

Why renters are paying thousands to live in glorified halls with a pool, spa and cinema

Young tenants turn their backs on independent landlords for professionally run buildings

By Emma Magnus

Gintare Valiulyte, 33, had been renting a flat in Homerton, east London, with her partner and housemate for five years. There were problems: the terrace was mouldy and covered in rusty nails. At one point, they'd gone for almost two months without hot water. And there were moths, which had feasted on the carpets.

Despite raising these issues with their landlord, she claims that little was done. Valiulyte and her housemates had been paying £2,300 per month for the flat, but between 2022 and 2023 their rent increased by 35pc, or £800 per month. It was time; they decided to move out.

"We got a bit sick of chasing for all these things that were constantly adding up," says Valiulyte. "We didn't feel like the state of the flat warranted the rent that they were being asked for."

Valiulyte and her partner had two months to find a new home. There was an extra deadline too: Valiulyte was having hip replacement surgery. But in the spring of 2023, when London's rental market was at its most frenzied, this was a challenge. Every property they viewed had a queue of applicants.



Gintare Valiulyte, 33, moved from a mould and moth-infested rental into a 'mini-village' apartment in Stratford, east London. Credit: Daniel Jones

"It was always a bidding war. It was almost like whoever gave the most money won," she says. "We were panicking and wondering where we were going to live."

Eventually, Valiulyte found a flat in Coppermaker Square, a development in east London's Stratford. It came with access to a 25m pool, spa facilities, a gym, a co-working hub, a private cinema and a roof terrace, with prices in line with her previous

rent increase. And crucially, she could move in straight away.

She is one of a growing number of young people who are shunning traditional buy-to-let properties rented out by individual landlords in favour of new purpose-built developments. Not only are these flats usually in much better condition, but they also often come packed with amenities and have a ready-



For the price of her previous rent, Valiulytė found a flat in Coppermaker Square that comes with its own cinema Credit: Grant Frazer

made community – much like a block of glorified student halls.

Valiulyte and her partner moved into a two-bedroom apartment in May 2023, for which they pay £3,300 in rent. The flat is the same size as the three-bedroom property they had rented in Homerton, and has access to facilities they would otherwise have to pay for separately.

“It’s not just your flat,” she says. “You have communal spaces, a shared garden, all these amenities. When you’re going through [a major surgery] like I was, where I wasn’t able to go far and had a long recovery, having all of that right there was life-changing.”



Valiulytė says having access to facilities after her surgery, when she couldn’t travel far, was ‘life-changing’ Credit: Daniel Jones

Coppermaker Square is a purpose-built rental development, and unlike traditional buy-to-lets, these are funded by institutional investors and managed by large professional operators. These blocks usually have on-site maintenance teams, events and resident apps.

“It is a very different type of living,” says Anshul Raja of estate agency Chestertons. “It’s a place where you can live, work and play, which is hugely different from the general private rented sector in this country.”

According to Savills, there are 132,000 homes in these developments, representing just 2pc of the rental

market. However, a further 161,000 developments are under construction or in the planning pipeline, with almost £1bn invested last year. In Manchester, nearly a quarter of all rental homes are built-to-rent (BTR). The sector represents an increasing threat to established buy-to-let landlords, many of whom feel like they are being pushed out of the market.

These properties do come at a higher price. In London, the average rent for a two-bedroom flat in a BTR development is £2,853 – 14pc higher than an average rental property at £2,500, according to Savills. A one-bedroom flat costs more than a fifth more per month. But that price premium is coming down, according to property experts.

‘You don’t have that instability’

For Aurora Bianco, 32, moving into Folk, a co-living development in Harrow, meant a small rent increase. The studio, which she now shares with her partner, Sogie Ogiesoba, costs £1,782 between them, including bills.

Bianco chose Folk for its amenities: the co-working space meant that she would no longer have to work from her bedroom. At Folk, facilities include a cinema room, gym, roof terrace and large communal kitchen where residents can host guests. There are events such as rooftop Pilates and crypto lessons.

“Our studio is smaller than a standard two-bedroom flat,” says Bianco. “But I feel like we actually have more space than a traditional living situation because we can use all the shared spaces.”

Bianco and Ogiesoba recently hosted their civil partnership celebration in the building’s event space. Their guests, who came over from Italy, were able to rent rooms in the building for the night. “It was very convenient. If we’d just gone to a pub, it would have been so much more expensive.”

At Folk, there is an app where residents can raise problems. When Bianco



Aurora Bianco pays £1,782 in rent and bills, and says the co-working space means she no longer has to work from her bedroom



Bianco's studio flat is small but 'it feels bigger because of the shared living spaces'

encountered an issue with her oven, it was fixed the next day.

For Valiulyte, who waited years for problems to be fixed at her previous rental, having an on-site maintenance team was significant. "It's life-changing as a renter, to be honest," she says. "It takes a huge load off your mind: the chasing, the waiting, the needing to leave your keys or be at home to let someone in. This way doesn't interfere with your everyday life."

Although Valiulyte's rent is subject to small increases, she finds reassurance in knowing it will not rise as unpredictably or as sharply as it did in her previous home. She also feels more secure in her tenancy, making it far less likely she would face the upheaval of a friend who is being forced to move with a new baby after their landlord decided to sell.

"There's none of that instability here. It's owned by an investor who doesn't have a mortgage. You don't have it at the back of your mind: 'What if we get chucked out?'"

'This is a social place'

For 19-year-old Eric Paterson, who moved from Australia to the UK last year, it was the more communal way of living that drew him to these flats. "It was good for me because I'd just come to the country and didn't know anyone."

In co-living developments, tenants typically rent smaller spaces but have access to a wider variety of shared areas; essentially, it's a rebranded flat-

share. "Co-living relies on the fact that you're predominantly sleeping in your room but otherwise sharing the living experience with other people," explains Chesterton's Raja.

Paterson had looked for flats on Rightmove too, but felt that those at Union Coliving, in central Manchester, were in better condition. "Some of the properties I saw didn't seem like good places to live, they weren't maintained well. [Here] it was nice and new."

Paterson was paired with two flatmates and now lives in a three-bedroom apartment. He pays £865 per month in rent, including bills, plus an extra £90 per month for "U+ membership," which grants him access to the building's gym, co-working space and social apps.

"This is a social place," he says. "I don't really get out of the building without seeing someone I know or getting into a conversation. I love that because that's how it is in Australia, and that's what I miss most."

For both Bianco and Valiulyte, this sense of community – Valiulyte calls it a "mini-village" – has been an unexpected benefit. When Valiulyte was recovering from surgery, neighbours would check in on her and offer to help.

"When you're renting privately, you don't really connect with other people unless you go out of your way to do so. We lived in our flat for five years but didn't really know anyone," she says. "I didn't realise how important that actually is."



Bianco used the event space to host her civil ceremony