

Symphony in design

Two new concert halls
and canalside living bring
good design and culture
to King's Cross,
says **Anthea Masey**

BUILDING an office block in a run-down corner of the capital is one thing — but having the courage to add two concert halls and a string of art galleries, restaurants and bars, all open to the public and all built without public subsidy, is quite another. Yet this is exactly what Newcastle-based developer Peter Millican has achieved at Kings Place, a new scheme that opened last week with a marathon of 100 concerts performed in just five days.

This striking new building, with its wavy glass wall reflecting the passing clouds, sits perched on the approach to the bridge over the Regent's Canal on York Way at the back of King's Cross station.

The seven-floor building fully exploits its watery location with a restaurant on the ground floor with outdoor tables on the quay-side overlooking picturesque house boats on the little-known Battlebridge Basin.

The larger of the two concert halls at Kings Place seats 420 people and is the first new purpose-built concert hall to be opened in London for 25 years. The beautiful light and airy hall is lined with pale oak veneer cut from a specially chosen 500-year-old tree found in Germany. Millican describes it as a "jewel box". The building will

**'This new cultural quarter
will rival the South Bank
and Barbican'**

also become the base for two of London's smaller orchestras: the London Sinfonietta and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

Kings Place, designed by leading architects Dixon Jones, who remodelled the Royal Opera House, will also become home to the Guardian and Observer newspapers, which will be moving from Farringdon to King's Cross by the end of the year.

And with Central St Martin's, one of London's greatest art colleges, now part of the University of the Arts, moving to developer Argent's 67-acre King's Cross Central redevelopment behind the station in two years' time, Millican can justifiably claim that he has been in the vanguard of a new cultural quarter set to rival the South Bank and the Barbican.

Kings Place has also exploited one of London's most underrated assets — its canals. With the exception of a handful of much-loved and much-photographed canalside locations, such as upmarket Little Venice and edgy Camden Lock, most of the capital's canals lurk behind a tangle of disused industrial buildings frequented only by cyclists and lone fishermen.

Unlocking a great asset

Gradually the potential of London's canals as a place to live, work and relax is being unlocked. At Brentford, where the Grand Union Canal joins the Thames, new canalside developments are helping rejuvenate a tired west London neighbourhood. And at Paddington, the long-hidden canal basin is now open to the public and the surrounding area has been developed with new offices and flats. The last stage, Merchant Square, situated between the canal and Westway, began work a year ago. The development of six new buildings — three office, three residential with some shops — includes The Blade, a 43-storey tower, which will be the highest in the West End. The three residential blocks will con-



tain a total of 554 flats and are being sold off plan by Hamptons (020 7758 8488).

And in Islington, almost within a stone's throw of some of London's most attractive streets and squares where houses sell for millions of pounds, a new canalside quarter is slowly emerging from the old industrial wasteland that marked the boundary of Islington and the City. Two long-forgotten canal basins, Wenlock Basin and the City Road Basin, are being opened up, and by Christmas the first part of a major planned

development around the City Road Basin will be completed with a new public waterside square giving access to the basin for the first time. At the entrance to the City Road Basin a joint venture development between British Waterways, Miller Developments and Groveworld has planning permission for a mixed-use scheme that will include

'A 26-storey tower with 295 flats and a new public square will feature at City Road Basin'

a 26-storey tower with 295 flats, of which 93 are affordable, although British Waterways director of property Stuart Mills admits that the scheme may be delayed by the credit crunch.

However, at Groveworld's Angel Waterside (020 7359 5259) development, which overlooks the same basin, there are nine remaining units for sale ranging in price from £499,950 for a two-bedroom flat to £2.5 million for a three-bedroom pent-

house. Owners are already moving in and the development will be complete this month.

At adjoining Wenlock Basin, developer, Londonewcastle, has 10 units left in the Wenlock Building (selling agent Hurford Salvi Carr, 020 7250 1012). These range in price from £750,000 for a two-bedroom flat with a terrace to £1.7 million for a penthouse duplex with four bedrooms.

The same developer has another canalside site. In Camden, on Oval Road, Jim Hensen's old headquarters, where the Muppets were born, will be converted into 46, one-, two- and three-bedroom flats. For more information contact Londonewcastle (020 7563 1666).

On the opposite side of the road, Barratt (020 7482 5905) is selling The Lockhouse. There are three-bedroom flats left in The Gate, which is now complete, from £895,000; and two- and three-bedroom flats in the eight-story Towers, completing in November, starting from £499,000.



£499,950: two-bedroom flats at Groveworld's Angel Waterside regeneration scheme beside City Road Basin in N1. Call 020 7359 5259





Peter Millican's Kings Place, at the back of King's Cross station, sits beside the Regent's Canal





Kings Place, at King's Cross, with its vast wavy wall of glass, aims to rival the South Bank as an arts venue

