

## Great escapes: spectacular, secluded and for sale

If you're going to join the urban exodus, be sure to do it in style

**Ruth Bloomfield** 4 HOURS AGO

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Time spent in isolation may have been an endurance test for many at the height of the pandemic earlier this year, but it did prove one thing – that escaping the hustle and bustle can make for an appealing lifestyle under certain circumstances. This, coupled with the realisation of the benefits of working from home, has led some house buyers [to look for pastures new](#), and a home far beyond traditional commuter belts, both in the UK and abroad.

“There are buyers who want to leave the country altogether, and we’ve seen demand for homes that are easily accessible from the UK,” says Joanna Leggett of estate agents [Leggett](#), a specialist in French property. “Brittany, Normandy and the departments down to the Charente and Dordogne have long been holiday-home favourites, and faster TGV routes mean that British buyers have good access by both road and rail, which means less reliance on flights.” A fairytale castle with the prospect of becoming a money spinner may even be on offer if Leggett’s château in Albertville is a benchmark. Set in 66,000sq m of park in the French Alps, the former boutique hotel (priced at £4,298,002) is 13 minutes from Courchevel, an hour from Monaco and, if you want to go further afield, has its own helipad. The château, with gîtes and outbuildings, has a restaurant, a banqueting hall and a fitness centre, and may be run as a high-end Alpine destination.



This house by CLB Architects on the banks of the Snake River, near Jackson Hole, Wyoming –built for a Californian couple – is on 5ft-high platforms to maximise views, as seen from the double-height, open-plan living space © Matthew Millman Photography

Beyond Europe, destinations such as Canada promise a total change of pace – and living – with the conveniences of the modern world within reach. In Nova Scotia, [Coldwell Banker Supercity Realty](#) is offering a four-bedroom clifftop home (guide price £2,214,496) with an edge-of-the-world feel that has a city (and an international airport) on the doorstep. Nestled in 2.7 acres, the modernist house – originally a second-world-war observation tower – is contemporary in style, and just a 20-minute drive from the centre of Halifax. That said, when the new owners want to get away from it all, it borders 1,800 acres of Crown Land.

New Zealand is known for its breathtaking countryside where buyers can not only escape the rat race but indulge in any number of outdoor pursuits. Lake Wakatipu, set against mountains and forests of astonishing beauty, boasts year-round trout fishing and swimming beaches. Here, [Sotheby's International Realty](#) is selling a contemporary 8,395sq ft, five-bedroom property on the waterfront for £9,579,124. Flights from nearby Queenstown Airport to Christchurch, the South Island's largest city, take one hour.

Nothing says remote like a private island, and for those with \$13m to spare, there's a chance to own not one but two such plots, some 25 miles from Manhattan in the US. Columbia Island was once home to an emergency television transmission centre (and bunker), which was converted into a private four-bedroom house in 2007. The property, on sale with [Julia B Fee Sotheby's International Realty](#), is in Long Island Sound, accessible by boat, and comes with neighbouring Pea Island, which acts as its de-facto five-acre backyard.



Lake Wakatipu in New Zealand is set in mountains and forests – this house on its shores is on sale for £9,579,124 through Sotheby's International Realty

If an island is a step too far off the beaten track, those searching for a home in the US might find the peace and quiet of Wyoming appealing – given that it has the second-lowest population density in the country behind Alaska. Here, on the banks of the Snake River, near Jackson Hole, Eric Logan, principal architect at [CLB Architects](#), has built a four-bedroom house for a Californian couple, set on a series of 5ft-high platforms. It is a striking example of how a property can be elevated to take in the scenery that homebuyers are often seduced by – in this case, a vista of cottonwood groves and mountain ranges. The house is contemporary but clad in timber, which helps it to merge into the landscape. Inside, its walls are punctured by windows, and a series of double-aspect, double-height, open-plan areas create modern living spaces where the outdoor views take centre stage. “Even though it is about a 15-minute drive from the centre of Jackson there is enough acreage and tree coverage for it to feel like it is at the end of the world,” Logan says. For him, escaping to the countryside is about enjoying the best of both worlds. “It can be done really successfully, as long as you have the means to travel and remain connected,” he says.



The Gart, a 13-bedroom baronial house in Perthshire, Scotland, dates from 1835. It is on sale through Savills for offers over £1.75m

In the UK, the lockdown effect has given rise to what some are calling “the great exodus” from the city to the countryside. “It’s inevitable that people will move further from cities,” says buying agent Mark Lawson, a partner at [The Buying Solution](#). “More than anything, they have realised that working from home is really efficient. This does, of course, depend on strong broadband access, but if they have that, they are willing to exchange a short commute to work for a bigger house, more land and greater privacy.” Lawson is currently working with clients who are exchanging urban convenience for country charm. “They originally wanted a property no more than an hour and a half from London,” he says. “Now they are looking at properties that are two to two and a half hours from the city, widening the net to counties that they would not have considered before.” Lawson suggests that most buyers want a home that feels remote but is within striking distance of a pretty village with a good pub or a scenic spot on the coast – and it’s in these locations that properties are more likely to offer space as well as unique character. One such property is Clayton Windmills, a Grade II-listed building transformed into a contemporary home that nestles amid the bucolic splendour of the South Downs National Park. For £3m (listed with [The Modern House](#)), its new homeowner could use the separate converted granary as a home office, and spend their leisure time cultivating the vegetable garden and orchard, while enjoying the fruits of their labour in the kitchen.



A modernist cliff-top house in Nova Scotia with a guide price of £2,214,496 through Coldwell Banker Supercity Realty © Gannet Photos

**Buyers want their children to become a little feral**

Andy Ramus, director and founder of [AR  
Design Studio](#), specialises in negotiating  
complex and restrictive planning rules to  
build contemporary houses in similar Areas

of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and says lockdown has been “game-changing” for many house buyers. “I am currently building a house in St Ives in Cornwall on a beautiful plot overlooking the beach. The owners live in London but have decided to make St Ives their primary home and keep a flat in London. So rather than spending five days in the city and two in Cornwall, they will do the reverse.” Over in Dorset, Ramus has also converted a holiday house into a second home for a couple of recent empty-nesters. The five-bedroom property, perched atop a cliff near Lyme Regis, is designed as a coastal eyrie, and its façade – clad in silver-grey larch – to weather with time. “The owners didn’t want a ‘look at me’ house,” he explains. “Buildings should belong to their place, which is why we used materials that age gracefully.” The house makes the most of the astounding views with floor-to-ceiling windows, which take full advantage of another benefit of secluded living – not having to worry about being overlooked.

Outdoor living is high on the wishlist for the majority of Ramus’s clients, and he was recently called back to Dorset to add an outdoor kitchen and dining area to the property – a feature, he says, that is gaining popularity. He has also seen new interest in outdoor swimming pools due to an unseasonably warm spring (and the fact that it is now possible to heat the water inexpensively using an air-source heat pump). Vegetable gardens, too, are a popular add-on for those in search of “the good life”.



Columbia Island, on sale for \$13m through Julia B Fee Sotheby's International Realty, is in Long Island Sound, and is sold with the neighbouring Pea Island



Clayton Windmills, a contemporary home in the South Downs listed at £3m through The Modern House

Moving to fresh fields – and, for example, a house in the rolling countryside of Wales or Scotland – can certainly offer greater scope for an indoor-outdoor lifestyle. According to Carol Peett, managing director of [West Wales Property Finders](#), many of the families she deals with are looking to give their children an outdoor upbringing in a place where they can fill their lungs with fresh air. “Often they want to be somewhere where they can be self-sufficient, for example by growing their own food, and where their children can become a little feral,” she explains. “I know buyers who, having made the move, have set up small cottage businesses selling their products on the internet. Hopefully this will encourage others to do the same.”



This five-bedroom property on the coast near Lyme Regis is clad in silver-grey larch to weather with time © Martin Gardener  
There are other buyers, of course, who are lured by the promise of palatial living. Scotland, with its rich history, is fertile ground for finding a grand country estate, and a fine example is The Gart, a 13-bedroom baronial house in Perthshire dating from 1835, on sale through Savills for offers over £1.75m. The house is spread lavishly over 13,415sq ft and sits in 12 acres of land, fronted by a river that is ideal for salmon fishing, bordered by paddocks and a vegetable garden. But there’s much fun to be had inside the house too, as it offers a cinema room, a library, a gin and whisky bar and, to compensate for any overindulgence, a gym. As The Gart testifies, such properties offer all the trappings of city living with nature on the doorstep.