

SPEAR'S

Mayfair must safeguard its 'idiosyncrasies' to stay special

Only Mayfair's artisans could provide the King of Tonga's coronation uniforms but such uniqueness is not guaranteed says British Land panel. Alex Matchett reports



Last week saw a meeting of minds from the global wealth microcosm that lies between Piccadilly and Park Lane. British Land hosted a panel discussion following the publication of its guide 'The Essence of Mayfair', aiming to determine exactly what that essence is.

Inside lavish Spencer House, James Taylor, director of British Land, spoke about their development Clarges Mayfair, a new-build block of 34 premium apartments, and how the bark of trees in Green Park had inspired the 'DNA' of the building.

Whether bark-inspired balconies are enough to become part of Mayfair's essence remains to be seen, but such attempts to blend in are clearly being taken seriously. Taylor was joined by shoe designer Rupert Sanderson, who complimented the oxygen the area gives to smaller bespoke craftsmen despite the ever-looming threat from mainstream fashion houses.

This was a sentiment echoed by the former head cutter at Gieves & Hawkes, Kathryn Sargent, who now runs her own bespoke tailors. Sargent mentioned the 65 apprentices working on Savile Row, although perhaps more indicative of the area's attraction is the commission she recently undertook for 25 coronation uniforms for the King of Tonga.

Another King - Jeremy, co-founder of Corbin & King and proprietor of such establishments as The Wolseley and The Beaumont Hotel - talked about how Mayfair had 'reversed a trend', having 'lost that feeling of being a village or town'. This was something he credited to the family-owned estates that still manage so much of the region.

However, he did point to a negative move: the bulldozing of Cork Street's galleries to put up more office. This was, perhaps surprisingly, countered by the RA's chief executive, Charles Saumarez Smith, who remained 'reasonably optimistic - the art market will remain anchored in Mayfair.'

On summing up, the panel was offered the chance to encapsulate the hinterland of London's wealth in one word or phrase. 'Craftsmanship', 'distinction', 'stability', 'rich and mixed' and 'the high end of the Monopoly board' provided a bullish conclusion.

Enjoying a glass of champagne outside the room was leading Mayfair property agent Peter Wetherell, who predicted Mayfair's return to the number one property spot early next year, usurping Knightsbridge: 'We're within a whisker of regaining that crown,' he later told Spear's.

However, words of caution remain, not least on what that value is really founded on: 'You have to go through the process of safeguarding history, but also creating new history,' said Jeremy King. 'Unless there's a vision, we won't have a Mayfair of all the idiosyncrasies, we'll just have hedge-fund offices.'