

INTELLIGENCER

HIGH LIFE

# WATER LOFTS

High life used to mean a penthouse residence or luxurious loft. But not any more. In cities across the world, houseboats are the new lifestyle statement—as evidenced along the banks of London's River Thames. By **Philippa Anderson**.

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Photo: Jez Dickson

Cushy comforts of modern living on The Bush Houseboat



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The Parkgate is currently on sale for £665,000 at River Homes



Simon Woodroffe, a strong advocate of houseboat living

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**L**ight, space, comfort and stunning views.” Just some of the reasons why Simon Woodroffe loves life aboard his Thames houseboat.

Woodroffe, British entrepreneur and founder of the **Yo!Sushi** chain, regards his home as more akin to a “loft on water” than a boat. The *Trafalgar* boasts more than 2,000 square feet of living space—including four bedrooms, three bathrooms, a den, a study and a deck with views across the river. It also comes with a speedboat, which provides easy access to pubs, shops and restaurants along the river. “I’ve even nipped across to France for lunch recently,” he states.

Woodroffe was not only quick to spot the opportunity for ‘living large’ on water; he has also done much to popularise the concept. With his sights set on one of the few mooring alongside the highly desirable Cheyne Walk at Chelsea, Woodroffe bought the *Trafalgar* before he had a chance to see it because of its position.

“It’s definitely the best place to live. I wouldn’t swap it for any other property in London,” Woodroffe states. “With

ducks, geese and other birds along the river, it is the nearest thing to living in the country in London. I have all this, but I’m only 100 yards from King’s Road.”

What Woodroffe bought, according to estate agent Russell Day at specialist agency **River Homes** ([www.riverhomes.co.uk](http://www.riverhomes.co.uk)), was little more than a ‘floating shed’. But like many of the spacious hulls along the Thames, it has been completely transformed with expert help.

London-based interior designer Adrienne Chinn, who has kitted out houseboats for the rich and famous, says, “Getting the right look for a houseboat is very different from a slick penthouse apartment. Apart from practical considerations, like choice of fabric, you need to keep things simple and uncluttered. With beautiful views all around, I tend to work with natural colours like blues and greens to build on the water’s reflection.”

Houseboats lend themselves to modern open-plan living because of the space. But until a decade or so ago, liveboards were viewed as being slightly bohemian. Now, changes in the lease arrangement for Thames



Light and space: the kitchen aboard Woodroffe's home



Luxury bathroom on board the *Ventana*



The deck on Woodroffe's houseboat

moorings and buoyant property prices mean houseboats are appealing to a new market.

"Buyers tend to be wealthy; you have to pay cash for houseboats as financing is difficult," says Day. Beyond wealth, the liveaboard population is diverse, he explains; it ranges from arty-types and musicians to city professionals looking for a pied-à-terre.

With only 250 residential moorings on the Thames in London but many thousands of apartments overlooking the river, exclusivity is driving the price up. "It's basic supply and demand," says Day. "River homes used to be focused solely on brick and mortar, but in the last five years we have seen more and more buyers looking for houseboats."

Is it because people want to live on water? "They are definitely not wannabe captains," he answers. "Being on the water does force you to relax. You can come home from the city in a suit, and within minutes, be on the deck in your shorts relaxing with a drink in hand."

According to Woodroffe, everyone who visits him (an added benefit of the space and views is that you are never short of

friends!) claims they would love to live like this. "But only 30% of the people ever do anything about it," he states. "I joke about wanting to keep houseboat living a secret. But really, I'm happy to promote the concept. As more settlements develop along the river, which is after all the last ribbon of development in London, we'll see more speedboats criss-crossing the river."

For those with liveaboard aspirations, estate agent Day's advice is to be flexible and patient. "It's not like brick and mortar where if you miss out on a property there may be something similar. Every mooring and every boat is unique." Another advice is to try out the experience before buying.

Few London houseboats are available for rent, however. One is **The Bush Houseboat** ([www.bushhouseboat.co.uk](http://www.bushhouseboat.co.uk)). With three bedrooms, every luxury—including dishwasher, woodburning stove and power shower—and 360 degree views, its owner Angie Loader says it is rented nearly all year round. Many are return visitors who simply enjoy life aboard—even on shallow waters ☒