



Laurel Grove, the latest new-build house to be released in South West London's Coombe Hill Estate, on the market for £9.95 million

## Coombe: London's hidden gem

ALEXEI GHAVAMI

When asked about Coombe, few Londoners will be able to tell you where it is. Yet, this leafy South West London neighbourhood is home to some of the wealthiest people in the capital. This beautiful wooded area, whose springs were once the main water supply to Hampton Court Palace, has all the attractions of a place in the country, with a nearness to London that is invaluable to the busy professional.

Coombe's secrecy is even more surprising given its rich history. In the Eighteenth Century, Coombe was owned by John Spencer, 1st Earl Spencer, an ancestor of Diana, Princess of Wales, and Prince William, first in line to the throne. But Coombe's wealth wasn't established until the Victorian age when newly rich industrialists arrived looking for a pleasant residential area to build their impressive new homes. Among them was the Galsworthy family where the famous novelist and playwright John Galsworthy spent the early years of his life.

Another famous Coombe resident was Dwight D. Eisenhower who, as Supreme Allied Commander during World War II, lived at Telegraph House, located on Warren Road at the edge of the prestigious Coombe Hill Golf Course, where he regularly played at the weekends.

The latest new-build house to be released is Laurel Grove located in the heart of the Coombe Hill Estate. This six-bedroom, 12,000 square foot house by the multi-awarding-winning Q Develop-

ments features a bespoke kitchen by the Queen's nephew David Linley, son of Princess Margaret, a 13-metre pool with a sauna; a gym; a cinema room; a wine cellar; and a separate one-bedroom staff apartment. The interiors reflect those of a prime central London townhouse – and outside is the large garden synonymous with houses in Coombe.

It is on sale with Savills Wimbledon and Coombe Residential for £9.95 million. State-of-the-art home technology, Italian marble en-suites, and hand-crafted oak flooring and bespoke joinery are just some of the other standout features, while the views towards Richmond Park, Wimbledon Common, and across the adjacent Coombe Hill Golf Course are to be admired.

"You will struggle to find a master bedroom that is so close to the boundary of the golf course," said Hani Madanat, director at local estate agency Coombe Residential. "To wake up in the morning with that double aspect view is just amazing." Q Developments are set to launch a second house, Asquith House, in the spring. The property neighbours Laurel Grove and is of equal size and grandeur.

The most expensive house on the market in Coombe is Cedar Court, a 12-bedroom, 14,508 square foot Grade II listed period house on Coombe Hill Road, offered by Knight Frank Wimbledon for £14 million. Other houses of the super-prime ilk include Soames House, a 10-bedroom, 12,500 square foot neo-Georgian house, on with Savills for £12 million, and an eight-bedroom, 10,000 square foot house on The

Drive, being sold by Sotheby's Cobham for £10 million.

Although a wealthy neighbourhood, Coombe is still more affordable than nearby Richmond and Wimbledon Village, where like-for-like properties fetch a higher price per square foot.

"Coombe has a lot to offer the London buyer. In addition to excellent local schools, the London buyer is getting more space, a larger garden, and a much quieter existence," said Clive Moon, head of the Wimbledon office at Savills.

"Coombe is surrounded by some of the finest golf courses London has to offer and you've got easy access to Richmond Park and Wimbledon Common. You can also be in Battersea and central London quickly using the A3. There is definitely more value for money than other prime locations in South West London."

Indeed, the area is very much a hidden gem with period homes, large detached properties built between the wars, and modern mansions concealed behind a network of tree-lined streets. Access to many roads is restricted to only residents and their guests, which not only enhances Coombe's privacy but also makes the area extremely secure.

Despite Coombe's rural surroundings, London's West End is still less than 8 miles away for a shopping trip to Selfridges and the flagship stores of the world's leading luxury brands, as is Westfield London shopping centre in Shepherd's Bush.

If a short trip is what you're after, there is excellent shopping at the historic town centre of

Kingston upon Thames, which is only a 10-minute drive. The Bentall Centre, one of the largest shopping centres in South London, is home to the popular Benthalls department store, where one can buy luxury brands from Ralph Lauren and Hugo Boss to DKNY and Mulberry.

Also popular is Ancient Market Place, renowned for high-end beauty retailers such as The White

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Company, Jo Malone, and Molton Brown. Wimbledon Village, with its wide range of boutiques, cafes, and restaurants, is also close by.

For outdoor pursuits, the Thames plays a big part in Coombe's sporting life. There is sailing at the Minima Yacht Club and the Thames Sailing Club, which claims to be the oldest river sailing club in the country, and rowing at the Kingston Rowing Club.

Coombe has two golf courses, Coombe Wood and Coombe Hill Golf Club – regarded as one of the best in the South East. Edward VIII and George VI both played there

as did Prime Ministers Winston Churchill and Lloyd George.

Wimbledon Common, where one can enjoy a variety of activities from cycling to horse riding, is a short walk. And east of the common is the famous All England Lawn Tennis Club, which hosts the Wimbledon Championships, the oldest tennis tournament in the world.

Coombe, Kingston, and Wimbledon are also home to a number of exceptional schools. Within Coombe are Marymount International School, a Catholic day and boarding school for girls aged 11–18, and Rokeby, a prep school for boys, which is a feeder for Eaton and Harrow.

King's College School, which is a member of the Eton Group of schools and is co-ed in the sixth form, and Wimbledon High School, a secondary school for girls regularly featuring at the top of the league tables for results, are both in Wimbledon. The Holy Cross, a well-respected non-fee paying Catholic school for girls aged 11–18, is in nearby New Malden.

The combination of tranquil, leafy surroundings with plenty to do nearby while being in easy reach of central London makes Coombe popular among wealthy purchasers who are looking for somewhere to live as opposed to a pied-à-terre.

"As a resident of Coombe myself, I would say that it is the ideal area for families," said Hani. "It has a quiet atmosphere with safe, leafy streets to go cycling with the children and is equidistant from two popular town centres, Kingston and Wimbledon,

and their vast range of shops, boutiques, and restaurants."

According to Hani, Coombe is home to people from a variety of backgrounds, including those in finance and medicine, self-made businesspeople, royalty, artists and theatre performers, and people from other walks of life who have moved into the area for the lifestyle.

"We tend to get buyers who are moving out of Kew, Richmond, and Wimbledon," said Hani. "The lifestyle in these areas is very restricted because of the more vertical arrangement of the properties. Houses in Coombe are detached, have larger gardens, multi-car garages, and driveways – it offers far better lateral living."

Hani added: "In recent years, Coombe has generated more international buyers than ever before and the dynamics of the immediate community are changing rapidly. In the last two years there has been a big influx of Chinese buyers. We have sold several properties this year to buyers from China."

According to Hani, international buyers are attracted to Coombe for schools, close proximity to London and international airports, the leafy environment and because of the supply of quality homes being provided at all price levels.

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The interior of Laurel Grove on Coombe Hill Estate, South West London, features state-of-the-art technology, a swimming pool, Italian marble bathrooms, and a designer kitchen

## Keep warm this winter with the right heating for your home

RUPERT OLIVER

As summer becomes a memory and the nights draw in, thoughts turn to sitting by an open fire in cosy surroundings. Shutting out the elements in a rural cottage sounds ideal for the cooler months to come. This is the time when smaller becomes better.

A cosy space conjures up images of winter evenings spent by a crackling fire, the warmth chasing the chill from your toes as you snuggle under a throw in a quaint sitting room that may have seemed too small to contain the joys of the warmer months. Now, you are grateful for the smaller space that means lower heating bills and quick warmth, but what of the modern open-plan home? Is it

really a wintry regret? There's no denying that knocking down walls to create open-plan spaces in older properties can result in heating problems. Older properties in general tend to feature rooms designed to be heated with an open fire. Take the walls down and drafts can be an issue, creating a permanent chill in the air. The lesson for homeowners is to consider the seasons before undertaking major renovations such as this. Naturally, there are plenty of heating options that can compensate for open-plan living styles, but these often need to be installed at an early stage, so plan accordingly.

For home buyers, winter can be the best time to house hunt. This will give you an accurate picture of your potential new

home in the least favourable months. Remember to ask current owners about heating options and costs so that you don't receive an unwelcome surprise when the days cool.

Open plan doesn't have to mean cold, though. Contemporary properties are often designed with variable weather conditions in mind and there are plenty of ways to reduce heat loss. Good insulation, double-glazed windows, shutters or heavier drapes, and efficient heating options will all help keep you toasty warm when the temperature drops.

Radiant heat from hot water pipes running along the joists or through concrete-slab flooring can keep a home warm from the toes up and for the more spacious open home, such as

those with vaulted ceilings, a wood or electric boiler or on-demand water heater can be an efficient solution. Alternatively, wood, pellet, or hybrid heating systems are a good choice for homes without walls to get in the way.

Standard heat pumps are also a possibility, as they turn cool air into warm air, and geothermal or ground-source heat pumps take the heat that's naturally stored underground for use in the heating process. In climates such as the UK that don't experience extreme temperature swings, an open-plan home is an ideal candidate for a heat pump.

Whatever property you choose, remember winter and think about how your home is warmed. That way you can be assured of a snug night in,



whether it's in a naturally cosy cottage or a well-warmed open-plan home.

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