

LIFE ON THE TOP DECK

Standards of luxury for apartment living in the capital of the North are now up there with five-star hotels, says Judith Heywood



The black penthouse swimming pool has attracted much attention for Skyline Central, left and centre, a scheme loaded with public art (including the floating sphere pictured) and other extras now regarded as must-haves

PROPERTY investors take note: your future is in Manchester. The northern powerhouse, where apartment living has been embraced as in no other British city, is breeding a demanding new consumer who expects and gets the finish and services once confined to high-class hotels.

Developers in Manchester are increasingly including concierge and valet parking services, public art and landscaped open spaces. Investors, who account for 70 per cent of apartment sales in the city, may not like the higher prices and service charges, but such features are vital in securing renters or a generous resale price. The beneficiaries are professionals aged 20-34, who make up half the city-centre population. To the draw of Harvey Nichols and Selfridges, you can add the lure of the decision to build the Las Vegas-style supercasino in east Manchester. By making a virtue of renting, these young professionals can maintain a city lifestyle rather than stretching to buy.

Skyline Central, an eye-catching wood-panelled addition to the fast-regenerating Rochdale Road launched recently, has won praise for a lavish 20m swimming pool, part of Elysium, a penthouse spa for residents. Such is the buzz about the soon-to-open rooftop health club, with its 360-degree views over the city, that Claire Ralston, associate director of Hamptons International, says pools are now seen by devel-

opers as a must-have when they plan new sites.

But it's not just gyms. Skyline also boasts the requisite concierge and valet — and a warm Zen room, with tropical plants, heated seats and a view of an orb sculpted by Neil Dawson and suspended over landscaped, lighted gardens. The developer, West Properties, is a build-to-let investor. It keeps about half of the apartments it builds and acts as letting agent for itself and the

a waiting list, but West's new venture is pitched against iconic rivals.

Completion of the Beetham Tower, designed by Ian Simpson, is still weeks away, but buyers have been seduced by the bold design and sheer presence of the 561ft-high building — the tallest residential site in the UK. With the apartments only now close to completion, a brisk trade in the high-spec Deansgate homes is already under way: expect to pay from £330,000 to £380,000 for a two-bedroom apartment, or £1,700 a month rent.

Agents cite the Great Northern Tower, No 1 Deansgate and The Edge as those setting the standards to which other developers aspire. All enjoy central locations on or close to Deansgate, eye-catching architecture and a full range of facilities and services. With other developments, such as the Green Building at Macintosh Village and Greenquarter, offering environmentally minded features or green spaces, suburbanites are being lured to the city's high life.

Interior decorators and furniture stores in the shadow of the high-rise developments are doing a brisk trade. Furnished flats let more quickly — and for more, if they come with the works. Sarah Rogerson, manager of the lettings agency Jordans, says: "You might have 30 or 40 apartments within a new development coming on the market with different agents at one time. To let yours you need to have the best quality furnishings, down to the pots and pans and pictures on the wall." Claire Ralston, of Hamptons, agrees: "People want brands. They want Poggenpohl, Siemens and Bosch, and they are prepared to pay a premium for it."

Expect other cities to follow where Manchester leads. The Beetham Organization is planning skyscraper projects in London, Liverpool and Birmingham. West Properties has three more sites in Manchester alone, plus Leeds and London plans. West's Mulryan sees the future in developments in communal areas — but not as we know them. Having exhausted the search for interior perfection, the company believes that residents will demand hotels, restaurants and grocery shops. Buy-to-let investors should take note and plan how to keep up.

Skyline Central: 0161-832 0479
Beetham Tower: 0161-832 4777
www.westproperties.co.uk
Fancy Manchester but can't quite afford it? Turn to page 18...

Skyline has valets and concierges and a heated Zen room

select investors to whom it sells the rest.

Donal Mulryan, West Properties' chief executive, insists on inspiring public spaces, top-quality finishes, particularly in kitchens and bathrooms, and apartments furnished down to cutlery, towels and modern art on the walls. He says: "The trick is to give more for the same price as your competitors." At Skyline an eighth-floor, one-bedroom apartment costs £750 a month and a two-bedroom penthouse on the 17th floor is £1,295 a month. Such a formula has worked at Lumière, its first Manchester development, on City Road East, where there is

WHERE'S IT ALL HAPPENING?

Will I like it? What's not to like? Manchester is officially a "world-class city", but one where you can still walk from one end to the other. It's got enough shops, bars, restaurants and clubs to keep any urbanite happy.

I want to flash my cash. Where should I go tonight? What about Manchester's new casino, 235, beneath Linen restaurant on Peter Street? High-flyers might also like Le Mont at Urbis, Manchester's first elevated restaurant, 35m above the city centre. It's got French food and the first Bollinger bar outside London. Get in, as they say up here. **Let's go shopping. Where's hot?** You'll know about Selfridges (Exchange Square), and Harvey Nicks (New Cathedral Street),

and Armani and Westwood (King Street). But you really must visit the brand-new Arndale Market, with its fantastic food hall selling organic vegetables, meat and fish, posh bread and deli delights.

And take coffee with the stars? Probably not in the market. But grab a latte at Love Saves The Day, in Tib Street in the Northern Quarter. You might see Tony Wilson, Wayne Hemingway or even, gasp, Mick Hucknall. If it's more glitz you're after, try Panacea on Deansgate, where Take That once held court. **But I'm just a student...** You've come to the right place then. Manchester is the perfect student city and the university — and its 35,000 students — is right at its heart.

JAYNE DOWLE