

Big interview with Richard Angel and Ed O'Donnell: 'It's about more than fluffy cushions'

By [Andrew Hillier](#) | 23 Apr 2025

If you're looking for a central London apartment and happen to have £20m to spend, then you might want to take a look at the show apartment at the Old War Offices in Whitehall.



Richard Angel (standing) and Ed O'Donnell (seated), co-founders of Angel O'Donnell

Located in the building where Winston Churchill and his government formulated their wartime plans, the three-bedroom apartment features 4.5m-high ceilings, views over a secluded courtyard and a bespoke interior that probably cost more than the average family home.

The interior has been designed by Angel O'Donnell, a residential interior design studio co-founded by chief executive Richard Angel (pictured, left) and creative director Ed O'Donnell (right).

Since establishing their eponymous studio in 2018, the duo have been making waves in the prime and super-prime residential market, designing some of the most exclusive properties on the UK market. Notable schemes they have worked on include apartments at Centre Point and Park Hyatt in London's West End and the residences at One Crown Place in the City of London. Their schemes – according to their publicist at least – have broken per-square-foot records in both the Tottenham Court Road and EC1 postcodes.

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Richard Angel

For Angel, a chartered surveyor by background, and O'Donnell, whose previous clients include pop megastar Madonna, their role is far more involved than choosing the wallpaper and adding bits of furniture. "We are not in the business of just selling fluffy cushions to developers," says Angel. "We are there to hold their hand and work as a team."

Ultimately, he adds, the studio's role is to "help developers sell properties" by understanding the needs and desires of the targeted wealthy buyers.

At the Old War Offices, the design team completed the first show residence in 2022. The property sold for £14.25m within 48 hours of the studio handing it back to the developer. In total, it has worked on six apartments at the development – two show residences and four private homes.



Bold choice: Angel O'Donnell used bright colours for its apartment at Centre Point

The Old War Offices development includes a Raffles-branded hotel at the front and 85 Raffles private residences towards the rear that benefit from a range of onsite amenities including a private gym and a cinema room. Residents also have access to the hotel’s facilities, which include nine restaurants and three bars.

Angel says the reimagining of the historic building exemplifies what buyers want in today’s super-prime central London market. “It is an island site and a building of scale offering lots of amenities,” he says. “This is what super-prime residential looks like. It has moved on significantly in the past couple of decades.”

Layout challenges

The challenge with both older conversions and brand-new developments is that they can often create pinch points. Angel says part of what the company does is overcome layout issues that might deter buyers.

At the Old War Offices show residence, for instance, a major challenge was the lofty 4.5m (14.8ft) ceiling height, which tended to make the space feel intimidating. To make the ceiling feel “more connected to the floor”, Angel says the team has made use of wall units that run the height of the room, some of which can be accessed by library ladders. The design also uses pendant lights and trees in pots in some rooms. “You want that ‘wow’ moment but, at the same time, you’ve also got to show you can live in the space as well,” he says.

From a design perspective, O'Donnell says it has been a case of working with the historic building as well as making new additions in keeping with the original design. In the living area, for example, arches have been put in to give the room an extra architectural element. “When you look outside, you have the arches of the neoclassical element of the building,” he says. “We’re not just putting things in for the sake of it or because it looks great. It’s because it relates to the building’s architecture.”

When it comes to selling in the prime market, Angel says storytelling has become important. On arrival, he relates the tale of author Ian Fleming working from the Old War Offices before he wrote his James Bond novels and points out the once-secret spies’ entrance.



Prime time: the design studio has worked on six apartments at the Old War Offices

In the kitchen-dining room, a painting by prominent British artist Jack Penny is an eye-catching feature; and in the master bedroom, ceramic plates from artist Alice Corbett (whose mother was a muse of Pablo Picasso) have been hung on the walls. “We’re trying to think about talking points for when the agents are walking around with potential purchasers,” says O’Donnell. “It’s about dwell time. It is about keeping someone here.”

Another trend in the super-prime space is the desire for turnkey properties. It is no longer a case of international buyers purchasing a property and then immediately ripping out the fixtures and fittings and changing them to their own taste. “There was a time when people used to come and change things,” says O’Donnell. “But people don’t have any time. They want to see a place and see it beautifully furnished and move in.”

Throughout its properties, the studio commissions bespoke furniture and uses local craftspeople. Angel says this makes its properties stand out from the crowd and allows it to install fixtures and fittings suited to the scale of the property, rather than making do with something that does not quite fit.

“In 2020, we ended up having to use local craftspeople because of the pandemic,” he says. “Actually, it was hugely beneficial because everything was just easier. It means when things go wrong – and they do go wrong – you can deal with them quickly.”

Buying local is also more environmentally friendly. “We can be more sustainable if things are coming from 20 miles down the road as opposed to being shipped from half way around the world,” says Angel.

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Ed O’Donnell

O’Donnell adds that the approach creates future antiques and family heirlooms, adding: “The things we put in really are there to last.”

In the interior design world, agencies tend to have signature styles, but Angel O’Donnell has deliberately rejected that approach. Instead, O’Donnell says it tries to do what is right for the building as well as create homes as “individual as their clients”.

At the Old War Offices show residence, for example, it has used a largely muted colour scheme that showcases the building’s historic architecture, while for its apartments at Centre Point it selected bolder colours in keeping with the era of the iconic 1960s tower block.



“It was difficult at the beginning [not having a signature style],” says O’Donnell. “People wanted to know if you’re the kings or queens of neutral, or a traditional designer or whatever it might be. Now, I feel we did the right thing, because now everyone really understands the need for personality and for a point of difference and a narrative.”

Designers, he says, are often advised to “find your niche and stick to it”, but he believes there are “lots of niches you can explore”.

Growing expectations

In the Instagram age, the role of the interior designer is not limited to working on the property itself. Now, there is a growing expectation that the designers will help to market the property and use their own black book of contacts to help find buyers.

On the day we meet, the design studio is hosting an event for 150 people at another of its projects. “It’s a much more holistic approach,” says O’Donnell. “We have our PR team and an in-house brand director and brand strategist. Our work does not stop once we’ve made a property look pretty.”

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Richard Angel

Developers at the top of the market tend to bring on board big-name international interior designers, believing their reputations will help sell their properties, but Angel says having a star designer on board is no guarantee of sales success. “We’ve seen it at developments and, without mentioning any names, they have a lot of property to sell,” he says.

The super-prime sales market in London has been challenging over the past few years, with factors such as rising interest rates and restrictions placed on Russian buyers following the war in Ukraine hampering sales. **Some experts estimate sales at the** top end of the market have dropped by 40% in the past two years.



Angel says the interior design and layout can make or break a sale in a difficult market. He cites the example of One Crown Place where, he claims, sales had “stagnated” before the design studio was brought on board. “There were some challenging layouts, but we demonstrated how you can use the space,” says Angel. “They did £17m of sales in four weeks. Before, it was a stack of apartments that were not selling, full stop.”

At the Old War Offices, Angel estimates that £75m in sales has been achieved from its two show residences. “We could have sold the show homes over and over again, but we have to hold them back,” adds O’Donnell.

But how much do their designs cost? Neither Angel nor O’Donnell will reveal how much money has been lavished on the interior at the Old War Offices show residence, but Angel says it is important for developers to leave money in the kitty for high-quality interior design.

“It’s always going to be a conundrum at the end [of the build process] when there’s not enough left in the budget,” he says.

“Development is hard. I’ve been there, got the T-shirt and the scars. But the design is the last thing someone is going to remember.”