

London (/propertynews/london)

Grosvenor Square's original US embassy building gets the poshest – and most discreet – of residential makeovers

Neo-Georgian facade and Joe Kennedy's replica of the White House Oval Office expertly preserved in building's conversion to luxury apartments

16 HOURS AGO



By Edwin Heathcote

Grosvenor Square was always intended to be London's poshest address. Laid out between 1725 and 1731, its location in Mayfair and proximity to Hyde Park — and later to the best clubs, hotels and shops — established the square's fashionable reputation. Yet it also came to be a curious story of architectural mediocrity and lost opportunities.

The square's grand Georgian houses had been built by some of the greatest architects of the day: Robert Adam, William Chambers, John Soane, James and Samuel Wyatt, among others. Almost nothing of that era survives, save for two houses, one of which was once inhabited by future US president John Adams. It established a precedent: Eero Saarinen's huge US embassy building (1958-60), the first purpose-built embassy in London, continues to dominate the west side of the square. Though the embassy relocated in 2017, Saarinen's building is remembered as the locus of fierce protests against the Vietnam war in the late 1960s.

Much of the rest of the square was rebuilt in a kind of hypertrophied 1920s neo-Georgian style with ludicrously attenuated and extended mansard roofs. Little appears to have changed since, despite what seems like decades of continuous construction. The facades are mostly intact, but behind them, things are beginning to look very different. Saarinen's embassy building has been hollowed out to become a hotel, The Chancery Rosewood, designed by David Chipperfield. No 1 Grosvenor Square, the building that housed the US embassy between 1938 and 1960, and thereafter the Canadian High Commission until 2014, is now an exclusive apartment block.



Now luxury apartments, No 1 Grosvenor Square previously served as both US and Canadian embassies

No 1 Grosvenor Square has been designed by Eric Parry Architects, who have quietly done a lot of work around Mayfair, unfussily reinventing a number of buildings such as the Four Seasons Spa and the ceramic facade of 14 George Street, as well as the

galleries and apartments of 23 Savile Row. Its facade appears to be unchanged but has in fact been removed, rebuilt and extensively remodelled on the Grosvenor Street side to accommodate a development of 44 residences.

Unusually for the West End, it features a gated entrance and drop off for cars within the building. Parry's porte-cochère here is defined by timber columns that support an undulating grid. It is apparently the block's most Instagrammed feature and leads to the development's underground parking.

Some residences have entrances from the street, more like typical London townhouses, but most residents will pass through a lobby that leads to a series of circulation spaces, including one that is an unlikely homage to the White House Oval Office. It was installed by US ambassador, Joe Kennedy, in 1938 and was intended to inspire his children — including a young JFK, who visited his father here in the late 1930s — to achieve power and accustom them to its trappings.

The apartment interiors, designed by US/Canadian outfit Yabu Pushelberg, are relatively restrained. Most flats had already sold when the FT visited and I only had access to one relatively modest show apartment. It looked a little like a small upscale hotel suite, where too much furniture has been stuffed in as an excuse for the size of the space.



The replica of the White House Oval Office was installed by US ambassador, Joe Kennedy, in 1938

Nothing here is “affordable”. Prices start at £8.65mn. The penthouse, a knock-through of three separate apartments, sold in 2020 for £140mn. (Even this staggering sum failed to make it London’s most expensive property that year, being pipped by a £200mn, 45-room Knightsbridge house.)

As you might expect, No 1 Grosvenor Square (developed by super-luxe specialists, Lodha) offers hotel-style services and amenities including a 24-hour concierge, a 25m swimming pool, spa, cinema and dining room available for residents to hire, as well as biometric access and “embassy-level” security.

Perhaps the most impressive thing about this design is that it appears to be ultra conservative, a straight facade retention of a dignified and familiar, if oversized, city block. But it is really nothing of the sort. Eric Parry Architects were able to disassemble the facades, store the components, restore the stone and brickwork, and then stretch and manipulate the elevations to accommodate better, or more appropriate, ceiling heights and proportions. On the Grosvenor Street side, the facades were also extensively remodelled to make them more suitable for apartment rather than office use. It’s a compliment to the architects that one can barely see what has changed.

Donald Trump, when US president, famously refused to come to London for the opening of the new US Embassy in Nine Elms, on the unfashionable south side of the river, suggesting the move from Grosvenor Square was a bad deal. Looking at the prices here, he might have been right.

Photography: Knight Frank

🔖 Tags: [architecture \(/propertynews/tag?tag=architecture\)](/propertynews/tag?tag=architecture)

LONDON PROPERTIES [\(/property/for-sale/london\)](/property/for-sale/london)

[See More London Listings \(/property/for-sale/London\)](/property/for-sale/London)

RECENT STORIES✓



[\(/propertynews/london/7040-](/propertynews/london/7040-grosvenor-squares-original-us-embassy-)

[grosvenor-squares-original-us-embassy-](/propertynews/london/7040-grosvenor-squares-original-us-embassy-)

Grosvenor Square’s original US embassy building gets the poshest — and most discreet — of residential makeovers [\(/propertynews/london/7040-grosvenor-squares-original-us-embassy-building-gets-the-poshest-](/propertynews/london/7040-grosvenor-squares-original-us-embassy-building-gets-the-poshest-)

ianVisits

Your guide to London's culture and transport news and events taking place across the city.

A swarm of golden swallows lands on the side of Mayfair building

Published 17 August 2023 | By Ian Mansfield | London Art News

A decorative gold screen of birds in flight has appeared on the side of a grand Mayfair building in recent weeks.

Called Swarm, it's a new artwork by Alison Wilding RA OBE commissioned to go on the side of a building that has been both the USA Embassy and the Canadian High Commission and is now a block of flats.

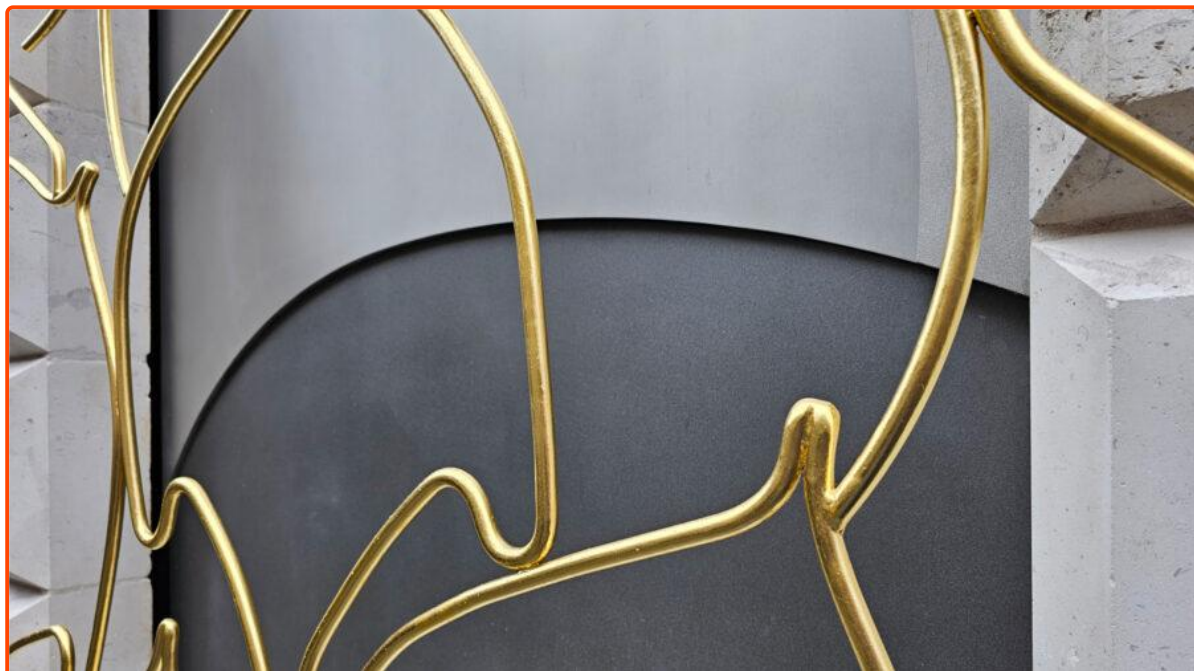


The artwork takes the form of a decorative metal screen mounted over a niche formed by a blank window in the central bay of the Grosvenor Street façade. Where the fencing used to be a continuous run along the building, they've also cut that back so you can walk up to the art for a closer look if you want to.

privacy

x





Although clad in gold, it's very easy to walk by without noticing as it's such a thin and delicate design, which is actually a good thing, as public art should be respectful of the location and not impose itself on people who might not always like what they see.

The sculpture can be read as an abstract artwork, although the screen is inspired by birds swarming in flight, while the curvilinear elements behind it reference the oval plan of Grosvenor Square nearby. It is not, however, the artist's intention that the sculpture should only contain fixed meanings to be interpreted, but rather that the viewer could be engaged in whatever way they wish, with the sculpture offering different readings over time.



The building it sits on is also interesting, even though it looks like yet another generically grand Mayfair building.

It was originally constructed as the Embassy of the United States of America, opening in 1938, but in 1960 it became the High Commission of Canada when the US embassy moved across to the other side of Grosvenor Square into their new Eero Saarinen designed building.

For decades the Canadian and US buildings faced each other, but now that the US embassy has moved to **Nine Elms** and the Canadian High Commission consolidated onto their **Trafalgar Square** site, the area around Grosvenor Square is becoming more residential again.

This building was converted into flats by Eric Parry Architects, but the method of doing so was itself slightly unusual. They retained the facade and gutted the rest of the building, but rather than keeping the facade intact, they **dismantled it** and kept it in storage, then reassembled it onto the replacement building.

The replacement building is also mounted on vibration-isolating springs to help reduce vibrations from the Jubilee line which runs under the eastern corner of the building.

Sorry house hunters, the penthouse was sold for £138 million in 2020.

More affordable, as it's free to see, you can find the art on the side of the building officially called **1 Grosvenor Street**.

The local TfL street sign needs updating though.