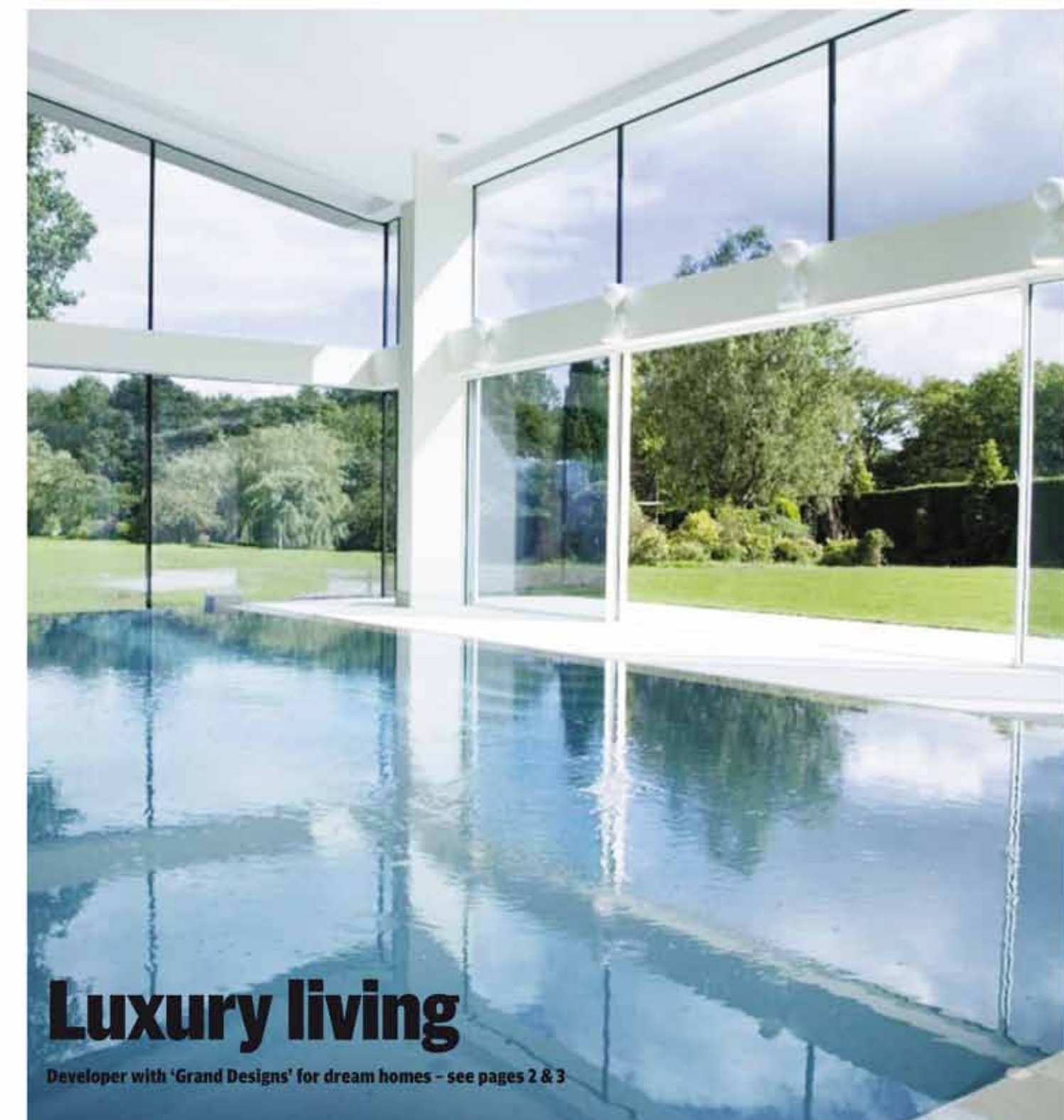


Homes

Thursday, December 15, 2011



Luxury living

Developer with 'Grand Designs' for dream homes - see pages 2 & 3

Developer has recipe for taste of the high life

Creating your own 'grand design' must be top of the wish-list for many householders. **Susannah Wright** chats to one developer who is helping clients build their dream homes

If you've ever fancied having a swimming pool upstairs - and you've got the cash to spare - Chris Oakes could just be the man to provide it. The developer's company, Huntsmere, is indeed creating a full-size pool on the second floor of a client's house in Alderley Edge.

"It's so they can take advantage of the panoramic views," he laughs. "It'll be part of a fabulous suite with a jacuzzi and master bedroom."

"We always work with our clients to create what they want, so they have a one-off bespoke house."

Huntsmere has been working at the luxury end of the market for nearly ten years. Having started relatively modestly, it has grown to become an award-winning multi-million-pound venture.

One of the reasons for its success, Chris says, is because of an interactive website it developed called Fingerprint, which allows clients to be part of the ongoing decision-making process.

Purchasers log on to their

own house's page, to access information such as architects' drawings, progress reports, design mock-up pictures, and photos of the work under construction.

They can also create mood boards for each room by looking through a database of more than 3,000 images, or upload their own.

"We developed the website as part of our client management system," says Chris.

"It can be quite daunting for clients when they're having a new house built, so this is a tool to help them see what's going on and decide how they want their house to look."

"They can do it anywhere, so they don't have to be here on site, and it eliminates some of the ambiguity that could arise through discussion alone."

"It also means they can decide what they want as they're going along rather than being flooded with a load of decisions at the beginning."

Some of the other bespoke items Huntsmere has created in various properties include a media suite where a hidden pro-

jector and large screen are lowered from the ceiling at the same time as the blinds are closed, an eight-foot fish-tank, an infinity pool, and several wine cellars.

Chris, 44, lives in Alderley Edge with his family. He originally trained as a barrister, but while he was building up his legal reputation, began dabbling in property development as a second job.

Recognising there was a market for high end properties in Cheshire's 'golden triangle' of Alderley Edge, Prestbury, and Wilmslow, he founded Huntsmere in 2002, and using a trusted group of architects, engineers, and contractors, the company grew.

"Eventually I had to make a choice between doing this and practising at the bar, so I handed back my wig," Chris jokes.

Huntsmere now develops about six houses a year and has around £40m worth of property in construction.

Half of these are commissioned properties, and half are started speculatively, with purchasers able to buy part-way through to ensure they can put

their own stamp on the completed house.

Inevitably, given the typical £2-£10m price tag, many of Huntsmere's clients are premier-ship footballers, although Chris remains tight-lipped about who exactly.

And despite the economic downturn which is affecting much of the mainstream property market, he says there are still plenty of high earning entrepreneurs and wealthy families out there.

One of Huntsmere's properties, Oakdene, in Prestbury, scooped a pair of prizes at two prestigious property awards last month.

It was named the best luxury new build at the Northern Design Awards, and came third in the luxury house category at the national What House Awards.

"I'm delighted," says Chris. "For the national awards we were up against properties that were £20m-plus, so it's a hard category to compete in."

And for the northern ones, we were judged by people such as Terence Conran and Wayne Hemingway.

"They're very well respected designers and they know their stuff, so it's certainly nice for our work to be recognised."

The £4.2m property is currently on the market through agents, Gascoigne Halman.

It features five bedrooms, a gym, infinity pool and sauna, and has top of the range audio and lighting systems, as well as eco-friendly heating and garden irrigation.

Chris believes his company has thrived because of its visionary approach to design and client-led ethos of construction.

He says: "Creating a house is an evolutionary process between us and our clients."

"And when the investment is of millions of pounds, it goes without saying that it needs to be right."

huntsmere.co.uk



SUCCESS This £4.2m Prestbury mansion (top, above, and far left) developed by Chris Oakes (left) won two property awards. Clients can use an interactive website (above left) to design the homes, and several clients wanted wine cellars (left)

Top tips for best mortgage

CHOOSING a mortgage is one of the most important financial decisions you'll ever make, with the wrong decision potentially costing you thousands of pounds.

But finding the right mortgage can be daunting at the best of times - and it has got even harder since the credit crunch. For a start, 100 per cent mortgages are no longer available and most lenders are demanding at least a 10 per cent deposit before they will consider you. To get the very best deals, you now need a 40 per cent deposit. Our top tips for getting the best mortgage will help you get started:

1 Total costs: Don't just look at the headline interest rate - take into account all the fees you have to pay, and compare the total cost over the lifetime of your deal. A



By **JAMES DALEY**, Money Editor. Which?

mortgage with a high interest rate but low fees could work out cheaper if you've got a smaller mortgage.

2 Early repayment charges: Avoid mortgages with early repayment charges after the initial deal has ended, so you can switch to a better rate without charge at that point.

3 Avoid extra interest: Be wary about adding extras like mortgage fees onto your mortgage, as you will end up paying interest on them. If you can, pay these out of your savings upfront.

4 Good advice: If you

decide you need advice, make sure you consult an independent mortgage adviser or broker.

A good mortgage adviser will guide you through the thousands of mortgages available, and recommend the best deal for you based on a thorough exploration of your needs.

However, some of the best deals are only available directly from the lender, so always do your own research before speaking to an adviser and compare these results with the recommendations your adviser gives you.

If you are looking for advice, the Which? Group offers an independent mortgage advice service that looks at every mortgage from every available lender.

Information: 0207 138 4693 or <http://www.whichmortgagehelp.co.uk>

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