

# High roller

A roof terrace can add thousands to the monthly rental price. But it must be in tip-top condition, warns *Chris Partridge*

**E**very city dweller loves the idea of a roof terrace, a hideaway between the chimney pots for sunbathing, stargazing or simply escaping the noise and smells of street-level life.

But so many roof terraces are windswept, arid places, more Colditz than Shangri-la. Isolated at the top of the house, creating and maintaining a roof terrace can involve a lot of backbreaking and tedious work, but it is worth it, especially if the garden is overshadowed and sunless.

Simon Bhul Davies of **Capital Rentals** Interior Services Department has just revamped the roof terrace of a £7 million apartment in Kensington, as part of a complete refurbishment. 'A roof garden can add value to a property as long as it is in really good order,' he says. 'Applicants see themselves sitting outside with the Sunday papers sipping coffee and freshly-squeezed orange juice, eating warm croissants or having long, lazy, summertime, alfresco dinner parties. Whether they will ever actually do this is debatable but this is the type of lifestyle that a roof garden needs to reflect.'

Bhul Davies recommends plants that can resist the dry, windy conditions that most roof terraces endure. 'Put in lots of lovely big pots filled with topiary or plants like lavender or rosemary and add lanterns with big, fat candles and good-quality furniture,' he advises. 'Avoid high-maintenance plants that die quickly!'

Reviving the Kensington roof garden did not involve major work to transform it from a cold, bleak storage area for old deck chairs into an appealing relaxation space. The wood decking was cleaned and oiled, and the pots rearranged to form a coherent space. The straggly, barely-alive plants were thrown out and replaced with bushes and dwarf trees, and the soil covered in light-coloured scalpings to help retain moisture. A pair of loungers and a big, jolly sunshade push the subliminal message that this is a place for serious R'n'R.



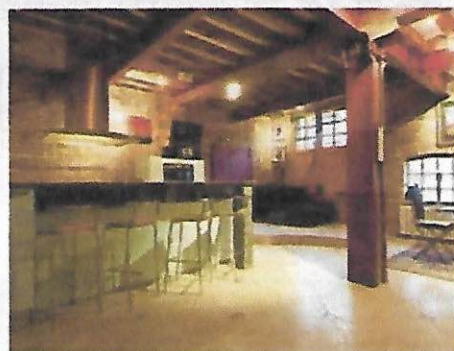
This picture: a Kensington roof terrace revamped by Simon Bhul Davies. Right: Dunbar Wharf – a lovely early Victorian warehouse

Don't lose sight, however, of the practicalities and remember that this is primarily not a garden but a roof with a structural job of work to do. 'Always ensure that the floor of the terrace is watertight and doesn't leak,' says Bhul Davies. 'Jet wash it regularly to keep it looking clean and fungus and moss free. Decking keeps it looking neat and crisp.'

Rachel Hunter of **Capital Rentals** Sloane Square office is currently looking for a tenant for a lovely first- and second-floor apartment in Wilton Crescent, which has a huge roof garden at first-floor level, opening conveniently off the kitchen. Green trellises help maintain privacy and create an architecture for the space, and terracotta pots contain a variety of hardy perennials. The decking is immaculate. 'The property is being marketed at a guide price of £1,975 per week,' says Hunter. 'I reckon that without the garden the property would have a guide price of between £1,400 and £1,500 per week.'

That's my idea of horticulture – a garden that brings in £500 a week.

The Piers Gough-designed flats at Dundee Wharf in Docklands feature roof terraces as well as spectacular sun rooms located in a free-standing tower next to the flats, which are styled to be reminiscent of a dockside crane. Getting to the sunrooms involves negotiating an aerial walkway, which can be quite intimidating on a windy day, I am told. Once in the room, however, one begins to appreciate the incredible views over the Thames. And on still days you can open the patio doors and fill your lungs with fresh air (something of a rare commodity in the metropolis). Cluttons in Wapping is letting the 10th-floor flat in Dundee Wharf at £1,350 a week. ■



## NEWS

■ Designer David Connor has created a memorable interior in a three-bedroom flat in Linden Gardens, Notting Hill. Gadget lovers will adore pressing a button to slide the roof back and let the outside come in. The rent is £2,250 a week through Marsh & Parsons, (020) 7243 5390.

■ A big lateral apartment in Pont Street has been formed by knocking flats in adjoining houses into one, creating a practical space but also a tunnel through the thick party wall that is a bit reminiscent of a dungeon in the Chateau d'Iff. Aylesford, (020) 7351 2383, is asking £2,500 a week.

■ Dunbar Wharf in Narrow Street is a lovely early Victorian warehouse with bare brick walls and massive timber beams, with some windows looking out on a little-known but picturesque inlet of the Thames known as Limehouse Dock. Cluttons, (020) 7498 4858, is seeking £1,400 per week for it.

■ One of the best things about first-floor flats in period buildings is the high ceilings. One such apartment, in Redcliffe Square, Chelsea, is on the market with John D Wood, (020) 7352 8111, and comes with a roof garden overlooking the Gothic fantasy of St Luke's church. The rent is £700 a week.