



From £1.5 million: Oyster Pier's bespoke barges offer spacious dining areas (far left) and living rooms with all the mod cons (left)

Lap of luxury: boat living doesn't have to mean skimping on the bathroom (top right) or on a sumptuous bedroom (right). Through Bective Leslie Marsh (020 7589 6677)



Leading a champagne lifestyle at Oyster Pier

LONDON'S WATERWAYS are changing. The wheels are in motion for major updates to breathe fresh life into the Thames and the canals that wind through the city. Mayor Boris Johnson's 2020 Vision aims to greatly increase use of the river. There are strategies in place for new piers, floating homes, hotels, restaurants and bars.

Live in luxury on your 3,000sq ft bespoke barge next to the heliport, says **Amira Hashish**

The Port of London Authority (PLA) and the Canal River Trust will play an integral part in the process. The latter looks after some of the capital's most significant waterways including Regent's Canal and West India Dock and anyone living or working on London's canals must apply for boat licensing and mooring from the Trust.

The PLA are much like the river police, with a fleet that patrols the

Thames 365 days a year. They also promote the river for trade and travel. "Interest in the Thames has increased substantially in recent years," says their representative Jim Trimmer. "We have observed a trend for more and more people wanting to be by the river and call it home. Not just to live next to it, but also on it."

For those considering taking the plunge, here are three very different ways of living on the water in London:

THE FIRST BLING BARGES

Lowdown: Oyster Pier (oysterpier.com) in SW11 is not your average marina. There is space for 10 bespoke barges. Sourced in northern Europe and refurbished in the UK, each takes six to eight months to build. "They cost the same as a Wandsworth penthouse but you get more square footage and high-end design," says Benson Beard of estate agents Bective Leslie Marsh.

With about 2,300sq ft of interior space and 730sq ft of outdoor terrace-style space, the typical two-storey barge will have three bedrooms and bathrooms, a sprawling living room, generous kitchen and dining room.

The vessels are traditional Dutch barges, so they are super-sturdy. For extra security, there is a pier master on site and residents have access to concierge services from Hotel Rafayel (hotelrafayel.com).

Location: just across the water from Battersea Power Station, where the first phase of redevelopment is due for completion in 2016. Prices there range from £350,000 for a studio to £6 million for a penthouse.

The area is also to have two new river bus piers – Plantation Wharf and Battersea Power Station – making transport links even more convenient.

Oyster Pier has qualified skippers and experts available to teach owners how to drive their barge. The pier has access to London Heliport. Plus, underground parking and residential on-street parking is available.

Costs: a barge with basic fit-out starts at £1.5 million and comes with a 60-year lease at Oyster Pier. Service charges are £7,500 a year. If it floats your boat contact Bective Leslie Marsh on 020 7589 6677 (bectivelesliemarsh.co.uk; zoopla.

homesandproperty.co.uk/for-sale/details/18917360).

THE FAMILY HOME

Lowdown: retired engineer Roger Saunders, 69, has lived on a barge moored at Kew Pier for 15 years. He bought the 1930 Dutch Spitz in Belgium and motored it over the Channel before parking it in Kew.

"I wanted to be in the area because my daughters were in school at Kew College," he said. "This houseboat offered an affordable solution."

After years of refurbishment it is now a comfortable three-bedroom home with a hydrotherapy bath and an en suite wet room. "You feel as if you are living outdoors, as you are surrounded by nature."

Location: a short stroll from Kew Gardens (District and Overground lines) and Kew Bridge (National Rail)

stations. There are easy routes in and out of London via the A4/M4 and A316.

Costs: the barge, called Spes, is on the market because Saunders plans to spend more time abroad. Foxtons and River Homes are selling it for £599,950 (020 8973 2700; foxtons.co.uk). Insurance is £700 a year and barge owners in Kew can expect to pay around £800 council tax annually. (zoopla.homesandproperty.co.uk/for-sale/details/27769842).

THE RENTAL PAD

Lowdown: Ben Storey, 24, a digital media executive, lives a stone's throw from Chelsea for less than £500 a month, including bills. "For the past six months I've lived on a fishing boat not far from Albert Bridge. I first viewed the boat on a fantastic day and I sat on the deck, saw the breathtaking

views and my heart decided for me."

Lack of space is the main restriction, but the young professional says: "On the plus side, it has made it essential for me to be tidy. The swaying took a bit of getting used to but it now helps rock me to sleep. It's like living in a quiet rural village in the middle of London. The sense of trust is strong. There are spontaneous barbecues and dinner parties, residents pitch in on DIY. It's nice to see camaraderie."

Location: King's Road is a five-minute walk away. "If you live further out you might miss out on the best London has to offer," says Storey.

Costs: £480 a month, including bills. Storey comments: "The average local house price is £1.2million so I'd say I have the better deal." Riverside homes.co.uk specialises in houseboat lets, or search "houseboat" on homesandproperty.co.uk.

£599,950: this houseboat, (right) called Spes and moored at Kew Pier, is a three-bedroom home that has been refurbished by current owner Roger Saunders



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