



## Interview: *Charlie Walsh* on launching a landmark super-prime scheme in Central London

PrimeResi meets the head of resi sales at The OWO, the Hinduja Group's new Raffles-serviced development in Whitehall, to discuss the project's launch strategy, the rise of branded residences worldwide, and the return of the roaring Twenties...

• By PrimeResi Editor • 7th June 2021

### London

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Can you break down the key attractions of branded residences over standalone homes in the eyes of HNWI?

I think branded residences have to have a genuine service offering which justifies the branding. Having branding for branding's sake in my mind is merely a marketing gimmick. The OWO will be the first Raffles branded residences in Europe, but the key attraction over, say a standalone home, will be the five-star turn-key service which will be available 24/7 to residents and moreover is right on their doorstep.



Has the development programme and plans for the launch of The OWO been affected by the pandemic?

Fortunately, we have fantastic contractors and technical teams on site who have created incredible work/shift patterns and routines which, in line with government guidelines, has allowed us to keep on track with our construction programme. We also have a number of digital marketing tools which have been specifically created to allow virtual tours in anticipation that there may be some potential visitors who are unable to meet us in person.

With international travel restrictions still in place, how will you convey the level of finish and USPs to potential buyers on the other side of the world?

We have developed a bespoke digital platform which can create a truly unique experience for potential buyers wherever they are in the world. As for experiencing service levels, they only need to walk into any five-star Raffles or Fairmont hotel and they will instantly get a feeling for the level of service and attention to detail they can expect to experience as a homeowner of one of the The OWO residences.

What have been the biggest challenges faced by the project team to date?

Keeping a site open and safe with over 1,000 tradespeople is no mean feat, but we're lucky enough to have a great project team with a real 'can do' attitude. Probably the next biggest hurdle is procuring and sourcing materials with the challenge of the pandemic but also Brexit.

Very few buildings globally have The OWO's kind of provenance; what is your favourite story or fact attached to the site?

For me personally and as an avid James Bond fan, the fact that Ian Fleming drew such inspiration for his character from The OWO and that no less than five James Bond films have been shot there, in my mind makes it a pretty special building. One can't but help feel swept up in all the history and heritage of the building when you're standing on the rooftop overlooking Horse Guards and St James's Park surrounded by all those fluttering Union Jacks.....it's a pretty special sensation.

How will you ensure the residences appeal to a wide range of buyers, and ensure that hotel guests and residents live in harmony?

Firstly, we have a wide range of residences available - in fact, of the 85 residences, no two are alike, and they range from studios up to five bedrooms so there is a great range for all types of buyers. In terms of hotel guests and residents living harmoniously, the building has been very cleverly designed and there is a clear separation between the Raffles branded residences and the Raffles London Hotel - they even have their own entrances and exits. This means that residents can enjoy all the buzz and excitement of a five-star hotel and the nine restaurants and bars, but equally they can retreat into their own private homes and enjoy the tranquillity and privacy safe in the knowledge that this side of The OWO is strictly for residents only.

Raffles is the latest high-profile hospitality brand to establish a resi offering in London; how do you foresee the fortunes of the capital in the wake of the pandemic?

There is a lot of conversation in the press about the return of the roaring Twenties and I really feel that with The OWO opening towards the end of next year, it will perfectly capture this pent-up demand of people wanting to go out and experience all that London has to offer, and this means creating experiences and memories with friends and family, be it having a drink on our spectacular rooftop or a special meal in one of the nine restaurants. I think we're going to see this experiential explosion in all things cultural and culinary as people emerge from the lockdown.

What proportion of purchasers are you expecting to originate organically - i.e. converting from Raffles hotel guests to owners?

Raffles has a wonderful core following of loyal guests who understand just how special the

brand is. We are getting a number of enquiries from such guests who are desperate to find out more about the first Raffles Residences in Europe. As with many repeat hotel guests, there comes a time when it makes more sense to own your own home rather than having extended stays in hotels.

You joined The OWO team as Head of Sales around six months ago; how does this project compare to other super-prime schemes that you have been involved with?

I think the main difference is the sheer size and scale of the project. When finished, The OWO will consist of over 760,000 square feet. Secondly, the biggest difference is working on a project with so many different moving parts and commercial elements, from the spa, to the hotel, to the restaurants and of course the 85 residences. It truly is a one-off.

How will the residents' amenities compare to other new developments in London and globally, and have any changes been made as a result of the pandemic?

Our residents have over 30,000 square feet of private amenities which are completely separate from the hotel amenities. What we have all learnt from the pandemic is the need for residents to be happy and healthy should the worse happen and another lockdown be imposed. This is why for example we have a private landscaped Residents' Garden, which is a wonderfully tranquil outdoor space purely for the residents to enjoy.

What has driven the recent blurring of the lines between hospitality and residential around the world?

I think certainly post-pandemic a lot of prospective buyers have realised that what they enjoy most about staying in these amazing hotels around the world is the incredible service level offered and attention to detail. When the pandemic hit and a lot of hotels closed their doors, this experience was hugely missed. Therefore, to have the opportunity to enjoy this level of service, but from the comfort of your own home, is a very compelling proposition and hugely attractive to potential purchasers.



**Further Reading**

[Europe's first Raffles-branded residences go on sale in London June 2021](#)