

LUCHFORD APM

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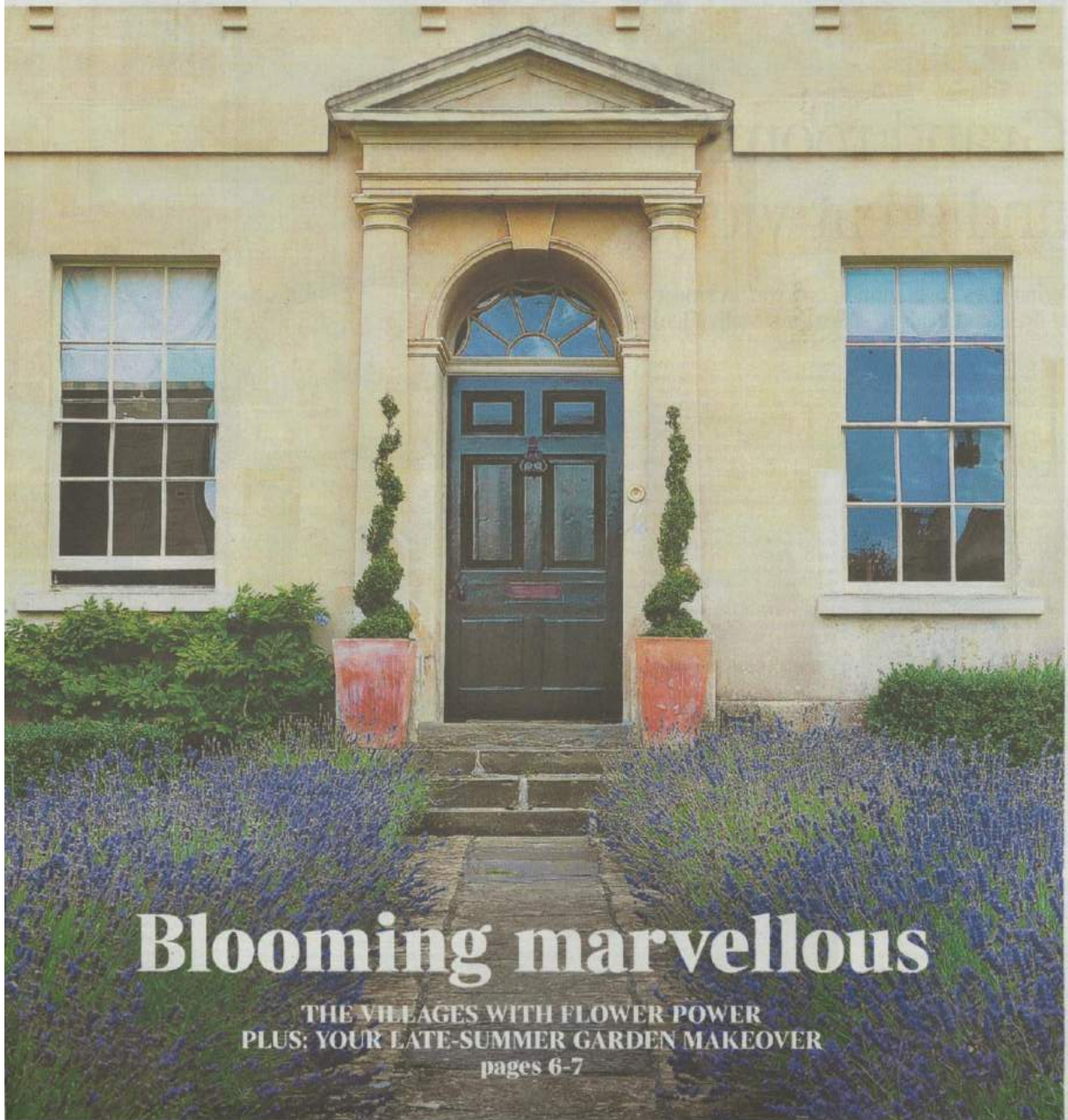
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Bricks & Mortar



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LONDON

In Ebury Street, not far from Belgravia's grand garden squares, is a smart mid-terrace, grade II listed Georgian townhouse. From the outside it is indistinguishable from its neighbours. Even if you peek through the windows at its upmarket interior, you are unlikely to be any the wiser as to why it isn't like every other house on the street.

Until 2011 the building was a dilapidated budget hotel with a truly "terrible" rating on TripAdvisor. Today it houses three luxury apartments — so far, so Belgravia. However, 119 Ebury Street is the first listed residential building in the UK to achieve the Building Research Establishment environmental assessment method (BREEAM)'s "outstanding" certification for sustainable design.

This eco-accolade has been granted, in part, for the addition of sustainable features during the renovation. These include: secondary vacuum glazing; rainwater harvesting for toilet flushing; photovoltaic and solar thermal energy panels; the use of innovative breathable insulation materials; high-efficiency boilers; and ventilation and heat-recovery systems that allow draught-free air circulation.

The house looks likely to become a fitting legacy for the former owner of the Grosvenor Estate, Gerald Cavendish Grosvenor, the Duke of Westminster, who died this week. The BREEAM judges said: "119 Ebury Street sets a benchmark for the sustainable retrofit of listed buildings in the UK, demonstrating how much their environmental impact can be reduced while preserving historically significant urban fabric."

In plain English it is a conversion of a run-down hostel into three luxury homes that look amazing, with the bonus of low energy bills and some rather whizzy technology, such as skylights that close automatically when it rains. The really clever bit, though, is that 119 Ebury Street could change retrofit policies for those considering renovating a listed building.

For the next two years Grosvenor Estate will be monitoring and comparing energy efficiency with that of a neighbouring flat — renovated in more a conventional style 18 months ago. Grosvenor will launch the flats on the market on September 1, with rents from £995 a week for a two-bedroom flat.

Victoria Herring, the director of refurbishment and retrofit for Grosvenor's London properties, says



Three flats at 119 Ebury Street in Belgravia are the first listed homes to earn the top eco-certification

A sustainable future for the listed home

A Georgian townhouse full of subtle green features creates a lasting legacy for the Duke of Westminster, says Carol Lewis

that by working with Westminster City Council and English Heritage she hopes the results will inform future planning policy on renovating listed buildings.

"It takes time to change the rule book. We are hoping that, as public and private bodies working together, we can try things and understand how policies might be changed," Herring says.

The architect on the project, Jennifer Juritz, the head of environmental design at David Morley Architects, says: "Well over half the energy loss from an old home is through the fabric of the building — walls, roof, floors and windows. Yet that is where the challenge is, because the fabric of listed buildings is precious. You change the fabric and you risk changing the character of the building."

Even seemingly non-intrusive actions can have dire consequences, for instance modern wall insulation can leave old homes suffering from damp and

Retrofit eco-technology



condensation. Juritz has employed different insulation techniques at 119, including wood fibre, IQTherm breathable insulation with lime-based plaster and Aerogel, a material developed by NASA to insulate spacecraft. Sensors in the insulation will monitor performance (temperature and moisture content) and check the long-term effect on the building.

The combination of insulation, glazing and heat-efficiency mean the house should meet the government's 2050 national carbon-reduction target of 80 per cent 30 years early. When tenants have moved in, data will be collected on energy and water consumption, environmental conditions and local weather (there is a rooftop weather station), as well as the readings from the insulation sensors.

"The planning process for 119 was very protracted. I hope we can show what can be done without detriment to the building, set an example of good practice and help to show planners how to evaluate these technologies."

"Grosvenor doesn't want to roll these technologies out [it has 1,500 listed buildings in its care in London] until proven. We also want to find out whether people like living with these technologies," Juritz says. Residents will be able to see the data at the tap of an iPad screen, and while they don't need to be eco-enthusiasts, it would help. It is not all about flash technology, though — the apartment interiors have solid eco-credentials too. The interior designer, th2designs, has used sustainable materials such as bamboo flooring, recycled-glass splashbacks, low-energy lighting and reclaimed cast-iron radiators. Everything has been done with an eye on sustainability. Even the loos are made by Toto, because the smooth ceramics mean a cleaner loo for longer, cutting down the need for harsh cleaning products and bleach.

ASK THE EXPERT

Q I took over a rental property and paid rent in advance. The landlord says he is sending a written agreement to sign, but that he forgot to ask for a deposit. Do I have to sign the agreement and pay the deposit?

A

Relatively short lettings do not have any strict requirement for a written tenancy agreement. Under section 2(5) of the Law of Property (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1989, the requirement for a written lease does not apply to tenancies of less than three years.

An informal arrangement is treated as a tenancy (as opposed to a licence or a lodging arrangement). If it grants the occupier exclusive occupation of the property for a period of time in return for rent it will be covered by housing legislation. Most significantly, an oral periodic tenancy is almost always treated as an assured shorthold tenancy under

the Housing Act 1988, and the landlord cannot end it during the first six months.

The letting will still be subject to the restrictions on tenancy deposits under the Housing Act 2004.

The basic terms for an unwritten agreement could be covered by emails or other documents, or implied from the conduct of the parties at the start of the letting. Once the tenancy has started, a weekly tenant must be provided with a rent book. Under section 20A of the Housing Act 1988, a tenant may also require the landlord to supply a written statement of the basic terms, such as the rent and the letting period. Neither party

may require the other to agree additional letting terms (such as the payment of a deposit) once the tenancy has begun.

You should bear in mind that different principles may apply if you live in Wales because of the recent radical changes made by the Welsh Assembly.

It follows that you do not have to sign the tenancy agreement or pay a deposit if nothing was said at the start of the letting.

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