail to excite prospective buyers, writes Ed O'Donnell.

The competition's tough. Or in the case of residential towers, steep. Each soaring totem claims to be an architectural masterpiece, a new icon on London's increasingly pointy skyline. And each one promises big views, hotel-like lobbies, private cinemas, communal lounges, gyms, spas, terraces, and at least one hot guy in a fluffy robe. These things, while desirable, are no longer exceptional. They're the norm for anyone with a healthy budget.

To cut through, a development must make a great first impression. And that impression has to outstrip the competition. The easiest – and often most overlooked – way to achieve this is through characterful and distinctive design.



Dress to impress

A development must captivate its audience the second they walk through the door

The average person spends 25.5 minutes deciding on a property. On a £1mn pad, that's a swift – arguably, hasty – £39,215 per minute decision. With no time to waste, a development must captivate its audience the second they walk through the door.

We had this front of mind when we were asked to interior design the communal areas at Amory Tower, Canary Wharf. We mixed illuminated vintage side tables with huge slabs of calacatta marble. Painted walls in a swarthy inchoyra blue. Added large handmade ceramics and specially commissioned acid-bright artwork. Festooned chairs and sofas in plump patterned cushions. And consulted plant specialists for an assortment of lush architectural foliage.

These elements work in concert with each other to create a series of inconspicuously luxurious, comfortable and inviting spaces. They speak to the senses and whisper, 'You've arrived'. They encourage people to pause and drink in their new surroundings. And they set the tone for the rest of the building.



Tell a story

Once you've nailed that all-important first impression, the next step is to build on it as you journey through the apartments. Storytelling is a smart way to do this – because interiors with a story to tell, sell.

You can forget about furniture fads and colour crazes. Instead, think about the interiors you're designing – interrogate them and seek out their best features. If you've got a large window with a killer view, create a conversation area or reading nook next to it. Use what's outside to inform your colour palette. Look for architectural cues that could inspire your choice of materials.

Interiors with a story to tell, sell

That's what we did at Amory Tower. The strong lines, acute angles, glistening metal – even the moiré effect of the building's fin-like strips – are qualities we replicated in fluted wood, brass inlays, glass tabletops and patterned fabrics. These things form a compelling narrative that's unique to the development. And with recent sales hitting £100mn, it's obviously proving popular with buyers.



Mix it up

Luxury Build to Rent (BTR) developments need to work just as hard to wow prospective tenants. As a lot of BTRs offer similar services – on-site management, high-speed broadband, Smart TVs, self-service bars, games and events – the interiors have to pop.

This was our aim when we dressed 23 serviced apartments in Newfoundland Place, Canary Wharf. In one apartment, dark terracotta is the backdrop to a trio of jewel-like collages. While in another, sculptural shapes and patterns ping out against a richly pigmented teal.

With subtle variations to colourways, artwork and objet, each apartment can have its own style – something people will value when they're viewing multiple units.



Put people at the heart of your designs

When someone sees a space for the first time, you want them to picture themselves living in it – working, hanging out, playing games, socialising with friends. So, take the time to consider how a space can be used day and night. You don't want it to give out club vibes while people work. Equally, it can't feel like the set of *This Morning* when people have downed tools and poured their first rosé. Done well, the mood and function of a space can change with the flick of a light switch.

At 10 George Street, Canary Wharf, we interior designed 6,000sq ft of multi-use spaces – all with a view to impressing its residents. We created bespoke angled sofas, dual-toned chairs, and sleek workstations. We filled shelves with recognisable design classics, zoned areas for large and small gatherings, and packed a vast terrace with cabanas and circular daybeds.

A great first impression only counts when it lasts

These spaces are a hit with residents. We hope they'll continue to bring people together and foster a strong sense of community for many years to come. After all, a great first impression only counts when it lasts.

