

ROCK SOLID INVESTMENT

Zachary House, the home of so much of Britain's musical heritage, has been put on the market, reports **Graham Norwood**

If you want a property of note – a musical note, that is – Zachary House, in the west London suburb of Chiswick, takes some beating. It features in *A Hard Day's Night*, the 1964 Beatles film, with scenes shot at Strand on the Green, the property's address next to the River Thames.

Then, almost two decades later, the house was bought by Midge Ure, pony-tailed frontman of Eighties new wave band Ultravox. In the lounge, Midge and his friend, Bob Geldof, co-wrote *Do They Know It's Christmas (Feed the World)*.

Downstairs in the recording studio, the pair created the backing track used as the base for lyrics later sung by more than 30 stars in the Band Aid charity supergroup – including George Michael, David Bowie, U2 and Phil Collins – who took the song to Number One for five weeks over Christmas 1984.

The property's claim to musical fame goes on, for in 1995 the house – the Georgian pile with more than 8,500sq ft of internal space includes six bedrooms, a library, staff quarters, two balconies and three terraces and has the Thames lapping at the front – was snapped

up by Alan Smith, the former editor of the *New Musical Express*, and his partner Bev Sage, the one-time lead singer in the Eighties band Modern Romance.

With today's *X-Factor* fame, instant music downloads and concerts via YouTube, it is hard to realise how influential *NME* was as rock music took Britain by storm. In the early Eighties, Smith turned it from a struggling paper with 60,000 readers to a weekly music bible with 300,000 devotees. He interviewed the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Who and an emerging songwriter called Elton John. "Yet through it all my first love was simply working on houses," says Alan, who was born in Birkenhead in the late Thirties.

He bought his first home – a cottage in Olympia, west London – for £2,000 in 1962, selling it four years later for £10,000. He followed it up with a wreck in Richmond costing £25,000, which he turned into a £70,000 gem. This kept going even during the next three decades, when he created a publishing empire of

magazines covering the explosion of interest in mobile telephones, satellite and video, home cinemas and finally the internet. On the side, Alan was the public relations man for Roy Orbison in Europe. "I was working professionally during the day, going to concerts and sometimes travelling a lot, then worked on the house in the evening and at weekends," he says.

"Most of the houses we lived in, but I bought some as pure investments to improve in Hampstead.

"I sold one to Jamie Oliver – he was all 'hello matey' on the phone, and he agreed to pay £25,000 over the asking price to secure it," says Alan.

His work on Zachary House was inspired by the condition when he bought it. "With all respect to Midge Ure, it was in a state of benign neglect when he left," says Alan.

No one can say that now. Alan has combined the main house, a garage block and cottage to form a single property on a grand scale, carefully preserved in line with its Grade II listed status.

Nine main windows on three floors enjoy dramatic views of the Thames while

several long open-plan rooms would be perfect as arts areas: one acts as a home cinema now, another is a recording studio. There are two garages, a garden, greenhouse, a conservatory and two kitchens – the list goes on.

“This property may not go to a British buyer. They’re probably reluctant to buy a large house right now. But it’ll be snapped up by an artist, likely from overseas, who wants the rare mix of space and privacy that’s here,” says Bella Tellwright of Crayson, the estate agency selling the house (for £6.95 million, 020 7221 1117; crayson.com).

As for Alan Smith, he is going to split his future time between a smaller home he plans to buy in London and a villa he already owns in Marrakesh.

And any plans for another renovation project? Not on your life.

“At my age, I’m all out of projects,” he says.

“I owe a lot, including this house, to music. Now it’s time to sit back and listen to a little of it.”



Pop art: Alan Smith enjoys his fabulous view of the Thames from Zachary House, having overseen its transformation into a spacious property with its stunning hallway and conservatory that lead on to a beautiful garden



