

THE MODERN HOUSE



*Nr. Lewes, East Sussex
Sold*

Bentley Wood

Set in approximately 18 acres of private land, with precious views over fields towards the South Downs, the remarkable Bentley Wood was designed in 1936 by the renowned Russian-born British architect Serge Chermayeff as a country retreat for his family. This impressive five to seven-bedroom detached house is a wonderful example of early modernism in a stunning rural location near Lewes.

Remarkably, despite its pedigree, the house remains unlisted. Nevertheless, careful work by ABQ Studio over the past 18 years has refocused the changes wrought upon the house over the years. Numerous aspects of the original design have been recreated or repaired, as well as making clearer the distinction between the original house and later additions and alterations.

‘It remained fresh in the minds of architects even in the 1950s, when most other pre-war Modern houses seemed impossibly dated.’ – Alan Powers.

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Chermayeff's vision for the house was a low-lying timber box with a ground level of floor-to-ceiling glass that opened fully to spill from the impressive living room into the green waves of the garden and countryside. The views across the downs in a southerly direction are spectacular.

Chermayeff chose a timber structure, both as cladding and frame, to reflect the vernacular surroundings but also as the modern idiom recognised the suitability of the material for modern architecture. In its heyday under the stewardship of Chermayeff himself, with its sculpture and paintings (Moore, Nicholson, Piper), and its extensive grounds (on which Chermayeff collaborated with Christopher Tunnard), the original house fused architecture, art and landscape into a memorable whole. As Alan Powers wrote in his book *Serge Chermayeff: Designer, Architect, Teacher*; "...Bentley Wood fitted into its landscape, with the graciousness of a Georgian villa, enjoying a lively but relaxed relationship with nature."

The house has been altered over the years, as is the course for many buildings of the modern era, including some post-war extensions. However, the current owners have sympathetically restored and reinstated much of the building's original essence.

The house is approached along a private drive, a fair distance from the road, passing through a link section of the building that connects the main house with an annexed studio. Beyond the link is a paved forecourt, providing a large area for parking, and the entrance to the house beneath a covered porch.

The plan is rectangular, with the service areas (kitchen etc) and connecting hallway to the north, leaving the main rooms to observe the view. The centrepiece of the original design is an extraordinary lateral reception room that runs the entire width of the house on the garden side, with full-height sliding doors that open to a newly restored south-facing paved terrace. A later addition to the house, extended at the western elevation, created a further 'snooker room' with panelled walls and impressive high ceilings, currently used as an artist's studio.

Upstairs there are five bedrooms, all with a southerly garden view, three of which have access to balconies. The master bedroom has a walk-through dressing room and a beautiful big bathroom.

At the eastern most tip of the house there is a self-contained apartment with a bedroom, kitchen and living room (originally a staff flat) that could easily be incorporated as an extension to the main house – bringing the total number of bedrooms to seven – rather than segregated as it is currently used.

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Outside, the gardens contain wonderful areas of lawn and wild meadow, a hardcourt tennis court, an open-air pool surrounded by a sheltering wall, growing areas for a kitchen garden and various types of fruit trees, and two ponds stocked with fish and large enough to boat on. The grounds amount to around 18.75 acres, however there is an option to purchase additional woodland by separate negotiation.

The house and grounds are beautifully located between the High Weald AONB and the South Downs National Park. Although in relative isolation, because of the position of the land, Bentley Wood is around 15 minutes from Lewes, a pretty town where the architecture consists of a lovely blend of medieval, Georgian and Victorian streets, through which its famous bonfire night procession happens annually. There are a growing number of excellent coffee shops, gastro pubs and restaurants in the area, and the high street has a distinct lack of chain stores. The sea at Newhaven and Seaford is a further 15-minutes beyond Lewes by car. Uckfield is a pretty little town less than ten minutes north of the house, with some lovely places to eat, drink and shop locally. Bentley Wood is approximately 30 minutes from Brighton, Tunbridge Wells, Haywards Heath, and Eastbourne, the three largest towns in the area.

There is excellent access to London by train with direct services running from nearby Uckfield into London Bridge in around an hour and 20 minutes, or from Lewes station to Clapham Junction or London Victoria in around an hour. Gatwick Airport is easily accessible from Lewes or Haywards Heath by train, or in about 40 minutes by car.

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About

The Modern House is an estate agency that helps people live in more thoughtful and beautiful ways. We believe in design as a powerful force for good. Inspired by the principles of modernism, we represent design-led homes across the UK which celebrate light, space and a truth to materials. Esquire credits The Modern House with “rewriting the rulebook on estate agency” and GQ voted us “one of the best things in the world”.