

# DON'T CALL ME A PORTER

A concierge is simply a must for any aspiring new development, writes Lucy Alexander



Service included: Barratt's Viridian scheme

WHEN is a porter not a porter? When he's a concierge. Porters may have manned London apartment blocks since time immemorial, but today any new development that aspires to fashionable status, whether built by Barratt or Candy & Candy, boasts a "concierge".

So what's the difference? Patrick Rhatigan, 62, is a traditional porter at Harlequin Court, an apartment block in Covent Garden, Central London. "If anything goes wrong, I get it fixed," he says. "I look after parcels, get keys cut, send out the laundry, supervise the cleaners and only come in at weekends in an emergency. Mostly, I'm a friendly face at the door." He draws the line, however, at booking restaurants.

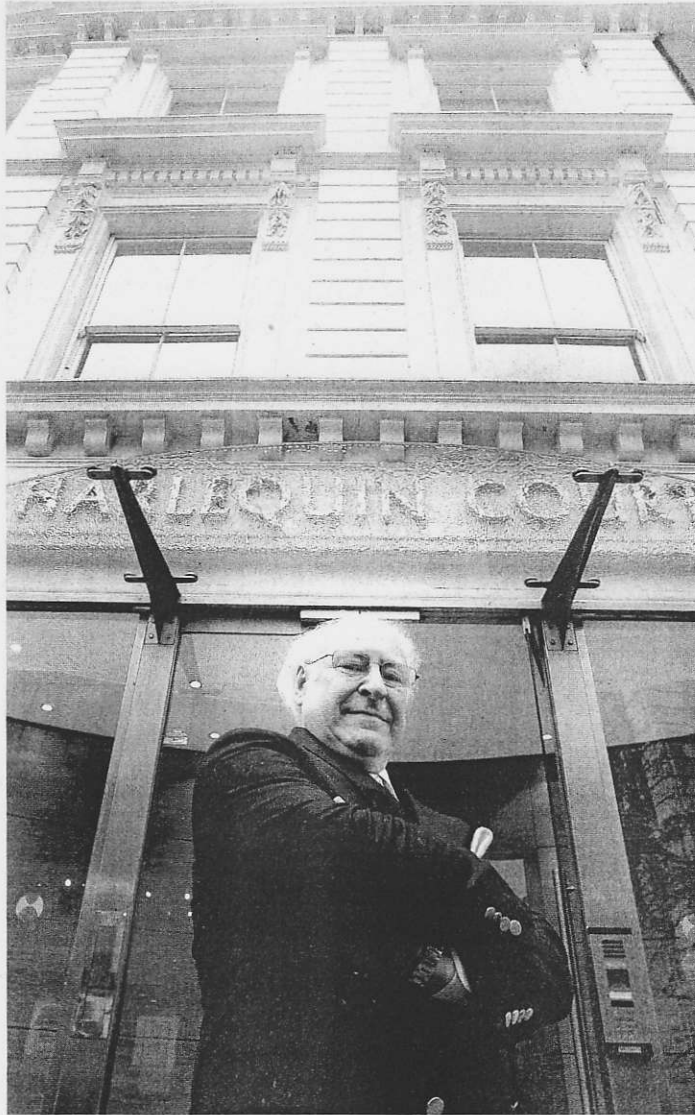
The more people are charged, the less they are fazed by it

A concierge, on the other hand, does book restaurants. And theatre tickets, holidays, dental appointments, helicopters, you name it. "A concierge service is one of the principal 'tick boxes' that people now look for", says Charles Leigh, who specialises in new developments for Knight Frank. "I have come across developments which sell the idea of a concierge when it's really just a porter, but there are some exceptional services, such as at One Hyde Park." This is the Knightsbridge development designed by the Candy brothers, where a penthouse costs £100 million and owners may order room service from the five-star Mandarin Oriental hotel next door. Tanya Fawcett, of Candy & Candy says: "They will do anything you need, from a turndown service and arranging dinner parties, to just opening the door and parking your car."

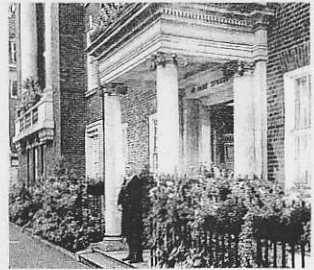
Other top-drawer concierge services are to be found at Edinburgh's deeply cool Quarter-mile, where buyers pay between £650 and £3,000 a year for uniformed staff to walk their dogs and pick up their dry-cleaning. At 47 Park Street, a set of "fractional ownership" flats in Mayfair, Central London, owners jetting in for a night on the town have a concierge to fill the fridge, iron their gladrags and book a table next door at Le Gavroche, which they enter through a private door, all for £5,344 a year.

As far back as 2005, buyers at Phillimore Square, Kensington, West London, were bribed with a year's free membership of the original luxury concierge company, quintessentially.com. All have since chosen to continue their memberships at a cost of about £2,500 a year. Quintessentially's Lucy Russell says that the concierge idea came from America. "We'll see a lot more of it here soon. Developers use it to ensure their new building has that little bit extra that the one next door doesn't."

SUSANNAH IRELAND



Front of house: Patrick Rhatigan is a traditional porter at Harlequin Court, Covent Garden



## FACTFILE

- Residents in 47 Park Street, Mayfair, above, pay £5,344 a year for their concierge service.
- 83 per cent of UK residents living in flats would be prepared to pay an average of £615 a year for a concierge, a survey by Instant Access Properties indicates.
- 23 per cent expect concierges to be commonplace in Britain cities by 2012.

Caroline Slocombe, of E.A.Shaw, a Central London estate agent, says: "People never used to want to pay service charges, because they didn't see why a porter was necessary. Now they're only too happy to pay." Charles Leigh agrees: "The more expensive the service charge, the less people are fazed by it. They assume it must be worth having if it's that expensive."

Three of Barratt's London developments — the Lockhouse in Camden, Viridian in Battersea and Great West Quarter in Brentford — offer "concierge services" for £1,400 to £3,070 a year. Yet the duties — "taking in dry-cleaning, looking after property, keeping an eye on building as a whole" — smack of the porter. A case of job title inflation? Not at Barratt's latest development, Allingham Court, on "millionaires' row", The Bishop's Avenue, London N2. Buyers (prices start at £3.9 million) receive a "six-star" concierge service for £16,600 to £38,700 a year. "No task will be too small nor any request too extraordinary. Need a private helicopter for a weekend sojourn to the South of France? No problem. Want some shopping picked up from Harvey Nichols? It'll be here within the hour."

When I asked Lucy Russell if a Quintessentially concierge could ever be compared to "a porter in a Barratt Homes development", the answer was: "No!" Barratt might well disagree.

▶▶ What are the must-haves for the Mayfair millionaires? To find out, go to: [timesonline.co.uk/luxuryproperty](http://timesonline.co.uk/luxuryproperty)

## LUXURY EXTRAS TO LURE BUYERS IN NERVOUS MANHATTAN

DURING the US property crash in the 1980s, Manhattan developers were forced to devise ways of differentiating one unsold apartment from another, given the thousands of square feet vacant in New York.

One consequence was the emergence of the kind of luxurious services normally associated with a five-star hotel but made available to permanent tenants in return for a service fee. Air-conditioning, sub-zero freezers and a gym in the basement began to look commonplace, and over the past ten years, Manhattan's condominiums have even started offering dog walking services, in-house cleaning, chefs, and catering staff.

It is not unusual for new buildings to have crèches for the residents' children, a bar and library for tenants to network with their equally successful neighbours and a virtual golf room to practise their swing, two dozen floors above the sidewalk.

Almost 30 years on, the rationale for such extras has come full circle. Over this period residents have come to expect them. However, few potential buyers can ignore that across the Hudson River lies the rest of America, which is suffering one of the worst property recessions since the Great Depression. Manhattan island is the only place in the United States that is not suffering

— some properties in California, Arizona, Florida and Ohio have fallen in value by as much as 40 per cent in two years. As Wall Street bonuses have started to fall, Manhattanites are wondering whether the blight in the rest of America will infect them.

So once again developers in Manhattan are desperate to convince buyers that, with additional concierge services, the property is a different kind of investment. It's no surprise, then, that The Mark — a new residential block to be completed later this year on the Upper East Side on Madison Avenue — has just hired the former general manager of The Savoy. **SUZU JAGGER**