PENTHOUSE



THE WORLD'S MOST STUNNING
PENTHOUSE APARTMENTS

CULTURAL UNION



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THE PENTHOUSE

The penthouse is the ultimate expression of contemporary urban living. As much a state of mind as a location, the word 'penthouse' evokes excitement, drama, exclusivity and escape. For designers, they allow for audacious decisions and bold creative statements outside the usual parameters. "You have the rare opportunity to create an oasis – a kind of floating sanctuary above the city," says Edo Mapelli Mozzi of Banda, designer of the 78th-floor penthouse in New York's iconic Steinway Tower.

And while height is integral to their appeal, so is style. Night Palm's cinematic Voyager penthouse in Los Angeles, with its 70s Italian glamour and 90s Tom Ford sleekness, is as much about ice-cool decadence as about the views over the Hollywood Hills.

Penthouses are also architectural embodiments of hyperbole: vast ceilings, 360-degree views, private elevators, roof gardens and acres of lateral space. It's why so much of their allure comes from their association with entertaining. Designer Brian Woulfe's brief for his Midtown Penthouse was to create the ultimate cocktail lounge. Rupert des Forges, Head of Prime Central London Developments at Knight Frank, says: "One of the best things about owning a trophy penthouse is the ability to entertain. Large wrap-around private terraces fitted with outdoor kitchens, firepits, surround sound, exquisite furniture, and weather-proof awnings create a fabulous space in which to host."

There's also the impact on the locations themselves. For New York, there's no more potent symbol of the city than the bird's-nest view over Central Park from 1,500 feet up. For London, the £170m One Hyde Park is an avatar for the city's global super-prime status. And Shoaib Shahid, Associate Director at Dubai Sotheby's International Realty, says: "Landmark penthouses are Dubai's luxury ambassadors, reinforcing the emirate's brand as the world's premier ultra-luxury hub."

The link between height and aspiration is nothing new. For as long as people have lived in houses, the desirability of 'the house on the hill', with its relative coolness, lofty perspective and enhanced sense of security, has been accepted without needing to be articulated.



Yet the penthouse itself is just a century old. Emerging with the advent of the skyscraper in 1920s New York, it was a by-product of a 1916 law requiring tall buildings to have terraced setbacks. This, together with the rise of steel-frame construction and elevators, made upper floors accessible and desirable (the first penthouse is often attributed to Robert Knapp, Vice-President of Tiffany & Co., who converted the top floor of the Pierre Hotel into a residence in the 1920s).

From the outset, penthouses embodied urban glamour. In 1925, Condé Nast moved into one of the very first purpose-built Park Avenue penthouses. In Fritz Lang's 1927 masterpiece *Metropolis*, the elites rule the city from the summits of colossal skyscrapers. By the mid-century, penthouses were deeply embedded in popular culture as a symbol of aspiration and independence. Gordon Gekko's apartment in 1987's *Wall Street* captured the frothy corporate environment of the 80s. Penthouses became synonymous with London and Manhattan's property booms in the early 2000s and the UAE and China's rise to global prominence. And now, in the second quarter of the 21st century, the penthouse continues to evolve – whether it's the phenomenon of the branded residence or the story of the flow of capital around the world.

But what unites them all is the balance of spectacle and intimacy. However striking the architecture, the most successful penthouses function as homes: places to gather, entertain, and retreat. At their best, penthouses achieve something paradoxical: they are elevated symbols of status, yet also personal sanctuaries in the sky.

And a century after their invention, penthouses remain the ultimate canvas. As the designer Ed O'Donnell says: "From a design studio's perspective, the potential is virtually limitless." Penthouses allow developers and architects to test ideas at a scale and height rarely matched elsewhere. They extend to designers a special license to project boldness and sexiness, combining the thrill of wide vistas with the intimacy of super-bespoke and curated interiors. And they don't just reflect the desires of their owners; increasingly, they shape the identities of their cities.

This book is an exploration of a very particular manifestation of our civilisation. It's a survey of style at the extremities and a celebration of some of the most talented designers working today – designers who are creating spaces that continue to define and defy the frontiers of urban living.

Peter Martin
Editor

MODERNIST



CENTRE POINT PENTHOUSE

WEST END, LONDON
DESIGNER: ANGEL O'DONNELL
DEVELOPER: ALMACANTAR

Angel O'Donnell is a London-based design studio celebrated for bold, expressive interiors that embrace colour, material richness and architectural storytelling. Co-founded by Ed O'Donnell, the practice has developed a reputation for creating residential spaces that are both vibrant and deeply rooted in context, often drawing inspiration from their buildings' histories and surroundings.

For this penthouse in London's iconic Centre Point, O'Donnell and his team leaned directly into the Modernist and Brutalist character of the tower. "All our design cues spring from Centre Point – from its brutalist architecture and iconic honeycomb facade to its extensive views and vibrant West End location," he explains. The scheme layers architectural echoes throughout: upholstered bedroom walls with zigzag panels, pillars shaped to mirror the exterior, vintage pieces dating back to the building's construction, and a carefully orchestrated mix of materials, from stone to oxidised steel.



Photography: Taran Wilkhu


REBELS

"In many ways, we wanted to celebrate the spirit of Modernism – its optimism and freedom of expression – and make it our own," says O'Donnell. "This meant mixing bold motifs with subtle patterns, strong geometric forms with soft organic shapes, coarse textures with smooth surfaces, bright colours with pale neutrals. This ebb and flow of contrasts creates a rich sensory journey from room to room – energising, lively, and deeply attuned to the fabric of the building, its philosophy, and its new life as a luxury residential development."

Colour plays a starring role. "We instinctively wanted colour-soaked interiors that contrast with the building's white-grey exterior," O'Donnell notes. A ceiling mural in the entrance hall delivers immediate impact, its geometric forms abstractly echoing the monochrome floor tiles while vivid hues recall the "fierce blues and fiery reds of the sunrises and sunsets that pour in through the east- and west-facing picture windows." The result, he says, is "like opening a plain manila envelope to find a rainbow-hued party invitation."







Each room carries its own atmosphere: terracotta lends warmth to the principal bedroom, soothing pink and green define the guest rooms, while copper enriches the dining area with a restorative energy. Art amplifies the effect, notably Anish Kapoor's jewel-toned etchings that unify the dining and kitchen areas. A bespoke divider, inspired by Centre Point's architecture, features open shelving, coloured glass, and a marble-clad fireplace. "When the evening sun strikes its lattice-like structure," says O'Donnell, "prismatic shadows sweep across the room to great effect."

The result is a penthouse that feels inseparable from its setting: an ode to Centre Point's architectural spirit, reinvented with colour, contrast and an unerring sense of place.

