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LIVING IN HARMONY

Singer Kevin Simm and his glitz-free country cottage

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A floating sensation

Jo Knowsley settles in for the night on a boat that promises to be the ultimate in water-based luxury – so how did she get on?

PHOTO: OSCAR MORINYE

THE moment was one of genial domesticity – a ginger tomcat bounding past the patio doors of our luxury ‘penthouse’ apartment. But when he returned with his brother, moments later, any sense of normality evaporated – the cats were wearing custom-made and brightly coloured, inflatable harnesses and

their ‘territory’ was a watery playground on the Thames.

The cats had come from a nearby boat at London’s Limehouse Marina, where we were resident for the night on the ‘Floating Penthouse’. This exquisitely crafted, one-bed apartment seamlessly blends the best of riverboat living with the space and facilities of a luxury flat. A new and

unique entry to London’s property market, it’s billed by agents Fine & Country and Rubicon as a home designed for ‘a life less ordinary’.

It’s certainly different – a lavish designer apartment with familiar right-angled and regularly shaped rooms, quite literally set on a hull in the water. A hull, it should be noted, that is equipped with a top-of-the-

range German-built engine, sewage-filtering equipment and navigational aids to allow it to be moved along Britain’s waterways.

Custom built in Berlin, its 67sqm interior can be designed to create a living space in almost any formation you want – making it ideal for a floating office or a luxury pied-à-terre. And, unlike a canal boat, its robust

8mm steel hull, coated with epoxy, means it doesn’t have to regularly retire to a dry dock for maintenance – it’s guaranteed for 20 years.

You can install luxury fittings such as a Jacuzzi, or even opt for a two-storey model, providing an extra two bedrooms – though this would

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Party space: The Floating Penthouse features an extensive roof terrace



Out on the tiles: The shower room

PHOTOS: OSCAR KORWEI



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'We felt we had

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require a permanent mooring, as it wouldn't be equipped to move about on the water.

On this night, however, my partner and I were exploring the one-bedroom apartment, complete with its extensive roof terrace, a kitchen with Miele appliances (including a sophisticated wine fridge), underfloor heating throughout and a log-burning stove to keep us cosy on a chilly autumn night. If you want to entertain, the boat can accommodate up to 50 people and there are optional high-power, underwater LED lights, which give dramatic definition to the outside of the vessel.

Let me confess, I'm not a 'water person'. But then, this floating flat barely resembles a boat at all. From the dock, you step straight on to a flat deck and inside it's all wooden parquet floors – except for the elegantly tiled shower room and toilet. In the main living areas there are no stairs at all, unless you want to climb to the upper deck, from just outside the entrance doors, or venture down into the hull through a hatch, to discover the magic of its engineering – and extra storage of 100sqm.

The double-glazed, tinted windows offer floor-to-ceiling views from almost every room – the bedroom is a particular triumph. And you can even step out on to

the external lower deck through doors from the toilet and shower room.

The power connection comes from a stainless-steel socket and a cable, plugged into the onshore power point that's fitted with a pay-as-you-go meter. You won't forever be stuffing it with change – typical use will rack up a bill of about £50 a month. Meanwhile, an LPG installation for 12kg gas bottles services the hob; the oven is electric.

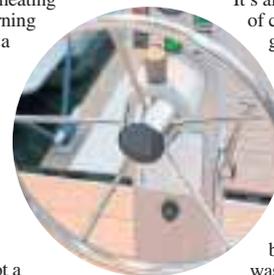
It's all digitally controlled, of course, and, yes, buyers get an exhaustive manual to explain how everything works.

But what about running water? Or – dare we discuss it – sewage arrangements?

This, by any boating standards, is very clever stuff and you'd be hard-pushed to know it was any different from a

land-based home. The boat has a state-of-the-art, full recycling system for water, which is a 400 litre tank in the hull. The system filters the contents, producing crystal-clear water for showering and washing, meaning that, unlike with most boats, waste water doesn't need to be stored or pumped out. An additional special membrane generates drinkable water.

As the sun went down, we sipped glasses of chilled champagne while sitting on the sofa, watching swans and moorhens glide past on the water within arm's reach. Around us, the lofty apartments built to rejuvenate this former industrial area in the docks soared high





Spacious: The living area features a Miele-equipped kitchen and a log-burning stove



Room with a view: The bedroom features striking floor-to-ceiling windows



Illuminating: Underwater LED lighting



Life on the water: Limehouse Marina

the best of both worlds'

overhead. We felt, rather smugly, that we had the best of both worlds – a sense of being part of the landscape, while enjoying the sort of luxury few boats can provide. This is not so much a boat adapted to use as a home, but an apartment that can perform like a boat (it's insured to go up to 3km out into open water).

We watched commuters bustle past on the dockside walkways, but felt miraculously removed from their

hectic world. Incredibly close to the heart of London, we occupied a rarified oasis of tranquility.

Rev House (the brainchild of a boat enthusiast and an interior designer), which manufactures the Floating Penthouse, boasts that it is one of the largest manoeuvrable house boats on the market.

Amanda Mangan, managing director of Fine & Country, City Living, gives more detail: 'The Rev

stands for revolutionary; it's the vision of two highly creative men. Where else in central London could you get a luxury, one-bedroom apartment for around £500,000? And right on the water?'

'We have agreed ten leisure moorings for five years at the Royal Docks in E16, for those who buy a Floating Penthouse. We're working to secure more London moorings soon.' A leisure mooring – which would

set you back £1,300 a month – allows the penthouse to be used as an office or as a second home, although you wouldn't be able to live on it full time. Each Floating Penthouse takes six months to a year to build and the model now residing in Limehouse is just over a year old.

In the morning, after a sound night's sleep, we watched the same commuters battling a sturdy breeze to make their way to work. The same cats visited,

closely followed by their owner. The Floating Penthouse had created quite a buzz. Whether, as the agents hope, they can multiply to create veritable floating villages on London's waterways remains to be seen – but there's no doubt, it's an enterprising vision.

■ Boats start from €499,000 (£423,000); for more information email paul.kirby@fineandcountry.com

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