

LUXE

Once more the best address in London

The office buildings in Grosvenor Square are being turned into glamorous flats, says Carol Lewis

Grosvenor Square in Mayfair, central London, looks the epitome of Britishness, with its imposing Georgian and neo-Georgian buildings set around a garden square. It has been one of the city's most fashionable addresses since the 1700s when it was built by Sir Richard Grosvenor — although in latter years it has become better known for its hotels and embassies.

One building sticks out: the vast concrete American embassy, the London Chancery Building at No 24, designed by the Finnish-American architect Eero Saarinen. However, the Americans are this year moving across the Thames to an equally striking new embassy in Nine Elms, near Vauxhall.

The move signals the end of an American association with Grosvenor Square that spans more than 200 years. John Adams established the first "American mission to the Court of St James's" in 1785 when he was vice-president and lived on the square. In 1912 the American embassy moved from Victoria Street, Westminster, to No 4 Grosvenor Square, moving again to No 1 in 1938.

During the Second World War General Dwight D Eisenhower established his military headquarters across the square at No 20, a building that was the European home of the US navy until 2007. During the war the square was known as "Little America" or "Eisenhowerplatz".

When the Americans left No 1 to move to the Chancery building in 1960, the Canadian high commissioner took up residence in No 1 and renamed it Macdonald House in honour of



Two-bedroom apartments at No 1 Grosvenor Square, Mayfair, central London, start at £8 million (Lodha)



the country's first prime minister, John Macdonald.

With the Canadians gone and the Americans about to be on their way, Grosvenor Square is being re-established as a prime London address. The Grosvenor estate is revamping the square; international investors are revamping the buildings.

The Chancery has been bought by the Qatari Diar Real Estate Investment Company and is to be converted into a luxury hotel. Eisenhower's former headquarters at No 20 has been bought

The apartments at No 20 Grosvenor Square start at £175 million for three bedrooms and include the services of a Four Seasons residents' director (Finchatton)

by an international consortium and is being developed by Finchatton. Meanwhile, No 1 is being developed by Lodha, the Indian property group.

Andrew Dunn and Alex Michelin, the founders of Finchatton, say that No 20 had been empty for about seven years when it was bought — when they toured the derelict building they discovered "a special CIA war room that had been wrapped in lead" and a mosaic US European Command floor plaque, which will be restored and placed in the development's lobby.

The American touches don't stop there. One of the key selling points for No 20 is that the 37 apartments will have a Four Seasons residence director, whose duties will include 24-hour reception and concierge, valet parking, dog walking, babysitting and housekeeping. The development will also include a garden library, residents' lounge, business suite, private dining room, wine cellars and humidors for each apartment, 18-seat cinema, swimming pool and spa.

Allen Smith, the chief executive of Four Seasons, says: "It is a far more intimate experience than in a hotel. This

is their home; the residence director will build an exceptional understanding of their needs and create a bespoke service."

He hopes that it is the first of more Four Seasons services set in residential blocks. "We think this is the future for residential living at the top end. It is very much the norm in places like New York and Hong Kong," he says.

Priced from £175 million for three or four bedrooms, the apartments will be "understated, discerning, old money" in style, Michelin says. The finishes and appliances will be top of the range.

Abhishek Lodha, the managing director of Lodha, hopes to appeal to an equally upmarket clientele across the square at No 1. It is also a boutique development — 39 flats and five duplexes (priced from £8 million for a two-bedroom apartment) — with an emphasis on luxury. There will be a 24-hour concierge, library, business suite, swimming pool, gym, spa, treatment rooms, private dining, screening room, lounge bar, on-site restaurant and "ambassador-level security".

The Oval Room at No 1, modelled on the Oval Room in the White House and built for Joseph Kennedy, then American ambassador, will be retained as a common room for residents. And while No 20 is being built afresh behind the original façade, the façade of No 1 will be dismantled and rebuilt, adding extra layers to enlarge the proportions. "All the bricks are numbered and put back. It is unbelievable," Lodha says.

Both developments have achieved good off-plan sales to international and British buyers. "Grosvenor Square is the world's most desirable address. It is instantly recognisable globally," Lodha says. "People will continue to buy here for its culture, healthcare, quality of life, education, professional and financial services. That won't change, even with Brexit."

Michelin says his company has sold to 11 nationalities, with particular interest from American buyers attracted by the strength of the dollar and the historical links. It seems that, despite the embassy's move south of the river, Americans continue to be attracted to this quintessentially English garden square. **Country homes — page 11**