

Breathe easy with air filters in your home

High-end city developments are installing systems that filter out particulates, pollen and viruses, reports Carol Lewis

Forget spas, concierges and helipads, the latest luxury property must-have is a top-of-the-range pollution and virus-busting air-filtration system.

Not least because some of the most expensive homes in the country are in city centres, where the air is the most polluted. However, the combination of global warming and a pandemic is making everyone more aware of the quality of air that we breathe.

This month Search Smartly, a London property portal, announced that it would put air-quality scores on all properties, and Propertymark, the estate agencies' body, said it was poised to make it a requirement that all sellers disclose poor air-quality ratings.

Will Watson, the head of London sales at the Buying Solution, a buying agency, says: "The current situation [with Covid-19] has made it even more important, but with allergies and pollution levels on the rise, for some time there has been an increased interest in air quality."

Several developers have begun incorporating air filters into their high-end schemes, including Native Land at its Holland Park Villas development in Kensington, west London, and Qatari Diar at its Chelsea Barracks development in southwest



The Bryanston is a high-end development overlooking Hyde Park in central London. It is also close to the traffic fumes of Marble Arch and will have an air-filtration system

London.

Almacantar, a developer, is providing air filtration and indoor-pollution monitoring at its new high-end development, the Bryanston, overlooking Hyde Park. It is believed to be the first luxury residential developer to register for AirRated certification, giving buyers and residents detailed information on the standard of air inside their home.

They may need it because, aside from being next to the green expanse of Hyde Park, the

'A client has asked for wardrobes that are sanitised at all times'

Bryanston, where prices start from £2.6 million for a one-bedroom apartment, is next to Marble Arch, a busy road junction that has average particulate levels of $16.5\text{mcg}/\text{m}^3$ — $6.5\text{mcg}/\text{m}^3$ above the World Health Organisation guideline.

Kathrin Hersel of Almacantar says: "The building will be monitored and we will receive guidance on what steps we can take to enhance the environmental performance of the property and the quality of the air for our residents."

AirRated will install air purification units, developed by scientists at Oxford University, that use Hepa filters to remove particulates, carbon monoxide and pollen, as well as bacteria and viruses, including swine flu

(H1N1). Testing is yet to confirm whether the filters screen out Covid-19, although the scientists point out that the virus is of a similar size to swine flu.

Francesca Brady, the head of environmental research at AirRated, says: “Areas with high outdoor particulate matter have been linked to long-term detrimental health impacts in those who live and work there, leading to increased Covid-19 mortality rates in those areas. The evidence therefore proves that better air quality enhances life and the body’s ability to fight the virus.”

“[One of the air filtration systems] we use is proven to eliminate swine flu [H1N1], a virus with a very similar make up to Covid-19, so it is highly likely it is clinically effective in the same way. Testing has progressed with the likelihood for it to be clinically approved this summer.”

Last week scientists from Cambridge University and Israel announced they had developed an air filter to capture and destroy coronavirus particles, so expect it to be high on the list of expectations not just in health centres but in office and residential blocks soon.

All the high-spec science will remain hidden from the residents at the Bryanston, though.

“Fresh, filtered air is supplied to the apartments through discreet long and minimal slots at the top of the walls or within

joinery in each room, with old air extracted through a detail in the curtain pelmet which is not visible to occupants.”

clients wanting air purification in their homes, says the quest for clean air goes beyond traffic fumes: “A client has asked that their clothes be stored in wardrobes that are sanitised at all times. This is to provide a dual purpose — minimise the threat of viruses, but also to clean the garments of odours, bacteria and air pollution. Lema, the wardrobe maker, has an air-cleaning system that can provide this function and we will be incorporating such elements into many future projects.”

Buyers in apartment blocks tend to pay more to live higher, not just for the views, but for cleaner air away from traffic. At South Quay Plaza, in London’s Docklands, Berkeley Homes installed ventilation systems in all apartments and in the lower storeys fitted specialist filters to prevent nitrogen oxide emissions from the traffic entering the flats through the ventilation system.

While there are regulations which control air quality in buildings, many think they don’t go far enough and that some regulations, such as those on energy efficiency, go so far they end up being detrimental to wellbeing, with people living in hot and stuffy homes and unable to open the windows.

Complaints on HomeViews, a

website where residents can review their new-build development, are frequently about poor heating, cooling and ventilation, especially during the recent hot summers. And you know the situation has become slightly surreal when someone in the industry boasts of “openable windows for occupants’ personal control of their environment, allowing fresh air to fill the space immediately”.

However, opening a window can expose you to high levels of pollution and noise, which puts residents in a Catch-22 situation. “It is a problem balancing the need for clever technology and natural cooling. People want the best technology, but they also want a terrace or balcony and the ability to open doors and windows,” says Tom Dailey, a development consultancy partner at Knight Frank.

While the latest cooling and air filtration systems are beginning to appear in luxury homes, they have yet to make it into the mainstream. A key problem is cost with air conditioning, for instance, not usually fitted in developments that cost less than £1,000 per sq ft. “We need affordable cooling systems in the face of global warming,” Dailey says. “You expect developments at the top end to have all the bells and whistles, but [profit] margins are tighter in the mainstream market so adoption is slower, but good clean air should be available for everyone.” ■