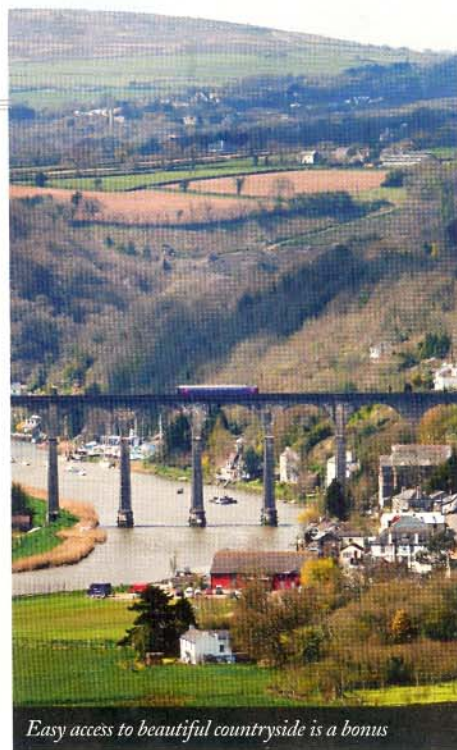




*Plymouth Hoe provides open parkland close to the city centre*



*Easy access to beautiful countryside is a bonus*

centre as we speak,' he adds. Even the Grade II-listed Civic Centre (a 14-storey tower block, designed by HJW Stirling in 1961) is at risk of redevelopment, a side effect of the Vision for Plymouth initiative led by Barcelona-based architect David Mackay, in progress since 2003.

Whatever you think of its architecture, you can't fault its location. To the west, you can nip across the Tamar into Cornwall; to the north follow the glorious Tamar Valley to the edge of Dartmoor.

'I'm not a Plymouthian, but it's a great place to live,' says Jeremy Gould. 'I walk to work, I walk to the theatre – the best provincial theatre in the country – and I struggle to think of a British city with better views.' Plymouth Hoe, a parkland of green open space overlooking the sea, is just a few minutes' walk from the centre.

## What can you buy?

Some of the most popular areas ring the city centre: Peverell, for example, or the little streets of Victorian terraces that line North Hill (handy for the university). Further north, leafy Mannamead and Hartley are naval officer territories and, according to Jeremy Gould, offer some of the finest suburban architecture in the country. Older, conservation-area properties can be found in Stonehouse (a pocket of Georgian townhouses, close to the water) or on the Hoe (tall Italianate terraces in fancy stucco, many Grade II-listed). To the east and west of the city, there are some grim post-war estates alongside military rows of rather dreary suburban housing, though Stoke Village, an up-market residential area between Devonport and the city, is

particularly strong on Regency villas and semi-detached Victorian Gothic.

## Building from scratch

With planners muttering about creating a city of 'taller buildings', of outstanding landmark architecture, it ought to be easy. But on a domestic scale, contemporary houses are thin on the ground, mainly because anyone with the cash to spend on grand designing tends to head out of the city (one result being Westlake Brake, at Heybrook Bay, a rammed-earth house by architect David Sheppard). In Plymouth proper, look out for houses that need updating or improving (a four-bedroom former pub with an unconverted basement, for example); and keep an eye on local auctions for plots and projects. →

## Famous Plymouth People

**Well-known Janners**, as the locals call themselves, include Elizabethan mariner **Sir Francis Drake** (the city's former mayor was born in nearby Tavistock), explorer **Robert Falcon Scott** (of the Antarctic) and the artist **Sir Joshua Reynolds**. **George Passmore** (one half of artists Gilbert and George) was born here, and the late **Beryl Cook**, whose comic paintings were all about Plymouth life, spent much of her life in a house on the Hoe. Others include Olympic diver **Tom Daley**, dancer **Wayne Sleep** and, er, **Gus Honeybun** – the bunny-hopping TV puppet who amused a generation of juvenile Janners from 1962 to 1992.

## 'Our townhouse had no merit, but we loved its location'

**Dr Mary Embleton**, a GP, and Jo Jo (a photographer who uses no surname) bought their three-storey Seventies townhouse in 2001. A post-war infill, probably built on a bombsite, it had, says Mary, 'no architectural merit'. But they loved its location on a medieval back street of the Barbican and faced a dilemma when they started to outgrow it (their son, Milo, is six). 'We wanted to stay,' says Mary, 'but the Barbican doesn't really do large houses.' The solution? To

fill in an under-used, double-height balcony space to create two extra rooms. Robert Bedner, of Research Plus Design, designed the neat, two-storey infill, which has provided a first-floor sun room, with bedroom above, within a £43,000 budget. Clad in Siberian larch joinery, it's cantilevered, referencing the jettied upper storeys of the district's Elizabethan buildings, and has just won an Alan King Award for technical excellence in construction.

