

High End Living on London's High Street

By [Howard Amos](#)

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The spire of Cathedral of the Dormition, Britain's oldest Orthodox cathedral, housed in a converted Anglican church, looming at the end of a lane. **Howard Amos**

LONDON — A short walk from Harrods, one of London's most prestigious department stores, and buried deep in the plush backstreets of Kensington and Chelsea, is Britain's oldest Orthodox cathedral.

Converted from an Anglican church in the 1950s, the Cathedral of the Dormition and All Saints has an icon screen salvaged from the chapel of the imperial Russian Embassy in London in 1918. On a mild Thursday evening in February the daily service — conducted in Church Slavonic and English — attracted a congregation of about 20, mainly well-dressed, young and middle-aged women.

In Kensington and Chelsea, the London borough with the country's highest property prices, the cathedral is well placed to serve London's high profile population of wealthy Russians. Stratford, the hub for more humble economic migrants, is an hour's journey away by public transport.

There are no reliable figures for the total number of Russians in London but Natalya Chouvaeva, editor of the Russian-language London Courier newspaper, put the quantity of Russian-speakers in Britain at about half a million — a figure that has more than doubled in the last 10 years.

London's well-heeled ethnic Russians, however, make up a fraction of this total that is principally made up of less affluent migrants from Eastern Europe and Russia itself.

The community of rich Russians in London, however, has a profile out of all proportion to its numerical size.

One of Britain's biggest estate agents, Knight Frank, has a dedicated Russia and CIS desk. Elena Norton, the desk's head, said the firm's clients are typically looking for large apartments, with porters and parking, in purpose-built buildings costing upward of £5 million (\$8 million) — or large detached houses in prestigious London suburbs, like Hampstead, with a price tag of at least £10 million (\$16 million).

"They are totally self-made," said Norton of her Russian clients. "And they are very, very realistic."

London has been well known as a destination of choice for wealthy Russians for many years, but the demand for luxury properties shows no sign of falling. In 2008, Russian and CIS clients made up 12 percent of Knight Frank's customers for prime central London real estate; in 2010 this figure rose to 17 percent.

Sought-after properties — which can be expected to double in value within 8 to 10 years — are not the only reason rich Russians are drawn to Britain.

"The Russian community in the U.K.," said Ivanna Chevliakova, managing director of Law Firm, which specializes in immigration issues, "is mainly highly skilled workers and business people."

Unsurprisingly, such immigrants are attracted by Britain's favorable tax regime, world-class banking facilities, clear immigration laws and central location for accessing European, American and Asian markets. London is also a global financial center, and Russian firms regularly conduct international public offerings on the London Stock Exchange. Analysts predict that 2011 may see Russian companies raise up to \$30 billion in London.

In recent years, Britain's Russian community has not just been confined to London but has started to spread out to the Home Counties — the countryside regions surrounding the capital. Manchester and Edinburgh also have very large Russian presences.

The education system in Britain, particularly its private schools, is another big draw for wealthy Russians. The offspring of such Russian luminaries in London as exiled tycoon Boris Berezovsky and poisoned former KGB-agent Alexander Litvinenko have attended prestigious London private schools.

Muscovite Levy Andrachnikov, 14, joined the £88,290 (\$141,734) a year Charterhouse school in 2009 where he will study until he is 18. Although the transition to a British school was difficult, he said, it was "made much easier because of my very close [Russian] friends

studying at other U.K. schools with whom I keep in touch."

He added that more than 50 Russian children have applied to join Charterhouse in 2011, out of a total school population of 775.

His reception among the other boarders had been friendly, Andrachnikov said, but "Russia for the British is mostly a large area of land associated with communism, [Arsenal football player Andrei] Arshavin and vodka."

Not all Russian residents of the British capital, however, have left their homeland by choice. "Since Putin came to power," said Michael O'Kane, a partner at the Peters & Peters law firm, "there has been a steady stream of individuals seeking refuge in London against politically motivated extradition cases."

Peters & Peters has represented many clients who have fought extradition to Russia, including the former owner of Yevroset, Yevgeny Chichvarkin, against whom charges of kidnapping and extortion were dropped by Russian prosecutors in January.

British courts have repeatedly thrown out extradition requests from Moscow on the basis that the accused would not receive a fair trial in Russia. Other high-profile figures who have won political asylum in Britain include Chechen separatist Akhmed Zakayev and Berezovsky.

Just as the wider population of wealthy Russians in London shows every sign of continuing to grow, so the number of business and political exiles is unlikely to shrink. "With the 2012 election we're not expecting any decrease," O'Kane said. "It may well increase."

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