

London (/propertynews/london)

Eccentricity trumps conventional opulence in London

Edwin Heathcote wanders around the inside of the architect's head in Walmer Yard

7 HOURS AGO

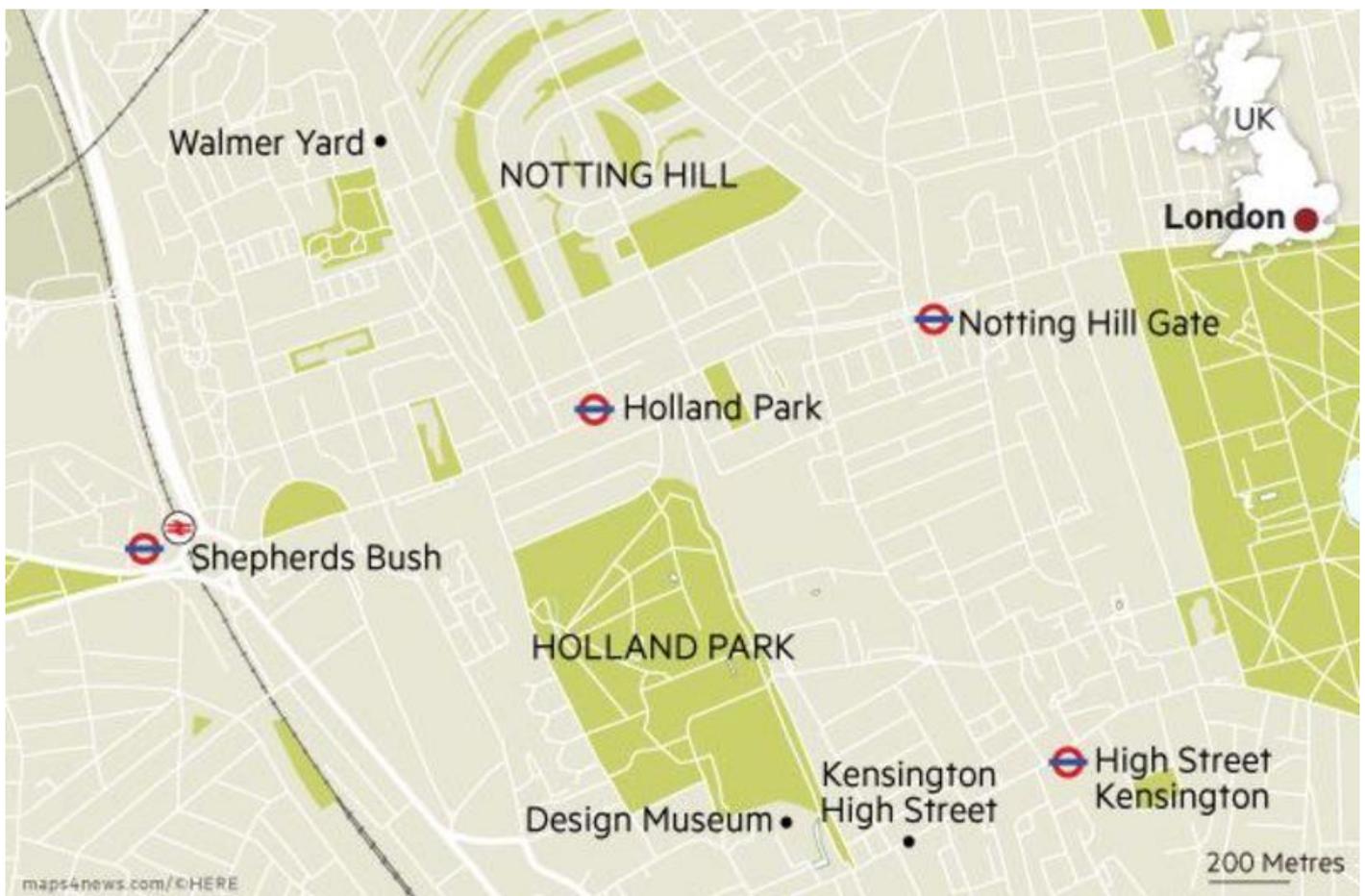


by **Edwin Heathcote** (<https://www.ft.com/stream/authorsId/Q0ItMDAwMDIIMg==QXV0aG9ycw==>)

If the kind of homes developers build for the super wealthy tend to look a little alike, this little group does not. Four small but intense houses clustered around a courtyard in a bit of London where prime property scrunches up against a dense landscape of social housing — to say Walmer Yard is eccentric is an understatement. Instead of huge open spaces and panoramic views, Walmer Yard (<http://www.walmeryard.co.uk/>) is characterised by tight, intimate, irregular rooms cocooned in carefully crafted materials, but not the material of conventional luxury. Instead of marble, there is concrete; instead of polished stainless steel, slowly tarnishing plumber's copper; instead of exotic timber veneer, plywood.



It was built by developer Crispin Kelly, usually a hard-nosed pragmatist who revels in working with good architects and squeezing the best from them to make affordable housing. This project was his indulgence. Kelly had trained as an architect at London's Architectural Association and when he finally got the opportunity he commissioned Peter Salter, his one-time tutor, to design a one-off. Whatever the opposite of a commercial architect is, Salter is it. A wild-haired, reclusive paper architect, he had barely built anything before this, his work having been too complex, too intense and too nuts to ever realise.



Salter seems to have poured a lifetime of ideas into this project. It is crafted with an obsessive fervour, occasionally almost overwhelming. Walking around the complex web of interconnecting rooms can feel like wandering around the inside of the architect's head with all its influences, fantasies and strange connections.



There are yurts on the roof: dark, domed spaces. Openings are unpredictable, occasionally tiny slots, at other times big picture windows. Part architect's dream, part Japanese fantasy, part Terry Gilliam nightmare, it is a thrilling ride, an affecting journey, an artwork as much as it is a building.



Walmer Yard is a particular project, personal, intense, eccentric. It is also a kind of story that unfolds and reveals itself as you move through it, using time, space, darkness and light. It won't be to everyone's taste, but the best art never is.