

On the future of the show apartment (*& how the cookie-cutter approach went stale*)

Developers and designers can no longer expect to woo people with a white-gloss kitchen and accent wall splashed with shades of Pixie Breath or Mermaid's Flipper, writes *Richard Angel* – these days, the more personalised the product, the greater the results...



Written by

Richard Angel

Co-founder, [Angel O'Donnell](#)

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Two years ago, half of all new-build luxury London flats weren't selling. Various reasons were posited – from an overstuffed market to Brexit uncertainties and anxious overseas investors. But in the end, these speculations were overshadowed by a simpler assertion: New-builds aren't selling because...they're all the same.

Today, this problem is compounded by – dare I say? – new post-Brexit uncertainties and the ongoing London exodus. As people surge to the suburbs in search of lockdown-friendly sheep and 'character properties', the spectre of posh ghost towers wafts on.

Buyers' and renters' demands have evolved spectacularly. So if we can't offer topiary hedges and room for a pony, it stands to reason that we can no longer expect to woo people with a white-gloss kitchen and accent wall splashed with shades of Pixie Breath or Mermaid's Flipper.

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The show flat – with its prim table settings and incongruous foliage – has died. And in its place, something more humanly-endearing and statement-driven has emerged.

One-size-fits-all luxury has lost its lustre

Now more than ever, successful developments are created with a particular person in mind. Rooms are crafted to captivate that person as soon as they walk through the door. In essence, the more personalised the product, the greater the results.

People's love of the personal touch is why we like to strike up PR-able collaborations. Working closely with creative consultants, art galleries, design archivists, plant specialists and colour experts helps us to create one-of-a-kind interiors with compelling stories to tell. And stories sell.



'What sells now is warm, human and unabashedly characterful designs; ownable creations with smart layouts and compelling narratives', says Richard Angel (pictured with Angel O'Donnell co-founder Ed O'Donnell)

Shout less. Say more

We're seeing an inexorable move towards inconspicuous consumption. Discreet wealth has become the new status symbol as rich buyers eschew emblems of materialism – like big-name designer labels – for high-quality artisanal pieces which, while no less expensive, aren't so shouty.

Get it right and a flagship development can play a key role in urban regeneration and herald the growth of new vibrant and culturally diverse communities. And designs that take inspiration from a location's history, culture and architecture can become talked about landmarks in their own right.

Generic has had its time. Yesterday's show flat is outmoded. What sells now is warm, human and unabashedly characterful designs; ownable creations with smart layouts and compelling narratives. That's what people want to live in – and they're willing to pay handsomely for it.

When we recently finished interior designing one of the sub-penthouses in [The Dumont](#), Albert Embankment, nearly every marketer, buying agent and journalist who saw it said one of two things: “Isn’t it homely” and “It’s so colourful”. Homely and colourful came with an £8.5 million price tag and sold, with all the furniture, artwork and fittings, within two months.



The Angel O'Donnell-designed show apartment at The Dumont sparked a bidding war when it hit the market last year at £8.35m (Image credit: Taran Wilkhu Photography)

Our approach to designing a multi-million pound pad

- Go bespoke

We designed the joinery and a lot of the furniture ourselves. That way, we could bring to life our unique vision as well as closely monitor the quality of each piece. Everything from sumptuously soft bouclé-covered swivel chairs and jewel-toned sofas to upholstered walls and a bronze-clad fireplace was custom-made. When you take the time to design and make things from scratch, you massively boost your chances of attracting buyers and securing that all-important sale.

- Colour revolution

The lively aesthetic combines striking geometric patterns with splashes of gold, aubergine, terracotta, sapphire blue, emerald green and mustard yellow. To this we added wall coverings in every room, large throws, giant cushions and satisfyingly heavy window treatments.

It's all about layering as much colour, richness, depth and texture as our senses can handle. This is especially important today when international buyers are expected to view properties on Zoom, liaise with agents via WhatsApp or WeChat and make multi-million pound investments from afar. It's why every designer and developer should ask themselves this: how impressive will the interiors look on a smartphone?

- Art house

Curating an eclectic mix of art isn't a luxury, it's an essential part of what makes a property PR-able. Because the more noteworthy and story-rich your scheme, the more people will want to spend their valuable time drinking it in. Ceramics, line drawings, water colours, limited edition prints, specially commissioned acrylics – even an African ceremonial crown – all made it into our design. It's a wide-ranging collection that looks as though it's been pieced together over time, rather than artificially assembled for the sake of a show flat. If it looks authentic, people will want a piece of it. Or in the case of The Dumont – all of it.

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The point is this: Know your audience. Evolve with each project. And keep it fresh. As soon as you feel like you're treading old ground, you need to rethink your design...or your designer.