

## Style Watch

### PROPERTIES



# A Piece Of Piccadilly Circus

*These airy, bright and stylish apartments in London's sought-after St James' district offer contemporary city dwelling in one of the UK capital's most historic and exciting areas*

BY GIOVANNA DUNMALL IMAGES COURTESY OF ST JAMES' GATEWAY

**N**amed after the royal palace, the London district of St James' lies between four city landmarks— Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus, Green Park and Buckingham Palace — and is known for its historic shop fronts and buildings, luxury goods, art galleries (the area has a staggering 62 of them) and a Christopher Wren church. It is a place Londoners and visitors go to for art, culture and fine dining, high-end hotels and clubs and a distinctly British array of independent stores and boutiques. It doesn't always appear to be a particularly desirable place to live, however. For one thing it's noisy - the traffic on Piccadilly is loud - and it's also chaotic; Piccadilly Circus is lined with walls of neon flashing billboards and throngs of tourists gather there day and night.

**ABOVE**  
The development offers opportunity for elegant living amidst the hustle of Piccadilly Circus

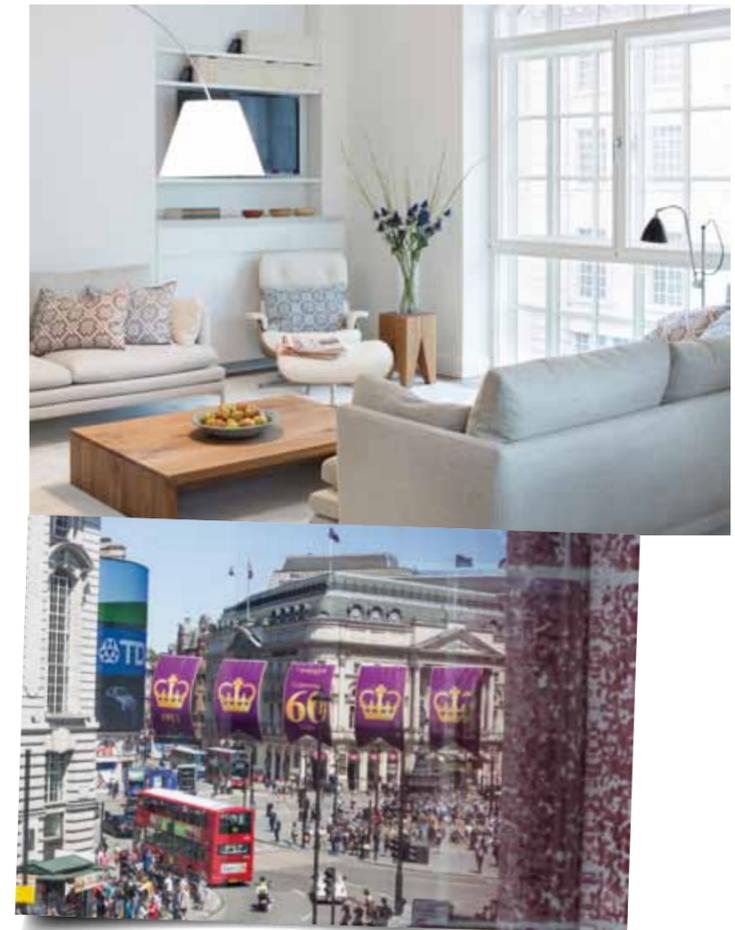
**OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE TOP LEFT**  
Views of the Big Ben can be enjoyed from various rooms; The rooms are appointed with designer furniture; A massive plan is underway to redevelop the St. James district; A few of the units also offer outdoor spaces

### Regeneration And Redevelopment

Yet the Crown Estate's £500 million plan to redevelop this conservation area may just change all that. The Crown Estate, which owns almost all the freehold for Regent Street and 50 per cent of the buildings in St James', hopes to woo companies and residential tenants to the area alike with the allure of cheaper rents than in neighbouring Mayfair or Belgravia and St James' amazing location. Aside from some of the best retail and dining in the country, it's a very short walk to uber-busy and happening London district of Soho just north of Piccadilly Circus.

### A Multi-use Scheme With Artistic Touches

The first stage of the regeneration has seen London-based Eric Parry architects



refurbish, restore and rebuild a huge block at the east end of Piccadilly into a new scheme that offers 60,000sq ft of office accommodation as well as some retail space and 16 residential apartments on Jermyn Street (11 for rent, five for sale). As part of this £100 million St James' Gateway redevelopment a section of the original Portland façade has been retained, while the contemporary elements are by Eric Parry Architects. It was also Eric Parry's idea to get acclaimed British artist Richard Deacon on board to create a dramatic polychromatic cornice at the top of the façade of the new building structure. Another sculpture by British artist Stephen Cox adorns the corner building facing Jermyn Street and Eagle Place.

### Loft-like Spaces With High Ceilings

The apartments are in the middle of all the action. As project architect Merit Claussen, an Associate Director at Eric Parry Architects, says with a smile, "They are fantastic for people-watching and for city dwellers." The apartments

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for rent are particularly alluring, for several reasons. Located in a late 1920s listed building in the Beaux Arts style, six out of the 11 apartments for rent offer views of Piccadilly Circus, and two offer outdoor space (two also offer glimpses of Big Ben). Two of the biggest selling points of the flats were the imposing windows says architect and designer Eric Parry, and the generous floor-to-ceiling heights, which were achieved after the existing suspended ceilings were removed. "As the building was originally a purpose-built office building for Barclays Bank, the floor-to-ceiling heights exceed those of most residential buildings," he says. "The flat rolled steel windows, many of which are of considerable height, are a window type



often found in industrial buildings and lend a loft-like atmosphere to the spaces.” He continues. “Both, room heights and windows, offered the unique opportunity to create living spaces that breathe air and light, and associate space; qualities needed for creativity that are in contrast to the surrounding dense and busy urban environment - particularly on the Soho side of Regent Street.”

#### **Preservation And Modernisation**

“We had to preserve all of the former structure that were not later additions,” says Parry, “and there were two main areas with listed original features that we entirely preserved.” One is the former banking hall (that will be used for retail) and the other are the bank’s grand former boardrooms located on the second floor and adorned with coved sections and period mouldings. These were turned into two flats; the largest weighs in at a massive 1,700 sq ft and offers glimpses of Big Ben. The interior architects won a battle to install new windows and in some cases added an extra layer of glazing – or secondary windows - too. “The replacement windows had to be visually ‘like for

#### **OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP**

Light colours and a neutral palette helps to bring natural light into the apartments; Suave interiors add touches of sophistication in the spaces; Contemporary additions seek to keep the historic spaces from looking dated

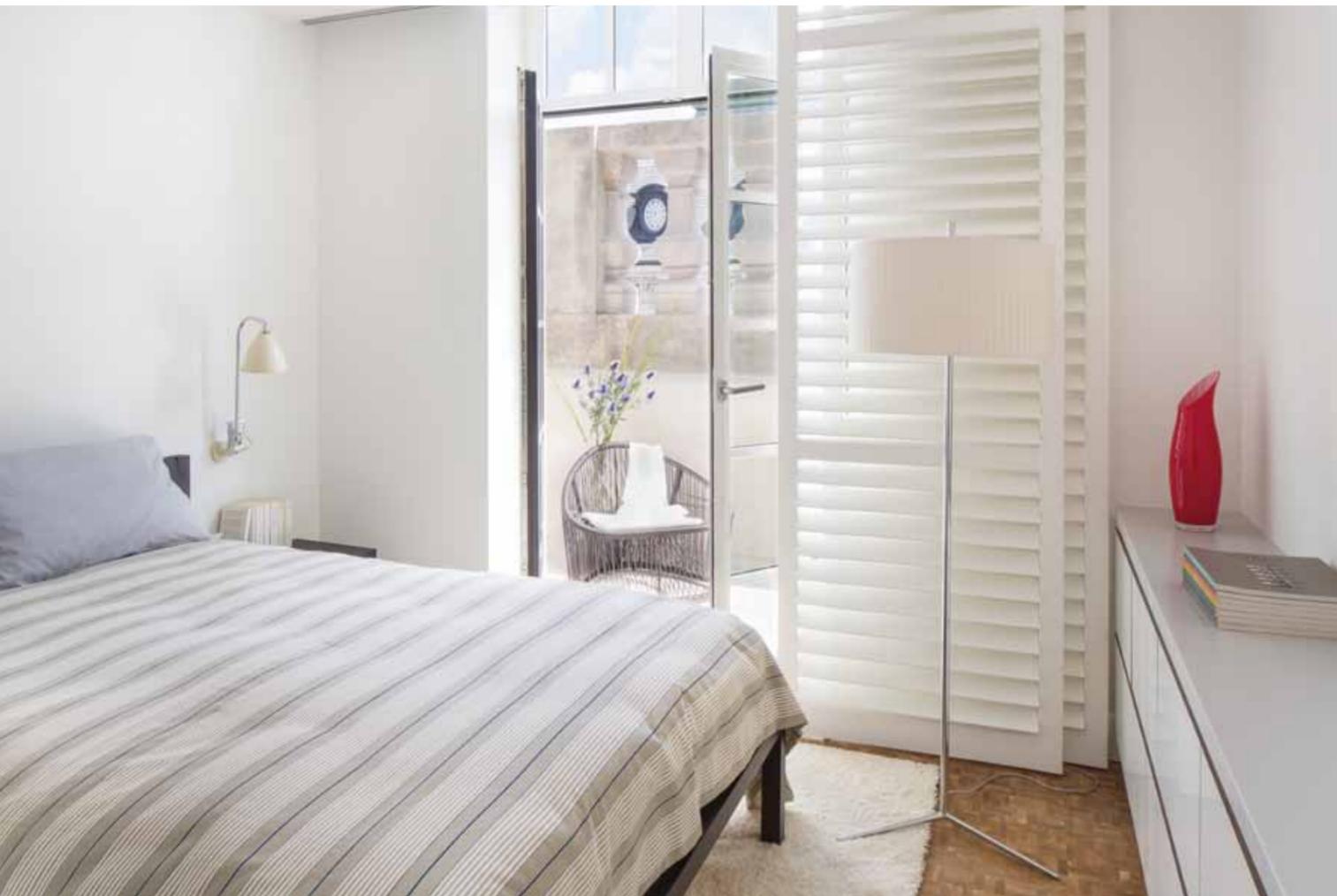
#### **ABOVE**

The units come ready equipped with designer trappings and furnishing

like’ with only small variations where inevitable as the building is listed and shares the façade with the neighbouring building which remained in office use,” explains Parry. “The secondary windows on the Regent Street side are set back by 150mm, and kept as simple as possible with the street facing frames sprayed in a dark grey colour to make them ‘invisible’ from the outside.” The result are high-performance, aesthetically appealing and unobtrusive windows, that cut out almost all sound. Interestingly, Gibson says all the Regent Street flats (which are the noisiest) went immediately. “Most people would say ‘Are you mad, I can’t live on Regent Street, I want to sleep’. But if the windows are this good and you have comfort cooling then why not?”

#### **Cosmopolitan Furniture And Atmosphere**

The furniture is recognisably European and the look and style is cosmopolitan, airy and bright. “All furniture is from high-end manufacturers selected for longevity and timelessness,” says Parry. “Each (2- and 3-bed) unit features a signature piece that is easily recognisable for everyone no matter of



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the cultural background, which is either the Eames chair and ottoman or the Egg chair by Arne Jacobsen, both in their leather version for beautiful ageing. Those signature pieces are supported by sofas by Italian manufacturer Zanotta, coffee and side tables and dining tables by German wood manufacturer E15 and dining chairs by Thonet.” There is also a very fresh Mediterranean feel to the apartments with pastel blues and browns (in the cushions and bedcovers) and full-length white shutters. The interiors blend chic style and bespoke sculptural door handles with more industrial elements such as hard-wearing blond oak end grain flooring.

In terms of tenants Oliver Gibson, Director of Development and Investment at W.A. Ellis (the estate agent marketing the rental properties) says the rental flats are being targeted at employees of local professional

**OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**

Large balcony windows are part of the draw for potential homeowners; Pastel colours add warmth to the bedroom; Modern accessories give the spaces a vibrant and chic vibe

**LEFT TO RIGHT**

Sleek bathroom fittings add to the elegance of the apartments’ design; Plenty of storage spaces abound within the domain; The facade of this landmark building in the neighbourhood had been carefully preserved

companies and singles and couples. Among the tenants the nationalities include Singaporean, Chinese, German, Swiss and British, while on the buying side the two flats that have gone were snapped up by Hong Kong Chinese and Singaporean purchasers. “What is fascinating about St James’s,” according to James Cooksey, Head of The Crown Estate’s St James’s Portfolio, “is that it means different things to different people and consequently we are attracting interest from a global audience, all from different walks of life.” What’s more, the rental block also offers some of the most unusual accommodation in London. “As far as we are aware, it offers the only apartments that boast a view out over one of London’s most spectacular landmarks, Piccadilly Circus,” says Cooksey. **H**

**15 Jermyn Street**

**DEVELOPMENT:** St. James’ Gateway

**NO OF UNITS:** 16 apartments (11 rental, five for sale)

**CONFIGURATION:** Rental units range from one- to three bedrooms, including two penthouses with outdoor terrace space)

Sales units include two single bedroom and three two and three bedrooms

**COST OF RENTAL:** £700 to £2,500 per week

**COST OF SALES:** £1,600,000 to £4,150,000

**WEBSITES:** www.waellis.co.uk