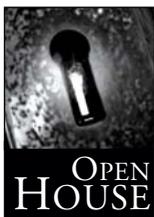


The jewel in the crown



Above: The spectacular Ocho Rios on the Crown Estate in Oxshott Right: The person responsible for this startling development, Mary Georgiou from Designer Touches of Epsom



A visit to one of the most salubrious areas in Surrey, the Crown Estate in Oxshott, sees ANDREW LOPEZ-CALVETE go through the keyhole to one of the more lavish properties that this column has ever covered

I LIKE to think that this column is a pretty egalitarian concern, covering a broad range of properties, both in respect of style and expense from across the county. However, every once in a while we stumble across something truly exceptional that extends our outer parameters, whether it be a particularly unique décor or more simply the budget – be it inspiringly frugal or breathtakingly lavish.

This month's property seems to cover all bases, as not only does it have a truly individual sense of style but also what may be the heftiest price tag of any property I've covered in my three years as your humble correspondent. Add to that its location on the Crown Estate in Oxshott, second only to St George's Hill in property value terms, and the recently completed Ocho Rios promises to be something truly special.

Regular readers will know that normal form is to talk to the owners of our feature property. But, in this case, given the rather

unique relationship between the designer and her clients, it seems only fair that we spoke to the person responsible for this startling development, Mary Georgiou from Designer Touches of Epsom.

"My parents moved into this property 22 years ago when it was a small three bedroom house dating back to the mid Fifties," explains Mary. "I was already married and living away from home at the time, so the first stage of the site's development was undertaken by them before they had even moved in, extending the floor plan to around 3,000 square feet."

A chat with the designer

However, as we sip coffee in the magnificent Stoneham-designed American oak kitchen, it's clear that the existing property has very little to do with the original dwelling; indeed, it now boasts 9,500 meticulously designed square feet.

"It was three years ago that my parents first started talking seriously about moving house," she continues. "They had developers knocking on their door almost daily wanting to buy the plot in this sought-after estate. We knew that they would just demolish what was here and put up something much more fitting for the market." But, while the initial rewards from a quick sale were tempting, the family could see a 'longer game'.

"At that time, I had been working as an interior designer for around ten years – mainly in the local area but with some overseas experience under my belt – with clients in what would be considered the mid to upper range of the market," says Mary. "So, it was actually my husband Andy's suggestion that I considered taking on the redevelopment of the site myself."

Whilst the potential gains made this a prime target for an established and experienced developer, taking on



Top: The guest bedroom
 Above: The comfortable drawing room
 Below: The stunning indoor swimming pool



The black and chrome accents really make themselves felt in the dining room



something of this magnitude (and expense) for even a successful designer like Mary was something of a risky endeavour. However, with planning permission granted without change and her parents carefully ensconced in rented accommodation, work started on what she estimated would be an 18-month project with the complete demolition of the existing property.

A well-known architect

“The design of the building was undertaken by architect Frasier Kirkaldy, whose work I was aware of from St George’s Hill,” she says. “He remained a very key part of the team and worked along with the site manager and project manager to ensure that we kept very close to both our schedule and our plans. Having said that, both my husband and I were daily visitors to the site to keep tabs on progress.”

The project does indeed seem to have gone without major incident, other than going slightly over the budgeted time schedule by almost six months – though that isn’t excessive for such an ambitious build. “We did have some issues with getting certain trades on site at the right

times, though that is hardly unique to this project. In fact, the only radical change we had to undertake was a small extension of the triple garage as a friend pointed out that a new Rolls-Royce or a Maybach wouldn’t fit in it!” she laughs. The couple had also taken the very sensible step of agreeing a set price with their team so delays and problems had no impact on the overall spend.

Once the construction element was complete, Mary was left to weave her magic on the interior. “From the start, I was very aware that I was having to think almost three years ahead of myself so the style would still be fresh when we were ready to sell,” she says. “It also had to be something that would appeal to a wide audience at the top end of the market, so I decided to stick to a palette of neutral tones punctuated by dark woods, black and silver finishes. I also felt it was important to have a signature colour throughout the property, so you will notice small accents of teal in many rooms.”

Her approach has been to sensibly focus her budget on the hard infrastructure of the building such as the magnificent staircase, Crema Marfil marble flooring and the impressive indoor pool, gym and



The American oak Stoneham kitchen



The wall carving dramatises the en-suite



Above: Black pearlescent wallpaper is definitely a unique touch!

Below: The marble-clad staircase

steam room. She has also avoided fleeting contemporary touches, predicting as she does a return to glamour.

“Taste at the upper end of the property market is definitely going back to a more comfortable and luxurious feel, with plush fabrics and classic touches such as ornate corning – but punctuated with statement contemporary features such as the impressive gas fire in the family room.”

His and hers dressing rooms

For me, the most memorable feature is the master bedroom with its his and hers dressing rooms and amazing en-suite, with its imposing wall carving and ingenious lighting design, though the miniature health club Mary has created puts up a strong challenge for attention. Overall, Ocho Rios is not just an exceptional family home, but also a daring and lucrative project that showcases what Mary’s company is capable of. In fact, she tells me that her only regret is not having done it sooner!

on 01372 270211. Alternatively, point your browser in the direction of www.designertouches.co.uk. Ocho Rios is being marketed by Knight Frank for £6million. Interested parties should contact 01372 464496 for more details.

GET THE LOOK

- Demolish your house and ensure that you have an exceptional relationship with your bank manager (and possibly your parents)
- Black, chrome, marble ...



i Mary can be contacted through her company, Designer Touches of Epsom,