



SPACIOUS: The main flat's loft-style kitchen and living area, and the exterior of the former Unigate dairy, far left

The cream of apartments

PHILIP DE

Son of design guru sells spectacular £3.5m homes built in a former dairy

By **Duncan Farmer**

SINCE setting up his interior design business in 1971, Christopher Vane Percy has worked on some of Britain's most iconic institutions, including the Garrick Club and Mayfair's Connaught Hotel.

As well as being involved in such prestigious projects, Christopher, a past president of the British Institute of Interior Design, also made his own furniture.

In 1979, needing a studio to produce his pieces, he bought a former Unigate dairy in North Kensington, a stone's-throw from

Ladbroke Grove and the fashionable Portobello Road market, for £90,000 and set up his own workshop.

It proved to be an astute buy. In 1995, Christopher no longer needed the workspace (partly because most of his one-off pieces were being copied), so he sold a portion of the land for development and then spent £2million converting the dairy into seven live/work units and a maisonette.

He gave three properties to his children – and today his son Maxim is selling a three-bedroom, two-storey apartment, which comes

complete with a roof terrace, and a one-bedroom flat for a total of £3.5million.

The cul-de-sac in which the apartments are set contains a mixture of Victorian terrace houses and businesses – the old post office sorting office has since been converted into offices and studios, and an undertaker’s remains where it has been since 1937. The three-bedroom apartment is, naturally, beautifully designed, although elegantly simple and retains its industrial character.

Maxim, a director of a property business that manages the £4.5billion Berkeley Square Estate in Central London, bought the top floor, which had been a studio, from his sister Tryce, and set about amalgamating it with the flat below.

‘Because we owned the building we didn’t have to do all the work at once,’ says Maxim – the couple finished the top-floor kitchen and sitting room only two years ago. But their hard work was worth the wait, and the result is a stunning loft-like space with a vaulted ceiling and a vast skylight that floods the room with light.

‘We never put the lights on,’ says Maxim’s wife Lisette, 35, who runs a fashion business, pretaportobello.com, which showcases

the couture of stallholders at Portobello and London markets. The open-plan room also gives a view of the campanile at nearby St Charles Hospital.

‘When my father bought the dairy it wasn’t

listed, so he could have flattened it, but because he has a great interest in architecture he treated it like a listed building,’ says Maxim. ‘This part was the offices and all he did was gentrify it.’

But not by much. The beauty of the apartment is that it has space, light and an impressive utility.

The walls are hung with modern art – a Banksy, a Miranda Donovan and an intriguing work by James Hart Dyke, who followed MI6 spooks for a year, painting their interviews with contacts for a project to mark the 50th anniversary of James Bond.

A huge marble worktop in the kitchen reflects the building’s heritage. ‘In a dairy they would have used marble not because it’s easy to clean but because it’s cool,’ says Maxim.

BRICKWORK beside the staircase is exposed, and the electric wiring is covered by aluminium scavenged from a decommissioned ship in India, while the huge pendant lights from the high ceiling in the hall came from a Vauxhall car factory.

Light and space are the key to this building – even the cloakroom has a view (out but not in) and the cupboards are designed to provide storage, but not at the expense of masking light or interrupting the flat’s flow.

The kitchen/reception is 32ft long and even the couple’s dressing room is the size of most double bedrooms.

‘We could have crammed in another bedroom but, for me, circulation space is so important,’ says Maxim, who points out that, with the flat below their apartment being part of the sale, the two could be knocked together into a house. Alternatively, the smaller flat could be kept as an investment opportunity.

So why sell? ‘We’re a young family and we want more children. The roof terrace is great but it’s not a garden,’ says Lisette.

Although Maxim admits that he’s not artistic, he made one key decision that has had a great impact on the property’s value.

‘When Dad developed the dairy, he did live/work units, but the problem is that it’s not great for residential values, so we changed its status to residential.

‘Not only is it very hard to get a mortgage on part-commercial and residential property, but you also have to pay business rates, which are expensive,’ he says.

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MOVING ON: Lisette, Maxim and their son Louis

