

THE SECRET IS HAVING THE GOLDEN KEY

London has more than 600 garden squares.

David Spittles

finds split-level penthouses overlooking landscaped gardens

GARDEN squares are one of London's architectural delights. About 600 of them are sprinkled across the capital, many of them historic public garden squares and spaces, such as Lincoln's Inn Fields in Bloomsbury, others are charming little greens tucked away in unlikely pockets of the urban East End.

Arundel Square in Barnsbury, one of Islington's most gentrified corners, was famous for having a "missing" fourth side, a vacant plot of land that was once a bus depot alongside terraces of handsome early Victorian town houses. After an ambitious engineering project, the square is now complete again.

A series of interconnecting low-rise apartment blocks have been built – contemporary in design yet with a classic symmetry and using materials such as limestone that dovetail nicely with the historic fabric of the neighbourhood. A bonus is that the central garden area has been extended and improved by fresh landscaping.

The 115 flats are reached via a new road, gated at each end, that runs

across the new side of the square. Buyers can choose from 32 different layouts, ranging from studios and split-levels to penthouses, most with a decent-size balcony or terrace. Wide floor-to-ceiling glass panels maximise views of the square, while interior design is above average.

Open-plan living spaces have smoked-oak floorboards, calming textural decorative finishes and subtle lighting; underfloor heating helps the uncluttered look; kitchens have stone worktops, bathrooms have crisp white sanitary ware set against bespoke cabinetry; bedrooms have fitted wardrobes. One show flat features a shelving system on a wall behind the bed, a useful space-saving solution. Underground parking is available plus a car club.

Discerning buyers working in London's creative or finance sectors are the target audience, according to joint developers Londonewcastle and United House. There is a bit more value for money to be had in this location. Arundel Square is a short walk from the fashionable Islington heartland around Upper Street and the emerging quarter around King's Cross, yet the address remains cheaper than the City

fringe districts of Clerkenwell and Bloomsbury.

Prices range from £285,000 (for studios and one-bedroom apartments). Two-bedroom flats cost from £470,000, and penthouses from £1 million. Leases are for 250 years, twice the normal length for flats on new developments. For more information, call Chesterton Humberts on 020 7288 0330.

Also nearby is **Highbury Square**, Arsenal Football Club's former stadium, which boasts London's biggest new garden square, a two-acre open space planted out and with a glass-walled sculptural water feature. Many of the 724 new apartments overlook the square. Instead of railings there is a hedge boundary with push-through gates. Residents gain access by using a swipe card. About 60 homes remain for sale, priced from £250,000 to £1.5 million. Call 0845 262 6000.

Leafy garden squares in central London close to all the action are favoured by super-rich residents such as Roman Abramovich, who is knocking together two houses in Lowndes Square, Knightsbridge, to create one of the capital's most spectacular homes.



Boutique developers are carving out splendid new homes from run-down Victorian town houses that have been split into bedsits.

Queen's Gate Place overlooks a garden square behind the wonderful edifice of the Natural History Museum in Kensington. Developer Northbeach has transformed a substantial 19th century stucco town house into five luxury modern-design apartments. Prices from £1.95 to £4.95 million. Call estate agent Farleys on 020 7589 1234.

Many of London's squares are in the poshest parts of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, where only key-holding private residents have access.

"Mayfair's two main squares – Grosvenor and Berkeley – are open to the public but there are several secret gardens that even some locals don't know exist," says estate agent Peter Wetherell.

"Behind mansion buildings facing Green Street, South Street and South Audley Street are courtyard gardens where only owners of ground- and lower-ground floor properties have access, making this a very exclusive benefit.

"They are remarkably tranquil places and little used because there are few families and a large number of second homes in Mayfair. Lucky residents use them to relax, read a book, have picnics and the occasional drinks party. The gardens have real wow factor when friends come to visit."

Such private access typically adds 10 per cent to the value of a property. Maintenance charges could be up to £1,000 a year per property.

A refurbished listed Georgian town house with access to South Audley Street's private gardens is on the market for £11 million, while a 2,500sq ft apartment on Green Street with direct access to private communal gardens costs £3.95 million. Call Wetherell on 020 7493 6935.

'Arundel Square was famous for having a missing side.'

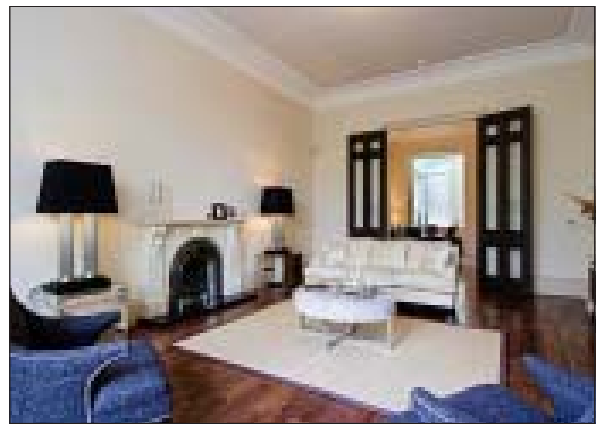
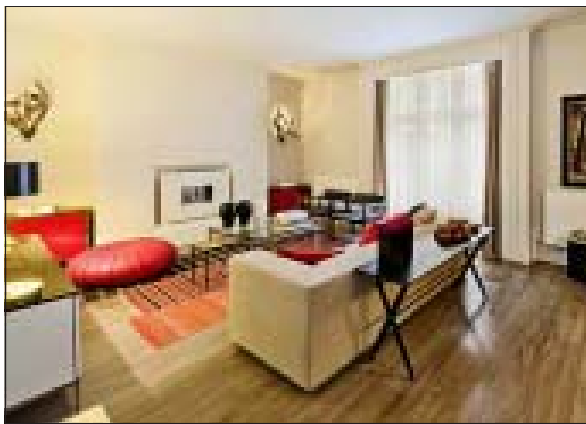
Now the square is complete again'

'Mayfair's main squares are open to the public. But there are several secret gardens that even the locals don't know exist'



£3.95 million:
Green Street W1.
A ground- and lower-ground-floor flat with three bedroom suites and direct access to private gardens. Call Wetherell on 020 7493 6935





From £995,000:
Queens Gate
Gardens, SW7.
Five flats in a
sought-after
garden square
in South
Kensington. Call
Northbeach on
020 7228 9822

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DAVID PRICE



From £250,000:
Highbury Square,
N5. Arsenal
Football Club's
former stadium
has 60 homes
remaining. Call
0845 262 6000

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£2,500 a week:
Dunraven Street,
W1 (left and
below). In the
heart of Mayfair,
this three-
bedroom, two-
storey house,
with access to a
garden square,
is for rent. Call
Grosvenor
Lettings on 020
7312 6449

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From £285,000:
Arundel Square,
N7 (above and
above right).
New flats have
open-plan living
space and a
glass-panelled
balcony
overlooking the
gardens. Call 020
7288 0330

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