

an everyday life interiors magazine – issue #02

# apartamento

Featuring: Markus Miessen, Enrique Giner de los Rios, Kiko Buxo, Christopher Bollen, Mathias Sterner, Juan Moralejo, Karley Sciortino, Klas Ernflo, Paula Yacomuzzi, Erol Alkan, Yorgo Tloupas, Felix Friedmann, Alex Gartenfeld, Wai Lin Tse, Max Lamb, Terence Koh, Jem Goulding, Katherine Clary, Mylinh Trieu Nguyen, Arquitectura-G, FAR, Giorgiana Ravizza, Carlotta Manaigo, Joan Morey, Ekhi Lopetegui, RJ Shaughnessy, Ye Rin Mok, Julian Gatto



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# The Camelot Solution

TEXT BY MARCO VELARDI  
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We heard about Camelot for the first time when Yorgo Tloupas, Editor-in-chief of Intersection magazine, visited Milan last April and told us about how incredibly cheap his rent in London, was £60 per week, while living in a beautiful huge building. Shortly after we realised it was not just Yorgo's case but a sort of incredible community of individuals living in such exceptional places as fire stations, schools, castles, council offices, and who knows what, across five countries: the Netherlands, where it all started, the UK, Ireland, Belgium and France. The more we spoke to friends and people around us, the more we began finding out incredible stories and experiences about Camelot, both good and bad. Curiosity grew even higher, but at the same time realising it would have been unrealistic to pursue a 360° view on this phenomenon. Taking a personal approach to it was the only way forward. Invited by Yorgo, we took a trip to London last July to experience the Camelot style of living and, while being there, we briefly met up with photographer Felix Friedmann who told us about what life in an ex library feels like.

[www.camelotproperty.com](http://www.camelotproperty.com)

apartamento - text







**YORGO TLOUPAS**, is a 33 years old, half French half Greek, art director who moved to London from Paris 7 years ago. He founded Intersection magazine together with Dan Ross and Rankin, after working for Crash and Magazine, further developing it into an international publishing empire made of four editions in Japan, USA, France and Dubai, with two more on the way in Germany and Russia.

Were you originally based in France?

I was born in Paris, and I always lived with my parents, in the leafy suburbs. My father, Philolaos Tloupas, designed and built his own house in which I grew up and I still retreat to when I travel back to Paris. He drew the plans and built it all by himself in the late 60s late 70s, with just one other guy helping him. The house is actually pretty amazing, and it has been featured in various design magazines. It is a very minimal open space structure designed around the ancient Greek golden ratio, which is supposed to make the proportions perfect to the eye, with big windows, totally white and no curtains. To grow up in a house like that, unlike any of my friends' ones, has always been the normal thing. Only later on, I realised how truly lucky I was to grow up in such a situation.

Do your parents still live there? Have you got any siblings?

My parents still live there, and there is no way I would ever give the place away. I have also a sister and she is living in a place my dad worked on, he took an old farm, and he redid the inside for her.

Has he built other houses then?

Not really, he is a sculptor by trade, literally he built those two in France and he did something in Greece for our own house over there. He built an extension in the shape of a minimalist block of white concrete with sleek windows, attached to this traditional looking mountain house. It is a very interesting combination!

So when you moved to London, leaving behind these beautiful houses in the country, did you already know about Camelot?

Not at all, I didn't have an idea about Camelot seven years ago. I first moved into quite a cool place, called the Golden Lane Estate -[www.goldenlane.co.uk](http://www.goldenlane.co.uk)-, which is next to the Barbican, built by the same architects. It's a listed

building with a very utopian structure, big windows, and strongly influenced by the work and ideas of Le Corbusier. I moved into a studio with a small garden by my own, because I was not sure about sharing a house, like everyone does in London, as in France kids live mostly by themselves. I still remember it was so expensive, £800 a month, and I lived there for 1 or 2 years. Afterwards, I moved into a live and work (loft) space, with a separate room for my bedroom. Basically, I was living in the magazine's office, which was great, but it became difficult to keep the place tidy, and suddenly there was no more space for my private life, as well as I ended up working non stop.

Before I began living with Camelot, I spent some time with two friends, who were living in a similar type of place to the ones Camelot provides. It was 400sqm for £200 a month near the Barbican tube station. They were super great set designer, working on the Vivienne Westwood catwalks installations, music videos and much more. The building had a workshop downstairs with a massive courtyard that was never used. Another floor was used as their storage, while the upstairs of approximately 150sqm was where we lived. They built everything themselves, like the whole kitchen in one day, then they separated the whole floor with partitions. Our bathroom was covered up in prints designed by Eley Kishimoto, as we are all good friends with them, while the walls of my room.

My room walls were made out of shoeboxes, since one of their friends was a shoe designer, so we had these cardboard that would contain 6 shoeboxes each. In between these we put some of the light boxes you see here at my place now, which were remaining from some music video, could be even a Madonna one. The whole thing was freestanding, no tape, I loved it! The rest of the place was an extravagant mix of Victorian and modern, both very messy and very eclectic. Unfortunately, we got kicked out after a few months, but we kind of knew it as it was a dodgy deal. After I moved out, I found out one of my employees, Bjorn, was living with Camelot already, so I tried to get a place too.

What's the deal to get on board with Camelot? There are definitely a few prerequisites in terms of about who you are and what you do. You can't be a student to move in, you can't organize parties, have a cat, or smoke inside.







They will let you stay as long as the locations are available. And the move out warning is just one month.

Normally, it is quite difficult to get on board. You have to fill in an application form and you are put on a waiting list, but essentially you have to convince them to trust you. In my case, I had the email of a girl working at Camelot and after writing back and forth a few times I managed to go and see her. At first it felt like I would not be able to get any accommodation, then after 10 minutes, she suddenly told me there was a free room in a school in Chelsea. Literally, she gave me the keys and I took my bike and went to see it. It was the right one for me, so I took immediately.

#### What was it like?

It was a fairly similar location to the one where I live now, a sort of art and design college, but it was totally abandoned. I think they temporarily moved some people out of the building before I moved in, so the kids from the estate nearby began smashing things and doing graffiti. Things went back to normal right after, so I felt quite happy about the whole Camelot system, to stop squatters or people to vandalise the properties.

#### Well, then what happens on the occasion you have to move out?

If you have been good to them, like paying rent on time and respecting the rules - you are given a set list of rules at the beginning of your tenancy -, they will propose some other venues, and you can choose from those. I went through the whole process when I moved out of Chelsea last Summer in 2007. They proposed me some other rooms, one of them was in Felix's school, but it was too small and not the kind of space I wanted, so I put my things in storage and waited. What I like about Camelot is the big spaces they offer, like Felix has got. In the end, I heard about a new school with empty rooms, and I knew a girl who just moved here, so I asked Camelot and it worked out. When

you are lucky enough it works really well and they are efficient.

#### I wonder if it's all based on word of mouth or is there a forum or bulletin to find out about the available properties?

They don't show properties on the website for security reasons, to prevent against squatters. The practice is that they email you proposing to show new places every now and then. I actually got one offer last week, but it was far outside London. You always hope that isn't the venue they propose you next. I could not live outside central London.

#### How many places do you think they manage in total?

I have no idea, but they have venues all over the UK. To be honest I know most of the people would want to be based in central London.

#### How does it work with the standards they provide such as security?

There are a few basic things for living you get guaranteed such as fire extinguishers, a common area with a fitted kitchen and a shower/toilet for example. You can also add your own things like a washing machine. On the bad side, I have

also heard some properties don't have heating, but I have never been into one though. As for security, you are supposed to guard the place, there's a whole set of guidelines. Honestly, it is quite easy even though it always depends. Right now I live next to a council estate and nothing has ever happened.

#### Do they give you any furniture?

No, but for example in my case all you see fits into a van, and it takes 25 minutes to put it in.

#### Do you have extra storage space somewhere?

I had books, but I keep them at the office or I took most of them to my parents in France. I love books but the idea of moving them around





was driving me crazy, mentally and physically, so I am avoiding any, beside a few small things I can easily carry around or leave at the office.

Do you buy furniture then?

Not really, lately I only bought some Muji cardboard boxes, which I use as my closet. I normally find things around and got some from Habitat, when we first launched the magazine as we did a deal with them. Those cardboard boxes are great, you buy them flat and can easily carry wherever you want. Regarding some of the rest, the couch is a Robin Day reissue from Habitat, I really like his 50s' designs. My dad built the table; it is such a heavy one, while the chairs are Habitat again. Ultimately I prefer classic things and build mixes of own and found stuff.

Anywhere to check for inspiration?

I quite like the blog Dzine. I also love how people manage to integrate cars in their houses, there's a magazine called Garage Life from Japan, where garages become part of the house or office with similar fixtures to the actual car interiors.

Going back to Camelot, do you think it is something many people know about?

If you start talking about it at a party or a dinner, someone will know for sure, but it takes a bit of courage to live in this kind of situation, where you could be evicted within a month notice. It's almost like you play a lottery. You leave the living side of your life to chance, I mean you can choose but not everything. It's probably the opposite of what most people do.

So you perceive of Camelot as a community? It is just a house sharing, it is cheaper and more bohemian.

How do you feel when you come back home, knowing it's not going to be permanent?

I don't have a TV or radio, if I had a screen to watch videos I would like it more. My real home is in France and Greece. I like Saturdays when they are quite, and love coming back

here and cycle in the courtyard. Living here is a good test to bring girls and see how they get used to the basic things, like for sharing the bathroom. One thing I miss is to have cats, but you are not allowed.

Do you think you could quit this type of living style?

Well with the kind of life I have, being always on the road, travelling a lot, if I had to pay normal rent it would be frustrating. After tasting something like Camelot you don't want to start paying normal prices. It is ridiculous. On top of this I don't know even how long I will stay in the UK. It could be that I move back to Paris at some point.

Camelot just launched in France?

Yes, it is just happening now. If it works out, it will solve lots of housing problems. I am also looking for something like Camelot in New York, as I thought of moving there. I don't want to pay crazy prices. It is not picking up even if it is full of empty buildings in various areas of Brooklyn, such as Greenpoint. When you start living within the Camelot frame of mind, you begin to look at spaces in a different way, already thinking how it could be used.

You really become aware of the possibility of transforming state owned spaces or abandoned buildings into temporary living situations. The aim for any organisation trying to do so, it is to find the hole in the loop. Whether it is more expensive to pay 24hr security guards or having temporary tenants taking care of it.

Have you already thought about the next step?

My next step might be prefabricated housing, or even an airstream trailer, the big American silver ones, and place it on top of a car park. Prefab houses are amazing. I have been looking at this website -www.prefabs.com-. I don't know why it doesn't take off as a concept. But I would like to explore the possibility in NY, to rent a parking space in a car park and try if it works.

