

Property

Luxury flats on parade in central Brussels

By Patricia Kelly

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Patricia Kelly looks at the attraction of living inside army barracks.

Emerging on the site of what used to be the home of the Belgian army's first and second grenadier regiments is 'Passacaille', a group of new low-rise luxury apartments. A far cry from army quarters, a five-storey block built in a U-shape around a private garden is rising where once the barracks and parade ground of Prince Albert Caserne used to be. Bordered by the Palais d'Egmont, the designer shops of Boulevard de Waterloo and the rue de Namur and the restaurants and cafes of the Sablon, this is as central as it gets in Brussels. Surprisingly, it is likely to be a calm and quiet place to live, because a number of the old perimeter buildings of the former barracks remain and will soak up traffic noise from the inner ring road, preventing it from reaching the new development inside.

But peace and quiet in the city centre come at a price, as does luxury, and the going rate per square metre for the first wing of the U, which will be ready for occupancy at the end of this year, is €3,000-€4,000 – currently the top of the price range for Belgium. Count half of that per square metre for a terrace.

Developers EGTA, a family-run company in business for 130 years, say that 60% of the Passacaille apartments have already been sold and within a couple of weeks their agents expect to start selling units in the second phase of the development. This has an estimated completion date of the end of 2010. While company director Odile Dherte will not specify price, she says that they will cost substantially more than the current crop.

Of several apartments still for sale in phase one, a one-bedroom, one-bathroom ground-floor dwelling of 78 square metres with a large terrace of 65 square metres is advertised at €322,800. An apartment with three bedrooms and two bathrooms on the top floor, five stories up and optimistically described as a penthouse, is on sale at €1,100,000. It measures 243 square metres and has two terraces of 48.8 and 27.6 square metres. Planning regulations prevented the developers from building any higher, the rule being that the building should not be visible from the neighbouring Parc d'Egmont. The apartments are to be finished off to a high standard with parquet throughout. Prospective clients have the option of choosing their own fixtures and fittings.

Underground car parking spaces are also for sale and Dherte says that these will be available only for residents. Vehicle access to the development is from the rue des Petits-Carmes opposite the Belgian foreign office through the giant entrance of the original barracks. Pedestrian access is from the rue du Pepin where phase three of the development, scheduled for completion in 2011, is the renovation of an existing building that fronts the street for offices.

As well as a private garden, Passacaille will boast a gym and a swimming pool for residents and a resident concierge. The apartments are for sale freehold and maintenance charges by the management company are likely to be in the region of €1 per square metre per month.

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Patricia Kelly is a freelance journalist based in Brussels.
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