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CULTURAL REVOLUTION

From ballet to theatre, London's cultural institutions are starting to spread across the capital, bringing a new lifestyle, identity and type of property buyer to the outermost areas

WORDS: ZOE DARE HALL

As London's West End ups the ante as a luxury residential destination, with areas such as Covent Garden and Soho providing a buzzy alternative for wealthy buyers who want arts and culture on their doorstep, the opposite trend is also at play. London's cultural institutions are starting to fan out around the capital, bringing a new lifestyle and identity to peripheral areas — and in turn, or so property developers hope, a new type of buyer.

In coming years, culture-lovers will be as likely to get their fix of the best in theatre, dance or music in east London's Stratford, Wembley in the north west, or in entirely new areas such as London City Island — also east — as

major arts institutions make their home in locations that had been seen as out on a limb.

Stratford's fortunes began to change when the 2012 Olympics came to town. Now the Olympic Park area has been rebranded "Olympicopolis" and will include new outposts of the famous dance theatre Sadler's Wells and the Victoria & Albert Museum. When, from 2018, Crossrail brings Stratford to within 14 minutes of the West End, it will be as easy to catch a performance in fast-changing E20 as it will in W1.

It's enough to convince Harrods Estates, the property agency linked to the world-famous department store, to stray from its usual multi-million



Clockwise from far left:

Manhattan Loft Gardens comes to Stratford; London City Island in Canning Town (left and below right) will have 1,700 new homes and give English National Ballet fantastic facilities; The Music Box (below left) in Southwark will provide 41 apartments above the Centre for Contemporary Music



£750,000 in Knightsbridge townhouse territory and market off-plan flats from £250,000 in Manhattan Loft Gardens, the Manhattan Loft Corporation's 42-storey residential tower in Stratford that includes sky gardens and a hotel and was designed by the architects of Dubai's Burj Khalifa (manhattanloftgardens.co.uk; harrodsestates.com).

Canning Town, also in east London, is a world away from London's arts scene, but that is all set to change. Among the new residents moving into the area's London City Island — a 12-acre peninsula under transformation from an industrial zone to a "mini Manhattan" by Eco World Ballymore — is the English National Ballet (ENB). It will take over its gleaming new premises in 2018, with bespoke rehearsal studios for the ballet company and



symphony orchestra, and glass walls so that passers-by can take a peek. There will also be 1,700 new homes, with prices currently starting at £340,000 for studio flats (londoncityisland.com).

There is a sense that London's cultural epicentre is moving east, but it takes a world-class name in the arts to provide "real endorsement" of an area, says John Morley, founder of Johns&Co estate agency (johnsand.co). "The ENB will change the the whole area and attract a new generation of investor. It gives the development a new layer, particularly as this art form is usually associated with the West End," says Morley.

It's a win-win situation for developers, buyers and arts institutions, which get brand new, purpose-built facilities — in some cases, in prized central locations. The Guildhall School of Music & Drama has taken up residence with its own concert hall and theatre in The Heron, a 36-storey tower in the heart of the City of London, where the two remaining penthouses are available for £10m and £15m (theheron.co.uk; savills.co.uk).

Or there's The London Centre of Contemporary Music, whose famous ex-alumni include Amy Winehouse. This will soon have a suitably themed building in Southwark, south-east London — The Music Box, which has a glazed base and vertical enamel blades inspired by piano keys. Above the six-storey music school will be 41 apartments, costing from £737,500 (taylorvimpeycentrallondon.com; www.jll.co.uk).

London's theatre scene is also in need of new performance spaces, according to Nicholas Hytner, former artistic director at the National Theatre. He has secured one of the most iconic locations in the city for



“We’ve been looking for the right kind of space in the right kind of location that could galvanise playwrights, directors and actors”



Top: Manhattan Loft Gardens, overlooking “Olympicopolis” in Stratford

The London Theatre Company (LTC), which he set up in 2014 with the National’s former executive director, Nick Starr.

The LTC’s new home — one of the few new theatres of scale built in London in the past 100 years, according to Hytner — is at One Tower Bridge, the Berkeley Homes development that sits alongside the world-famous bridge and where remaining flats start at £1,475m for a one-bedroom apartment (berkeleygroup.co.uk).

“The time is right for a new theatre to serve the needs of contemporary audiences. We’ve been looking for the right kind of space in the right kind of location that could galvanise playwrights, directors and actors,” says Hytner. From a property investment perspective, adds Jacob Sullivan, Berkeley South East London’s head of sales and marketing, having this famous theatre duo behind the new venture “brings extra kudos to the development and to the theatre. We are still two years away from final completions, so while people wait for their homes, the theatre is a great way for them to picture what it will be like to live here.”

London’s growing trend for property/arts partnerships is also spreading west. Wembley is synonymous with sporting and pop culture, thanks to its famous stadium and arena, but Quintain’s transformation of 85 acres around

the stadium will include a new theatre that will host the stage show of *The Hunger Games* this summer, alongside the new London Designer Outlet shopping centre and hundreds of new homes, currently starting at £398,000 for one-bed flats (alto-apartments.com; savills.co.uk).

Over on the river in Hammersmith, west London, Queen’s Wharf will house the new Riverside Studios, with TV studios, an independent theatre and a cinema onsite, with one-bed flats starting at £715,000 (mountanvil.com). And in Battersea in the south west, the Royal College of Arts’ relocation from Kensington to its new home near Battersea Park has inspired art galleries, fashion designers including Victoria Beckham and Vivienne Westwood and creative businesses to set up shop locally.

“In five years, Battersea has gone from an industrial area to a creative hub. The Royal College of Arts was undoubtedly the catalyst as it has given others the confidence in the area as an artistic destination,” comments Edo Mapelli Mozzi, CEO of Banda Property, which has employed a Royal College student to design the lobby of Radstock House, where eight large lateral apartments are available from £3.5m (bandaproperty.co.uk).

Attracting a major cultural institution means you have succeeded in creating a new destination, “which is what all developers want”, comments John Morley. But it’s surely good news for buyers, too, with a resident dance company or famous theatre being the Waitrose of the arts world — the ultimate mark of a well-heeled community. Music to everyone’s ears.

Above: Nicholas Hytner’s new theatre premises at Tower Bridge