

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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Cold-Weather Condos Get Winter Gardens

High-rise developers tout a practical alternative to blustery balconies. Winter gardens—enclosed, heated alcoves with luxury finishes—offer the same views and natural light, without the risk of frostbite.



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By ALINA DIZIK

Jan. 19, 2017 9:53 a.m. ET

Many buyers dream of a luxury condo floating high above the city. But those views come with a downside: Precious outdoor space often goes unused.

At that height, balconies are often too windy or dangerous, and in cities like New York, Toronto and London, even opening a window in the cooler months can be a blustery proposition.

So luxury developers are trying an option that they tout as both lush and cozy: the winter garden. Enclosed by glass on three sides, and often designed as an alcove off the living room or bedroom, these spaces can feature fireplaces, radiant-floor heating and sliding glass doors to bring in fresh air, weather permitting. For developers, the amenity can bump up asking prices, because winter gardens add interior square footage to a unit.

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When living on the 15th or 20th story of a building, “people can’t always use the balcony,” says Piers Clanford, managing director of Berkeley Homes, a London-based developer. Goodman’s Fields in London’s Aldgate neighborhood will be his company’s first project to feature winter gardens. These are designed as an alcove off the living room or bedroom areas and measure about 70 square feet. Sliding glass panels open up to the outside. So far, about 300 units in the seven-tower development have been completed. More than 75% of the 1,019 units have been sold, with prices ranging from

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about \$800,000 for a studio to \$6 million for a penthouse, Mr. Clanford says.

Another Berkeley Homes project is 250 City Road, a two-tower development with

multiple low-rises in London's Islington neighborhood. It will also have the feature when it is completed in 2022, he says. "The winter gardens proved pretty popular," says Mr. Clanford.

Developers are modernizing a concept once popular with European nobility and upper-class North American homeowners, says Larry Hodgson, a Quebec City-based writer who specializes in gardens. The heated, glass-enclosed gardens were attached to the side of some of the largest homes and used to grow rare, exotic plants, such as orchids, he says. "They would definitely become a quiet corner where you could have a bit of a drink in the evening surrounded by exotic plants," Mr. Hodgson says. With delicate glasswork, the winter gardens were costly to build, heat and maintain, he adds.

Sam Mizrahi, a Toronto developer who was inspired by similar concepts across Europe. His company, Mizrahi Developments, is currently building 128 Hazelton, boutique condo building in Toronto's midtown. When the building is completed in 2019, winter gardens will be located off the living room or bedrooms and accessed through sliding glass doors. Once inside, additional sliding glass doors will open up onto a railing or an outdoor balcony. When these doors are open, "you can have incredibly fresh, brisk air" without disrupting the temperature in the home, Mr. Mizrahi says.

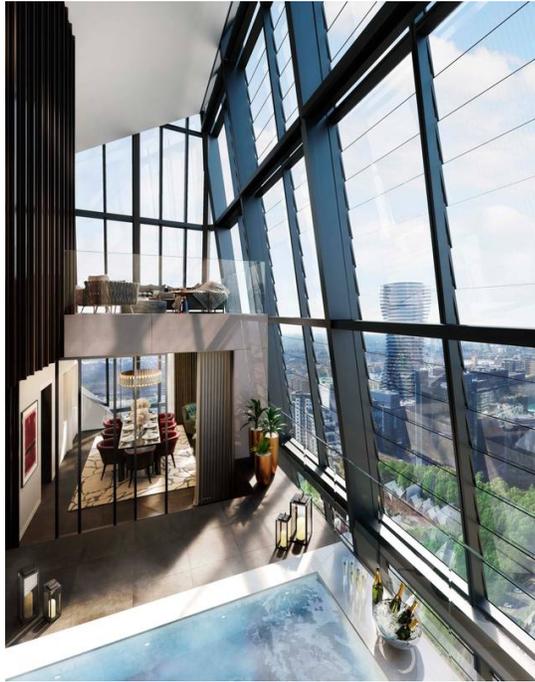
Buyers can choose the placement of their winter garden and are encouraged to customize the spaces with self-irrigating planters and fireplaces, says Mr. Mizrahi. The 128 Hazelton project, where prices range from \$1.14 million to \$11.5 million, says it has presold all 18 units.

Mizrahi Developments has another building in the works in Toronto that is scheduled for completion in 2021, he says. Called The One, this 80-story tower will have 416 units, most with a winter garden. Preliminary prices range from about \$575,000 for a studio to \$22.9 million for a 9,000-square-foot penthouse.

Even on warmer days, balconies on upper floors can be too windy for use, says Gianpiero Pugliese, the architect who worked with Mizrahi Development on 128 Hazelton. Interior winter gardens can be roomier and easier to build out than outdoor terraces, which are more complex to construct because they're exposed to the outdoors, adds Mr. Pugliese, principal of the Toronto firm Audax.

In his own condo in Toronto's Little Italy neighborhood, Mr. Pugliese carved out a corner of his living space into a winter garden room. Two walls of oversize windows surround a 225-square-foot space that borders the living room and feels almost like an enclosed terrace, he says. He added outdoor furniture, a double-sided fireplace (for extra heat when windows are open) and durable porcelain-tile flooring.

Some developers tout balconies with some features of a winter garden. At the Dollar Bay development in London's Canary Wharf neighborhood, the balconies have mechanical louvers that can be lowered to enclose the space, allowing homeowners to enjoy the outdoors when the weather is nice, says Jon Hall, sales director for Mount Anvil, the developer of Dollar Bay, where units range from \$670,500 to \$4.27 million. The enclosed spaces range from 125 to 250 square feet and can be accessed from the living areas and bedrooms.



A rendering of the two-story winter garden, above, in a penthouse unit at London's Dollar Bay development, scheduled to open later this year. ILLUSTRATION: DOLLAR BAY/MOUNT ANVIL

In a high-rise, the winter garden overlooking the city lights feels otherworldly, says Peter Low, 54, founder of a data-services firm. He purchased a three-bedroom unit with two winter gardens in Cashmere House, a tower that is part of the Goodman's Fields development that was completed in 2015. The winter gardens jut out from two of the unit's three bedrooms. Each has a set of sliding doors that open to the outside with a rail for protection, like a Juliet balcony. "It's suspended out, so it feels like you're in space," says Mr. Low who moved into the full-floor unit a year ago with his wife, Irina. He declined to give the price, but three-bedroom units in the development start at \$1.7 million, according to the developer.

The unit's two winter gardens were a top selling point for the Lows, who outfitted leisure spaces to fit their diverging tastes. His is designed with a 1962 G Plan swivel chair and footstool so he can comfortably listen to music or play guitar. Hers has a love seat and marble table for her laptop and is often used as part of a dressing area. The couple also uses the winter garden spaces for entertaining, he adds. "We have the benefits of having a view from the balcony without having to suffer the British weather," he says.

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