

INTERIORS

# The building where a man forgot he had a £20 million flat

Katrina Burroughs meets the woman creating luxury flats in Grosvenor Square for people so rich they sometimes forget they bought them



The Oval Residence, One Grosvenor Square

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[Katrina Burroughs](#) | Tuesday April 09 2024, 12.01am, The Times

**B**landine de Navacelle, the creative director of Studio Lodha, is the former LVMH executive behind the decor of the Oval Residence, One Grosvenor Square. It's the final apartment in the development to come on to the market, and the £21.5 million three-bedroom fully furnished townhouse has been under wraps until now. It's a cocktail of luxury finishes, art and craft, much of it set against a gallery-adjacent backdrop of white walls, all ready for a new owner to move in, right down to fresh flower arrangements. So far, so Mayfair.



Blandine de Navacelle, the creative director of the prime residential property developers Lodha

De Navacelle, 36, is Zooming from Barbados — naturally — and digitally walking me through the rich interiors, when I ask her to tell me something surprising about the development. For a moment she looks perplexed, and then she says that one buyer in the block was so wealthy that it slipped his mind he had purchased a home there.



In the principal bedroom the wallpaper is Palmyra from Paolo Moschino in ochre, and a Vaughan lamp is set into the upholstered headboard

“We had one client who bought an apartment and you can imagine our clients have wealth advisers, lawyers,” she explains. “They have a team because they have so many properties. So we sold this apartment and we heard nothing for quite a few months. Until this guy politely called the concierge saying I think bought an apartment in your building, can I come and see it? So the man turned up, really nice, he was with a friend, and he was discovering his apartment. Then he called his wife. He said, ‘Darling, why are we staying in the Connaught? Did you know we have a place around the corner and they have sheets on the beds, they have fresh flowers, it’s amazing.’ These are the people we are dealing with. They have so much wealth to the point that they forgot they had spent millions and they are staying in hotel rooms for a couple of weeks before they think, ‘Actually we bought something round the corner, shall we go and check it out?’ ”



In the stairwell the designer has created a spectacular backdrop for a collection of African masks, in the form of a dramatic blue moiré wallcovering by Dedar

That was a first for de Navacelle, who is used to the eccentricities of the seriously minted, from her seven-year stint at LVMH, which ultimately led to her current career in luxury design. “I worked for [LVMH] in Paris and in London, and I was the communications manager for Krug champagne and Hennessy. I moved to London [ten years ago] and was responsible for Krug champagne in the UK and Ruinart, which you can see in lots of art fairs — they have a big art platform. We used to do Masterpiece and I signed Frieze.” That was how the Frenchwoman became familiar with the UK art scene and concluded that her future lay in creating beautiful, art-filled interiors. When she had a call from the prime residential property developers Lodha in 2017, she was delighted to take over their marketing and design.



One Grosvenor Square was the US Embassy between 1938 and 1960, and the Canadian high commission until 2014, when it was purchased by Studio Lodha, Lodha's parent company, for over £300 million

BILLY BOLTON

“I always wanted to be an interior designer,” she says. She had one unusual proviso, for a professional decorator: “I can’t do things I don’t like. When I started designing show apartments for Lodha I said, ‘Please don’t ask me to do anything beige.’” De Navacelle was determined to avoid the frigid palette, shiny gold details and identikit features of the typical super-prime showhome. “There’s pretty much no gold in the building. And I don’t want that abstract art painted to match the cushions that everywhere else has.” Her understated, elegant schemes have a distinctly European flavour, informed by her passion for Parisian architecture and her childhood in Normandy, where she developed a love of nature and craft.



The cinema room has been made deeply cosy with an intense burgundy coloured wallcovering, a huge framed antique silk ikat robe echoed by a series of prints of costumes with similar pattern, and a metalwork console

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“We appeal to people who want something more discreet and thoughtful,” she says. “We are not into that trashy, bling, show-off luxury, but [we appeal to] people who are really wanting to learn about culture and the story behind each piece, and the difference between a real antique and [reproduction]. I don’t think people buy my apartments because they like everything we do, but they do want personality, culture and something unique.” Cultivating this demographic has paid off. Lodha clients, having bought a residence in London, will often ask the design studio to work on the interiors of their country houses, yachts and homes all around the world.

De Navacelle, who is married with three young children, is tireless in her pursuit of intriguing objects that will add character to her projects. She regularly visits French galleries and furniture ateliers, and has “hundreds” of WhatsApp conversations at any one time with designers and suppliers. She is continually checking her phone. “Right now I can see I have lots coming in from this tiny gallery close to Victoria station. Well, it’s a tiny shop but it’s endless underground. This guy has a collection of fabrics from India and Uzbekistan and a few Turkish kilim rugs.”



On the ground floor the kitchen has a subtle reference to art deco, with fluted glass and elongated handles on the cupboard fronts and frosted glass globe lights

Her family is used to every holiday becoming a treasure hunt. “My husband and I, we love going to tiny galleries and finding small artisan pieces. It’s a bit stressful if I travel and there’s no craftsmanship. [On family holidays] we often have to leave some of our stuff behind. I can’t tell you the number of times my husband and I were trying to post our luggage in airports in Greece or having to buy new bags because we’ve bought so many plates. My kids are used to that.”



Behind the seats in the open-plan living room is a huge sculpture from a Parisian gallery

De Navacelle grew up in a château in Flottemanville in the Normandy countryside, which her great-grandparents bought, and which she spends weekends renovating, driving over from her home in southwest London on a Friday night. “I had parents who let me be very creative, and my mum loved antiques. We went to antiques dealers every weekend.”

The Grosvenor Square project is particularly close to de Navacelle’s heart, having seen it grow from the foundations up. The Oval Residence — so named because the building was the US Embassy between 1938 and 1960 — was purchased by Studio Lodha, Lodha’s parent company, for over £300 million in 2014.



An antique stripped trunk found in a gallery in the South of Paris adds a touch of warmth and elegance to make an unusual sidetable. The seating area, in the open-plan living room, features a bespoke rug made in France, inspired by cannage – the woven cane detail made famous by Dior

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“When I joined Lodha, seven years ago, it was a hole in the ground. We opened the first apartment in 2020 during Covid. I had just had my last baby.” In 2021 over £310 million worth of apartments were sold in seven weeks at an average price of over £24 million. The Russian billionaire behind the dating apps Badoo and Bumble, [Andrey Andreev](#), reportedly spent £145 million on the penthouse and other apartments at Number One.

Of the other owners in the development, de Navacelle says, “25 per cent are Americans. The youngest are 25. Pretty much everyone is an entrepreneur. They have all created their own companies. Lots are from the world of tech and made their money very recently. There are a few famous names but the wealthiest you’ve never heard of before. They are very quiet. Some of them turn up in Ubers, they come in in trainers and jeans, very low key, very discreet.” She says that while they have several homes, including properties in New York, Italy and the south of France, and holiday homes in places like St Barts, the residents of One Grosvenor Square tend to spend extended periods in London. “They have pets. The importance given to their pets is huge.” What kind of pets? “There’s a hedgehog, hamsters, a lizard, and lots of mini dogs. Our concierge books dog walkers and dog sitters and if you need them grooming there’s a van that comes around, a luxury dog groomer who is on call. Dogs are so important. In one of my design projects I was asked to do a little sofa for the dog that matched to the human sofa.



The sculptural lights over the dining table are by Eichholtz, and make a spectacular display, hung from the 4.7m-high ceiling

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What else do you get for your eight-figure investment? The lifestyle that comes with a residence, and not just for canines, is second to none. Forget Deliveroo; if your private chef has a night off, “you can get dinner sent from the restaurants of Mayfair. And the Connaught patisserie sends in fresh croissants in the morning.” To work off the Michelin-starred calories, facilities include a private health club and spa including a 25m pool, private treatment rooms and gym. Your homescape, created by de Navacelle, will feature antiques and contemporary design, with pieces from Parisian suppliers including remarkable design art from Virginie and Karine Glustin, the super-cool sisters behind Galerie Glustin.





Antique Chinese jars, in blue and white, on a white console against the white wall of the ground-floor living room, are echoed by a collection of hand-painted blue and white plates on the wall above

BERNHARD\_WINKELMANN

De Navacelle loves above all to find something that will be treasured by the homeowner. Among the most satisfying moments of the project at One Grosvenor Square was a buyer falling in love with one of her antiques and demanding its story. “I put a 17th-century chest of drawers I bought in Italy in one of the show apartments. I never know if people will keep the furniture, but this buyer was an American lady who wanted to know every detail about it — to make sure she could tell the story to everyone.”

*The Oval Residence, One Grosvenor Square, is [available to buy](#) fully furnished for £21.5 million; [studiolodha.com](http://studiolodha.com)*