



**B** hottest markets in Spain right now. It still looks like good value compared with London, Paris, Rome and

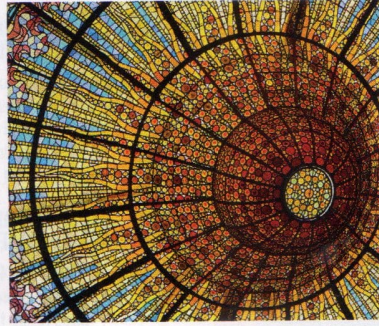
Madrid, and the rehabilitation of the oldest parts of the city has played a key role in attracting interest from investors.

While the market peaked there in 2007 – when average values reached €4,732 per sq metre, according to the agent Cluttons – prices declined until early 2013, when they had dropped by 37.5 per cent.

Official figures show single-digit rises year on year, but, as ever with Spanish property statistics, averages do not tell the whole story. “I get the sense that prices are rising much faster than the official figures suggest,” says Mark Stücklin, the Spanish property commentator, who lives in the city.

“I’m seeing examples of prime Barcelona property prices up around by 100 per cent in the last three years, though you wouldn’t know it from the figures. Foreign demand is driving the market in Barcelona, especially Chinese and European demand.”

He says that the Chinese were the biggest foreign buyers in Barcelona last year, up around 60 per cent year on year and overtaking the French for the first time. “If that trend continues, and



The Catalan coastal city offers one of Spain’s most dynamic markets, reports **Liz Rowlinson**

# HOT IN THE CITY: BARCELONA





Barcelona becomes a popular destination for Chinese demand [for the golden visa scheme that offers residency permits with property purchases of €500,000 or over], that will put more upward pressure on prices. The number of Egyptian and Israeli buyers is also growing.”

With new low-cost flights from Norwegian Airlines to Barcelona from four US cities starting in June, plus the strength of the US dollar against the euro, we could see more Americans in Catalonia too.

The number of British buyers in Barcelona grew strongly last year, although this is unlikely to be quite the same in 2017 with Brexit's affect on the exchange rate, although this might be countered by the strong domestic market (and one that is getting stronger). The local market is driven by increasing finance options in Spain, and the healthy Spanish economy: it showed GDP growth of 3.3 per cent last year.

What does the city have to offer? For lifestyle, it's pretty hard to beat. Whether you are seeking beautiful architecture, a great food scene, or a Miami-style city beach with a Catalan twist, it has something to suit most tastes. For a change of scene you can hop on a fast ferry to the Balearic islands, or along the coast to explore the beautiful Costa Brava.

Hand in hand with flourishing as a popular city-break destination and Airbnb hot spot (of which more later), the Catalan city associated with the artist Antoni Gaudí has also been growing as a second-home hub. Once known as a slightly rundown, edgy city, it has changed much in the past 20 years.

The 1992 Olympics began Barcelona's transformation into the fashionable beach city that it now is, and the redevelopment of its waterfront area included the beachside Diagonal Mar district, where towers of luxury apartments enjoy sweeping views of the Catalan coast.

Running alongside this has been the evolution of FC Barcelona into a brand in its own right, with its superstar players such as Lionel Messi, the five-times winner of the Fifa world player of the year award.

“Barcelona is a global city, offering a combination of great value right now combined with the fashionable lifestyle aspects, so it's a great time to buy a home there,” says Joanna Leverett, Cluttons head of international residential markets. “In what other major European city can you get a one-bed property in the central old town for €250,000?”

There's a much more diverse range of property offerings now as the new-build sector has recovered since 2013. The agent Engel & Völkers reports that the

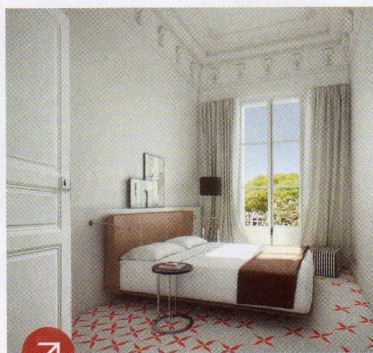
city accounts for more than half of the building permits in the Catalonia region and is marketing 25 new development or restoration projects. They predict that this number will double this year.

British buyers do tend to prefer older homes. They are especially drawn to beautiful historic apartment blocks in the harbourfront old town, Ciutat Vella, that are being redeveloped by local and international companies, or the Eixample if they have slightly bigger budgets. In these two districts, 75 per cent of sales are to foreign buyers.

### The old town or Ciutat Vella

The appeal of the old town – which includes the medieval parishes of La Barceloneta, El Raval, Sant Pere, Santa Caterina and El Born, as well as the Gòtic – is that it is within walking distance of the sea and the commercial centre of Eixample. Most of the residents are locals so there's an authentic feel, with lines of washing strung between the wrought-iron balconies of the tall medieval stone townhouses.

Last year the average sales value of a two-bed apartment in the old town was €225,920, according to Cluttons, with the average rent per month for such an apartment at €1,059. Renovated apartments will cost more than this, and



#### Eixample, €795,000 (£678k)

This two-bed, two-bath apartment in the Eixample district comes with a stunning roof terrace and 4m high ceilings. [Cluttons.com](http://Cluttons.com)



**FOR SALE**





**"I love the independent and community spirit of Barcelona"**

**The author of the Bryant & May detective series – 14 novels featuring two detectives working in modern-day London – divides his time between a warehouse conversion project in King's Cross and the Catalan city of Barcelona.**

After trying out relocating to Eze in the south of France (and taking on an "insanely ambitious house project") and also Los Angeles, where he worked in the film industry (and hated living there), Christopher Fowler plumped for a property in Barcelona's old town four years ago. So what drew him to the city?

"I made a trip to Barcelona on business and the Born area [also known as El Born in the Barrio Gòtic or historic old town] with its derelict market reminded me of King's Cross 15 or 20 years ago," says Fowler, a youthful 63.

"It's very central, only 15 minutes to the beach and two minutes to the park, and it is a very cultural place where writers hang out, full of bookshops, cafés, theatres.

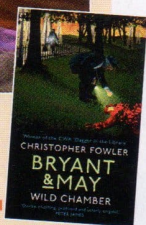
"I love the independent spirit of Barcelona, which I felt was lacking where I lived in France. All the barrios [ancient parishes or districts] have different styles and they are all still evolving."

He fell in love with a property in an old Franco-era building on one side of a square. "It was on the second floor of an old-school *comunidad* residential building designed for Spanish families with lots of children, with about eight or ten rooms off a long, thin passage," he says, unfazed after his previous property project. "The apartments had brown doors and fan lights and because it was a community [run by its committee owners] I had to go to a meeting in the building and phoned a friend to help translate the Catalan."

He bought the property for €430,000 (through the agent Lucas Fox) and converted it, with the help of an architect, into an open-plan two-bed mezzanine apartment. His balcony overlooks a concert hall and below him is the "best wine store in Barcelona". His neighbours are Spanish and French, and tend to live there full time.

Because he spends at least a week a month there, he doesn't rent it out and calls it the perfect lock-and-leave apartment, writing his award-winning novels (and he also writes graphic novels, screenplays and short stories) at a Franco-era writing desk. His latest Bryant & May thriller, *Wild Chamber* (above, right), is published on March 23, by Doubleday. He writes one at least every 18 months.

When not writing he loves walking along the beach, where *chiringuitos* (beach clubs) have replaced the factories and drug addicts of the once-rundown seafront areas. His neighbourhood has already changed massively in the four years since he arrived, and he's even using Catalan architects for his new warehouse project in London, a city which he loves and is still tied to through his partner's career. "Often when I get back to London I feel a profound sense of depression arriving back to the blank faces, grey



a two-bed example stylishly finished to suit the overseas rentals market, will be around €400,000. A one-bed will be around €250,000. This equates to about €3,650 per m<sup>2</sup>.

At Correu Vell, a building of 13 apartments with original beams and brickwork released for sale last year, prices started at €360,000 for a 50m<sup>2</sup> one-bed apartment, and there is a top-floor 66m<sup>2</sup> one-bed apartment with a roof terrace still available for €420,000 (*cluttons.com*).

They also have a one-bed apartment in a newly refurbished block one street from the famous La Rambla for €270,000.

Also popular is the bohemian El Born district, for its proximity to the harbour, authentic listed buildings, book stores and artistic ambience. Expect to pay nearer to €4,000 per m<sup>2</sup> for an older property, suggests Isidre Valldosera, head of Cluttons Barcelona.

**In and around the elegant L'Eixample**

The grid-like L'Eixample – which means "extension" (from the medieval city walls in the 1850s) – with its wide avenues, Gaudi-designed and other Modernist buildings and large public squares such as Plaça de Catalunya, is the major tourist and commercial area.

Its six barrios (districts) include the Sagrada Família and Sant Antoni – the new hipster district – while the Passeig de Gràcia is one of the city's most famed upmarket shopping streets and sought-after locations for grand apartments. Some of these will cost about €1 million and command long-term rental rates of €5,000 a month, although the average rent for a two-bed apartment in this district is a more modest €1,281 per month.

The average sales price is about €4,050 per m<sup>2</sup>, or €324,009 for a two-bedroom apartment, according to Cluttons.

North of Eixample is the district of

Gràcia, one to keep an eye on as it's generally a bit more affordable yet is still central, with many of the same advantages: great architecture, new boutiques, lively restaurants and pretty squares.

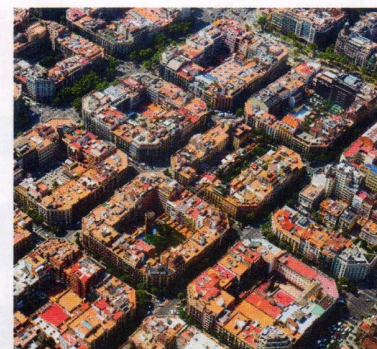
New development projects are not permitted there – as they are not in Ciutat Vella or Eixample – but there are plenty of rehabilitation projects where the façades of buildings are restored and the interiors reformed, keeping original features.

For example, the agent Lucas Fox has a one-bed 49m<sup>2</sup> apartment within a refurbished Baroque building of eight units in Gràcia. It has three terraces, totalling an impressive 59m<sup>2</sup>, and the price reflects the high-spec finishing (including smart technology) with lots of exposed brickwork and steel beams: €555,000.

Just south of Sant Antoni is El Poble-Sec, a formerly seedy area that is now fashionable and extends towards the harbour. There is a two-bed apartment there for €315,000 through Cluttons (*see next page*).

**The salubrious suburbs: Sarrià-Sant Gervasi, Pedralbes, Les Corts**

Home to diplomats, wealthy expats and the odd football star, the most expensive districts in the city are the leafy residential suburbs of Les Corts, Pedralbes and Sarrià-Sant Gervasi. The latter is the conservation area in the Collserola mountain range that historically has been the home to wealthy





summer residences there. The average price was about €4,598 per m<sup>2</sup> last year, up 11 per cent on 2015, according to Cluttons.

### Seafront new-builds?

Sant Martí is the main seafront district that includes the Olympic port and new beachside district of Diagonal Mar, where prices of apartments in super-luxe high-rise condos go up to €7,000 per m<sup>2</sup>. It also includes the more affordable area of El Poblenou, which is one to watch, according to Stücklin. This industrial waterfront area – once dubbed the Manchester of Barcelona for its former factories that became venues for raves – offers both sea views and regenerated Modernist apartment blocks. It's become Barcelona's live-work start-up hub – especially the 22@ area – and you can get a huge three-bed loft-style apartment for €575,000 ([Lucasfox.com](http://Lucasfox.com)).

### Short-term rentals: beware

Buyers hoping to rent out their property should be aware of the city council's moratorium on holiday rental licences (required to legally rent out your property on Airbnb or as any other type of short-term let – anything less than 30 days). "Some properties continue to be rented out illegally [without a licence], or you can buy a licence on the secondary market (not the issuing authority/town hall) and apply it to a resale property," says Stücklin. Or you can, of course, target the lucrative long-term rentals market. See [page 39](#) for some more on this subject. 📍



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## 5 FABULOUS HOMES IN BARCELONA

### Old Town, Barcelona, €630,000 (£538k)

This spacious (115m<sup>2</sup>) two-bed, two-bath new apartment is located in the heart of Barcelona's old town. [lucasfox.com](http://lucasfox.com)



### Poble-Sec, €315,000 (£269k)

Completely refurbished two-bed apartment in the central district of Poble-Sec. [Cluttons.com](http://Cluttons.com)



### Eixample, €649,000 (£553k)

This is a charming one-bed apartment with large roof terraces in the popular tourist and commercial district [lucasfox.com](http://lucasfox.com)



### Gòtic, €495,000 (£422k)

Fabulous designer duplex apartment in a quiet street in the old town of Barcelona. This property is an oasis of tranquility at a place with history and personality. Offers three beds, two baths, 157m<sup>2</sup>. [realestate-dreams.com](http://realestate-dreams.com)

### El Born, €1,075,000 (£917k)

Renovated two-bed duplex in a historic listed building, a *palacete* from the 18th century. A lot of character, round arches, noble wooden materials and iron works. Large open spaces, very bright, and 100m<sup>2</sup> large private roof deck. [realestate-dreams.com](http://realestate-dreams.com)