

Turning Liverpool into the Sydney of the United Kingdom



An interview with internationally renowned property developer Greg Malouf (Romal Capital)

www.romalcapital.co.uk

Greg Malouf is a property developer with over three decades of real estate experience in Australia. He owned one of the most successful real estate & development businesses in Australia, and after moving to Liverpool in 2015, Greg founded Romal Capital along with local successful developer Sam Rowlands. Romal Capital is dedicated not just to building world class residential properties in Liverpool, but the continued management of them as well. A vital ingredient to a successful development.

Malouf & Rowlands are particularly passionate about the beauty of properties & how they fit within the surrounding landscape. "There is nothing more enjoyable for a developer than to be located near water or within an historic Docklands region, and Liverpool has an abundance," Malouf says. It is why Romal Capital is currently working with The Peel Group to connect Liverpool's historic docklands with its city centre. In fact, it represents an extension of the city centre within a 15 minute walk. We spoke to Greg to find out more about his current projects.

What was the thought process behind swapping Australia for Liverpool?

My former partner is a Scouser. In 2001, when I first came to Liverpool from Australia, I watched the first ramps being constructed within the magnificent Liverpool One Shopping Complex. Each time I revisited, I saw the city centre grow. A beautiful, historic and once enormously wealthy city, as evidenced by its historic buildings, yet a city holding itself back from its true potential, was so exciting for me personally. I think it was always there in my mind from early 2000 to do something here. I still find it to be one of the most exciting cities in the UK and love the way the city is wrapped around water. It's got the branding, it's got the vibrancy, the music, and it's got the water – very much like Sydney back home. It was a natural fit, and it still is.

Why is water such an integral aspect for your developments?

In Sydney, we're completely surrounded by water. I know the value of water and its attraction to overseas and local investors. Before I invest and start any development, I think, 'what will our investors [the buyers] like from the end product?' On that question, we model three criteria for determining where to

build: One is obviously water; is there water close or are we on the water? Secondly, will our investors benefit from capital gain? And three, how strong will the rental return be? If two of these three criteria are evident and bullish, we will put a spade in the ground. Often you don't get all three, but Liverpool Waters ticks all boxes. People from our now completed phase one development are already achieving capital gain; they're already getting a good, strong rental, and they are located adjacent to the water.

What are the similarities and differences between the two property development housing markets, Australia and Liverpool?

The truth of the matter is that there are no differences. Good development is about questioning the three criteria mentioned above, as well as one more very important factor, which is: who will manage my property? In other words, once the purchase completes, who will manage the block, the maintenance, the grounds, and any statutory obligations? This factor is normally neglected until it is too late and the property is purchased or secured by way of a non-refundable deposit. Often this is left to the wind because so few developers know how to build a truly functional neighbourhood with the necessary infrastructure in administration

to protect and keep safe people's most valued investments.

Your first development in Liverpool, Quay Central, has focused on building neighbourhoods rather than just building properties. What led to this philosophy and will it be a recurring theme for Romal Capital's work?

I started at the very bottom of the chain and worked my way up to run and own one of the strongest real estate businesses in Australia. I built high-rise buildings with some of the best architects in the world. So I understand a lot of things about real estate and I understand what people want.

We are dealing with people's assets. This is the most important investment they'll ever make in their life as a general rule, and so we've got to be very mindful and considerate of people. In order to do that, property development is about building a neighbourhood, and that means looking after people *after* they buy their property. Are you available for the leasing? Are the prices they are paying competitive? Are the blocks being managed? Are the statutory payments on lifts and insurances all up to date? Can we inform people and keep them informed?

“EVERYTHING IS BEING TAILORED FOR LIFESTYLE. EVERYTHING IS BEING TAILORED FOR PEOPLE TO TRULY LIVE, WORK AND PLAY.”

Have we got people downstairs that can run upstairs and have a look at a simple repair that needs to be done? These are the things that Romal does.

I integrate these very important components, so that people feel safe. In a way we're offering a sort of concierge service, without people having to pay exorbitant dollars to have that. We try to be highly competitive; we want to build a neighbourhood and we want to deliver the service to people for years to come.

You are also involved in the Liverpool Waters regeneration. Can you tell us more about this project and what it means for the historic docklands area?

I remember at the gym one day, there was an old timer in there. 'I heard you're building down on the docks,' he said, 'in the 60's that was one of the most vibrant places on Earth; it was so lively and there was so much happening.' But now you look at it and it's a bit like the London docklands many years ago, just big vacant lands of potential. I got a sense from the local community of how vibrant it was and I thought that people really do need to live on and enjoy the docklands.

In 2006, Peel Holdings started a master plan to regenerate the docklands. The central docks were very exciting for me because I saw these beautiful canals that would run straight through the middle of it. Peel Holdings are trying to regenerate the docklands to create a vibrant, inner-city waterfront parkland. The docklands were completely neglected but they're coming to life now.



The development has begun and there's a lot of keen interest. People will be able to get longboat cruises to the Albert Dock, and get coffee or do their shopping. Then they can catch a longboat, walk or cycle home. Everything is being tailored for lifestyle. Everything is being tailored for people to truly live, work and play.

You have recently completed the initial Park Central development. What can you tell us about the next phase for the Liverpool Waters scheme?

There are a number of phases coming. Work has started on the new cruise line terminal to the Isle of Man which will facilitate more than 110 ships per annum, accommodating up to 100,000 passengers per year. Also, the home of the new Isle of Man ferry terminal is currently under construction. Once it is complete, passengers will be able to drive their cars onto the big FastCat ferry boats and travel by sea to the Isle of Man for a weekend of relaxation or fun. We must remember that Liverpool is the birthplace of the UK's first passenger shipping line, a rich and unsurpassed maritime history. Our investors are a part of that now.

There are a number of schemes coming forward on Liverpool Waters. Romal are an integral part



of that programme, and we're looking to put a number of properties into the docklands. We've got a good relationship with Peel and have done a lot of work together over the past four years.

Why is now a good time to invest in the city?

I think it's always been a good time to invest in Liverpool but I think it's a *really* good time to invest in the UK. As a foreigner, I've watched the UK market and exchange rates for many, many years. At the moment with Brexit, the currency is weaker compared to international standards so it is going to attract a lot of money from overseas. English people are also very clever, they know where to invest, and Liverpool is one of those key areas.

In addition, there is a ready-made market here. There are locals who grew up on the docks and want to be here. There are a lot of people coming from London. As far as the overseas market goes, there is a real vibrancy about the city – from the proud heritage of The Beatles to the international appeal of Liverpool Football Club.

Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

Although we have sold out of everything to date, there are more things to come. We will keep people informed of everything that is happening on the docklands and Liverpool via our website in order for them to make an informed decision, and I'm sure they won't regret it.

