

# WELCOME TO THE GLOBAL CLUB

### Proximity to a high-end members' club is a sure sign your property has cachet. The trend is catching on in cities around the world, says *Cathy Hawker*

If you take Groucho Marx's view ("I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member"), you may think that private clubs are as buttoned-up as their whisky-soaked members. But from Singapore to Ibiza, a new generation of private members' clubs is emerging, offering a second home – with a negroni – for a clientele eager to network and party in a modern manner. Proximity to one of these high-end clubs is a sure sign your property has premium cachet.

Soho House led the charge, opening in London in 1995. It was for thrusting young creatives who certainly did not wear a tie for work or play. The company's rapid expansion has led to 24 overseas establishments from Mumbai to Nashville; Copenhagen and Stockholm are next.

"London has always been the centre for sophisticated members' clubs," says David Forbes, the chairman of Savills estate agency's Private Office. "It started with nightclubs such as Annabel's, originally hidden in basements, then evolved to dining clubs, such as Mark's Club and Harry's Bar. The best clubs in London, and possibly the world, are Annabel's, Oswald's and 5 Hertford Street. Now London-style clubs are rolling out around the world."

## ASIA

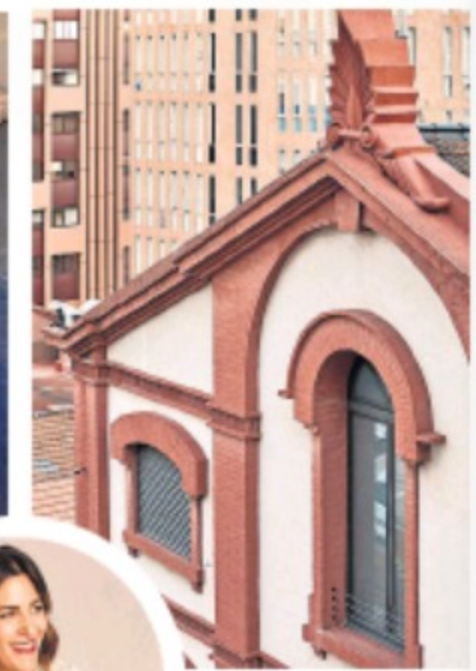
The Singapore offshoot of 67 Pall Mall opened in February this year, giving members access to a collection of 5,000

wines, "the biggest and most diverse wine list in southeast Asia". Membership costs include a one-off joining fee of S\$2,400 (about £1,400) and a monthly charge of S\$100 to S\$200. It's one of a number of clubs to have opened recently in the city-state says Ben Jones, chief executive of the Mandala Group. He opened the Mandala Club at the end of last year, rebranding and renovating an existing club in a striking building close to Marina Bay.

"Until recently members' clubs across Asia were generally old-fashioned ones," he says. "It's amazing, for example, in Tokyo, a city of 37 million, that there isn't a forward-thinking club based around art and culture. However, just as over the past decade London has seen a huge increase in a new wave of clubs, the trend is starting in Asia, and specifically Singapore. Living close to a club with a real lifestyle element transforms the city experience, making it more appealing for an international audience and, I think, adding further pulling power to Singapore property as an attractive investment."

The striking Mandala Club, with its three floors of restaurants, libraries, quiet corners, a gymnasium and a wine cellar, is a place to "collect like-minded people together, make connections, have fun and possibly do something serious without ever taking yourself too seriously", Jones says. Events – 20-30 each month – are diverse: a teach-in on fem-tech or sound-bath meditation, for example. "Since opening, membership has tripled to

**Clockwise from top left: The Mandala Club in Singapore; Juno House, its yoga studio and Soho House, both in Barcelona. Inset: Juno House's founder, Natalia Batlle. Barcelona, bottom, and Miami Beach and Ibiza, far right, have members' clubs in addition to local colour**



2,000, composed from across Singapore's dynamic and international business community," he adds.

## THE US

When Soho House opened in New York in 2003, it distanced itself from old-school Manhattan members' clubs. Based in a former warehouse in the Meatpacking District, it is three miles south of Central Park, where the longer-established clubs – notably the Metropolitan and the New York Athletic Club – are clustered.

"Soho House's goal is to create a community of like-minded individuals, whereas other elite [New York] clubs focus on wealth and fortune," says Edward Joseph, an associate broker at Christie's International Real Estate. "It's one of Manhattan's trendiest members-only clubs, with a joining fee of \$2,100. The Metropolitan Club, overlooking 5th Avenue, defined upper-echelon New York culture for hundreds of years. Old money is the name of the game here."

The Metropolitan Club is clear on its dress code. Men are required to wear jackets and ties "at all times", while dresses, skirts and "dresy pant suits" are deemed suitable for women. Jeans, shorts, leggings, stretch pants, sweats and T-shirts are "absolutely not acceptable", its website sternly declares.

While Joseph describes the Metropolitan as the "most exclusive" New York club, with presidents among its past members, he points out the irony that it was initially founded by JP Morgan as a protest against clubs with stricter entry requirements. Bill Clinton chose to join the Core Club on 55th Street, where privacy is so tight its website features only a tasteful holding page.

In sun-soaked Miami private clubs are an essential part of life for affluent residents, according to Miltadis Kastanis,

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a senior director of luxury sales at the Knight Frank associate Douglas Elliman.

"It's very rare a high-end buyer doesn't join a club," Kastanis says. "Clients in Miami are very transient, and while it is a coastal city, there are relatively few beachfront homes, even for those buying for \$20 million-plus. That means people don't have a ready network of friends and they want private beach access. Miami's best members' clubs offer both."

Kastanis's list of the most exclusive starts with the Hemingway Club at the Four Seasons Surf Club, followed by Faena Rose, an art-based club with an exceptional programme of cultural events. Membership provides entry to exclusive Art Basel Miami events.

The recently revived Bath Club is Miami's first private members' club – it opened in 1926 on a former avocado orchard, originally with a whites-only membership policy. Bought in 1999 by the African-American property developer Don Peebles, it now operates with its policy of being "exclusively inclusive".

The club and its three-acre sandy beach have been an important part of Stephanie Sayfite Aagaard's life. It was where the Miami socialite, newspaper columnist and businesswoman learnt to swim, and where she held her wedding brunch. "I like that it is not connected to a hotel as many clubs here are, and that it is safe and overwhelmingly friendly," she says.

"It has a wonderfully diverse membership of all ages and is a real home from home – somewhere my husband plays tennis, I meet friends for cocktails after work and where my teenage sons meet friends. Anyone looking for a community in Miami will find it here."

## EUROPE

Alongside its location in Singapore, 67 Pall Mall has opened an outpost in the elite Swiss resort of Verbier. The club is on the Rue de Médran, with a members-only dining room upstairs that claims "the most diverse wine list in the Alps" and a public bar downstairs. There's also a gym and a microbrewery.

"A private members' club like 67 Pall Mall wouldn't have worked in Verbier ten years ago,"

says Alex Koch de Gooreynd, head of the Swiss desk at Knight Frank. "Verbier is encouraging more people to live there full time, and these residents need somewhere to go to relax, to escape from the crowds and meet friends. They want an elegant restaurant with London-level food and service, not just fondue."

"It's all about bonhomie. The arrival of clubs such as 67 Pall Mall can only serve to enhance the already high international appeal of a more permanent home in the Swiss Alps."

Ibiza is another location without a history of members' clubs. The tech entrepreneur David Leppan aims to change that. He is setting up Los Patios Ibiza, a community for year-round residents and island lovers. There are more than 2,000 people on the waiting list, and Leppan hopes to open this year in Santa Gertrudis in the centre of the island for a fee of about €200 a month.

"Those who choose to live in Ibiza live

in a form of exile," Leppan says. "We've opted out of our lives elsewhere. We're hedonistic, tolerant, open-minded, whereas private clubs in the English sense tend to be exclusive, closed and often seen as a status symbol. Our model is the exact opposite. We're building a community, creating a space where the old Ibiza remains. I set out six years ago to acquire this 2,500-year-old farm to give those of us who care about the environment and the island a place to gather. Our world is changing and new communities are being built. Los Patios will be the cornerstone of our nomadic tribe."

Barcelona is a city with a winning lifestyle. Soho House opened close to Las Ramblas in 2016, and this year the city's first women-only members' club, Juno House, opened on the corner of Diagonal. It's the brainchild of Natalia Batlle, a businesswoman with US-Catalan heritage who wanted to create a "modern oasis for professional women – a playground and a trampoline for women to grow. I had lived in New York and travelled to Miami and London, and always felt that Barcelona missed the cosmopolitan vibe that a private members' club could offer," Batlle says.

"It didn't have the space for locals and internationals to connect. We designed the concept during the pandemic. We have a speakeasy bar and three floors of work/life balance, a family floor with crèche, a fitness studio, a room for self-care and fashion pop-ups, meeting rooms, a podcast studio and a huge industrial workspace. Clubs today are about community, especially since the pandemic."

