

# THE MODERN

## The beauty of brutalism: why concrete and clean lines are what we need now

**T**ry not to get contemporary buildings mixed up with modernist ones. One is a skinny glass tower with a flashy brand name, such as the Shard, while the other is a concrete slab that looks as though it could survive a bulldozer or three.

Modernist architecture is a rejection of the ornamental for the functional. It may not be everyone's idea of beautiful, but it works. In this zero-waste age we should be revisiting the utilitarian spirit of architects such as Sir Denys Lasdun, who designed the National Theatre on London's South Bank. And in this housing crisis we should be channelling the ambition of public housing projects such as the Barbican Estate and Trelick Tower.

These buildings are icons, still, because they were built to last. They are made from industrial materials – hunks of reinforced concrete and steel frames – that speak of a quality and dependability that's woefully missing from contemporary housebuilding culture. That would explain our continued fascination with modernist buildings, and why we're still building homes in a modernist style today.

Strictly speaking, the Modern movement in Britain only lasted from the 1930s

until the 1960s, and it was pioneered by visionaries such as Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier (who didn't build in Britain, but had a big influence).

Some typically modern features may have fallen by the wayside since then, notably concrete façades and leaky flat roofs. However, others appear to be everywhere we look for them: large, blocky window frames that allow light to pour in; courtyard gardens; and clean lines.

Is it any wonder that, in the image-obsessed age we live in, design-led estate agencies such as the Modern House have gained such huge followings online? Those geometric shapes are made for the rectangular tyranny of the Instagram grid.

The properties here are only a small selection of what's on offer. There are authentic masterpieces – from a modernist mansion built in 1936 by Sir Raymond McGrath to the family home of John Winter, another pioneer of the period, which was built in 1961. There are also newer homes reimagined with modernist elements, and even a University of Cambridge development that takes its cues from the original modernist masters.

Melissa York – @melyork

**LONDON NW1  
£1.8M**

The feted modernist architect John Winter built this home in Primrose Hill in 1961. The two-bedder is spread across three storeys connected via a spiral staircase. It overlooks Regent's Park. The downstairs bedroom is now a yoga studio. **020 3795 5920, themodernhouse.com**



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# LIST HOUSE



## SURREY £5.95M

This seven-bedroom, grade II listed house in Runnymede is in eight acres of grounds. Built in 1936, it has starred in a Marks & Spencer campaign and several episodes of Poirot. **07870 379 518, knightfrank.co.uk**



## PEMBROKESHIRE £3M

An eco-friendly Huf Haus built in modernist style on a cliffside in Tenby. The four-bedroom property has sea views, two outbuildings, a greenhouse and gardens. **01834 862138, fineandcountry.com**



## CORNWALL £1M

This copper-clad pad has three bedrooms and is the only residence on the Drift reservoir near Mousehole and Penzance. It can be rented from £1,550 per week on Unique Homestays. **01326 617447, jonathancunliffe.co.uk**



## WARWICKSHIRE £1.47M

This award-winning house, called Rooftops for its views, has five bedrooms and six bathrooms. It's a modernist home built on the site of an Edwardian mansion. **07880 731580, mrandmrsclarke.com**



## LONDON N1 £1.975M

This three-bedroom townhouse in Islington is made from steel, timber and glass and has a Japanese-style courtyard with a 100-year-old olive tree, plus a roof terrace. **07948 054332, nestseekers.com**



## CAMBRIDGE £1,049,950

The modernist-style Milne villas with three bedrooms and a large roof terrace are part of Athena, new housing developed by the University of Cambridge. **01223 607200, athena-cambridge.co.uk**

## MARKET WATCH

## WHY ARE ESTATE AGENTS STILL OPEN?

**W**alking down a normally busy London high street near where I live last week, I was surprised to see, between boarded-up shops and darkened restaurants, several estate agents with their lights on and workers inside. In one they were strategically distanced, while in another they sat next to each other, although separated by perspex screens.

Funny how uneasy the sight of an unmasked indoor workforce makes you feel these days. It must be frustrating to all those other small businesses that have had to shut up shop again, despite making expensive Covid-related updates. For the rest of us working from home in makeshift set-ups, what signal does it send?

I started househunting at the end of last summer, so have had experiences ranging from virtual viewings to masked real-life viewings – or no viewings at all unless your bags are packed and your mortgage is ready to roll.

However, last week I was taken aback when one of the agents we are registered with offered to chivvy me along by coming round for a “long chat about my requirements”. No thanks. Rather like the influencers who travelled to Dubai for “work”, it’s hard to justify as essential.

I’m not the only one feeling uneasy. In a recent YouGov poll, 42 per cent of those questioned thought that house viewings should not be able to continue in person during lockdown, while 24 per cent felt they should only be allowed for people within a local area. You can’t blame



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people living under a “stay at home” order for being cautious. It’s what the property portal Zoopla has suggested is behind a 12 per cent fall in homes coming on to the market in the first two weeks of 2021, compared with the same period in January 2020.

Of course there is a strong economic argument for keeping the housing market going. Stamp duty generated £11.6 billion for the UK economy in 2019/2020, and the process of buying and selling homes employs roughly half a million people.

Then there are all the associated spends that, according to a report by Knight Frank and the Home Builders Federation, contribute £9,599 to the economy per transaction. In the year after a move we treat ourselves to £4,018 of furniture, soft furnishings, DIY and kitchen and bathroom upgrades, according to the data agency Twentyci.

However, we spend big elsewhere too. Getting through this pandemic requires mass compliance, and a sense of being in it together. Ranks of estate agents visible on decimated high streets may be within the rules, but it’s not in the spirit of the game.

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