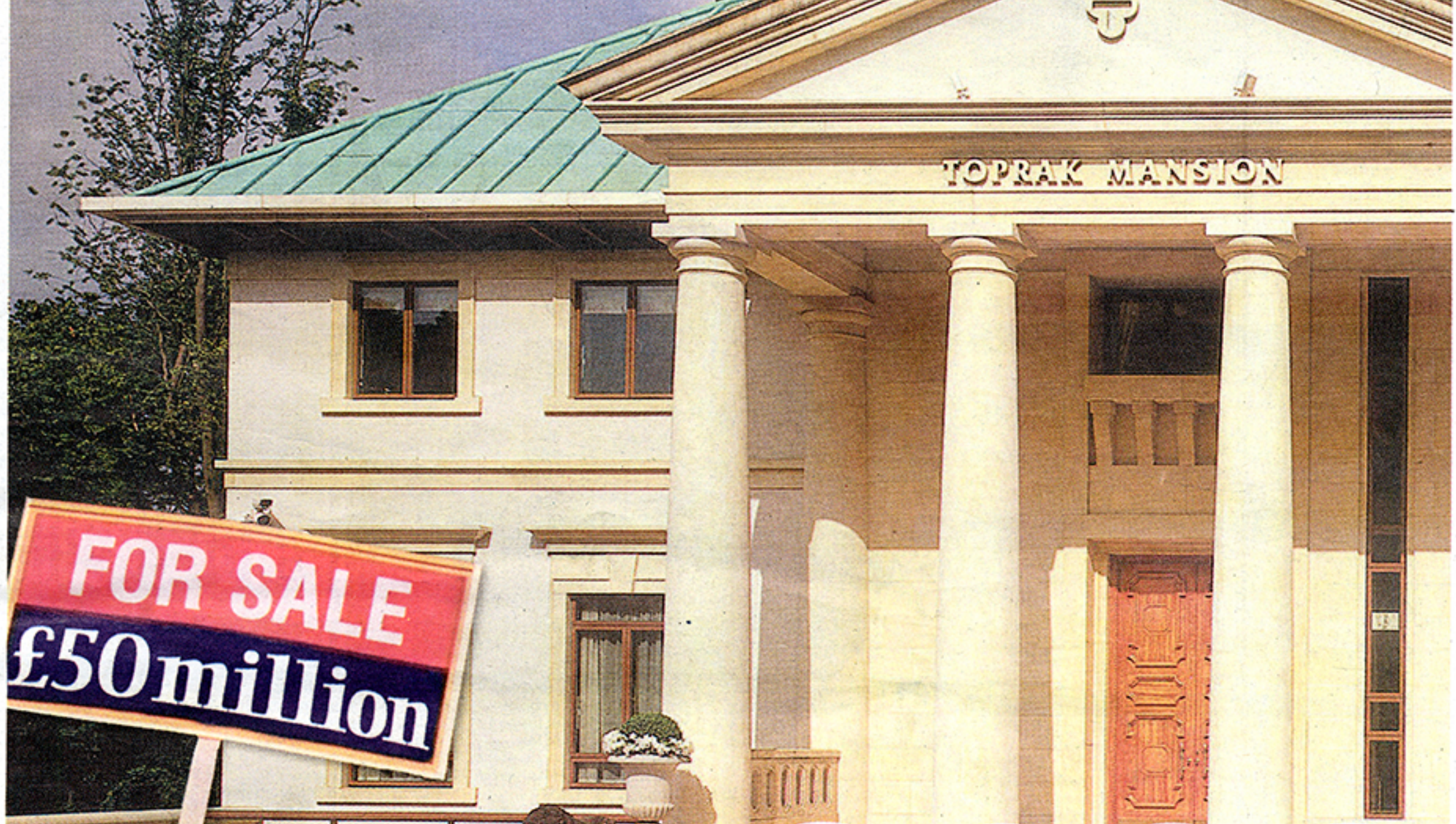


# London property



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## London property

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# Do your finances a power of good

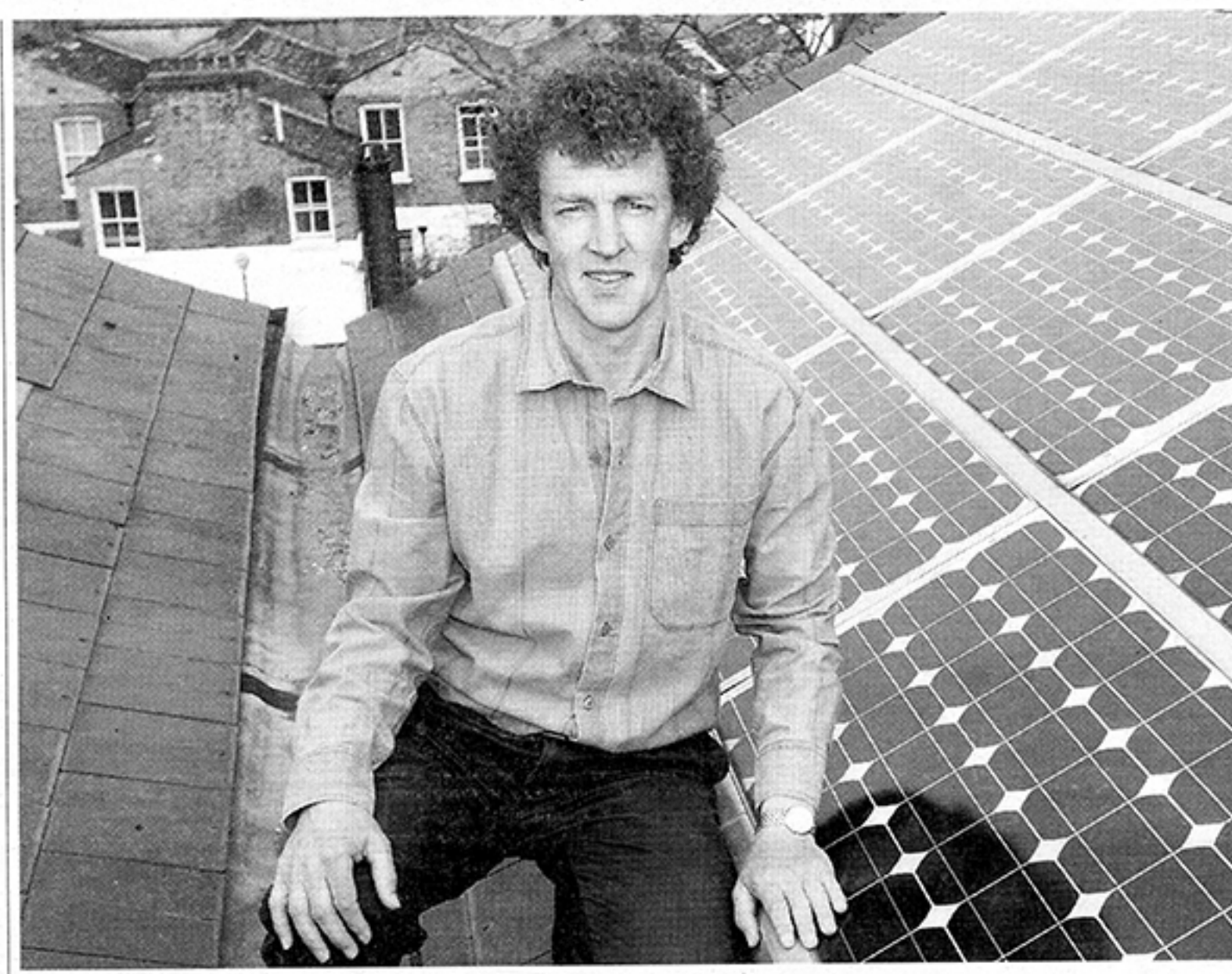
**GREENPIECE**  
WITH ENERGY BILLS SOARING, SOLAR PANELS ARE GENERATING LOTS OF INTEREST, WRITES SARAH LONSDALE

In no other area of our lives are we reduced to the status of helpless consumer quite so much as in the area of energy. If we don't like spending too much on clothes, we can patch up old ones or buy 50p jumpers at charity shops. We could even knit or make our own like our mothers and grandmothers. If food bills are too high, we can swap the foie gras and champagne for potatoes and cider. We could even grow our own.

But our energy bills keep rising remorselessly and there is apparently nothing we can do about it. We can tinker at the edges by turning off the television standby and insulating the loft. But actually being able to generate our own heat and light is becoming an ever-urgent goal for homeowners. It doesn't help when TV programmes about self-sufficiency show how someone on a four-acre farm with a stream running across the land can generate their own hydro-electricity. In urban homes on small plots, we're sitting ducks, aren't we? We all know the *Good Life* was fantasy.

Actually, it's fantasy no longer, as increasing numbers of people are turning to micro-generation, using wind, solar or wood power, finding it can be done as easily in the town as the country. Simon Roberts lives in Stockwell, south London, in a four-storey Victorian house with a smallish garden. He bought an electric Peugeot, with its own on-street charging point, in 1999 in an attempt to reduce traffic pollution. "I then realised that all I was doing was shifting my carbon emissions from the car to the power station that was producing the electricity," says Roberts, an industrial physicist working for engineering firm Arup.

"I did buy shares in a wind farm in an attempt to offset the emissions, but when the roof needed repairs done to it two years ago, I thought it would be crazy not to install photovoltaic (PV) tiles, so our home could generate its own electricity." Although his slate valley roof is V-shaped and is invisible from the street, he found the local authority was frustratingly cautious when he approached officials with his plans. "I hope that as more people start installing PV systems, council planning officers will be more sympathetic," he says. Roberts obtained a



Seen the light: Simon Roberts obtained a government grant when he installed solar panels on the roof of his home in Stockwell

government grant through the Energy Savings Trust to cover just under half the installation costs of £6,536. Grants are available for a variety of micro-generation schemes under the Department of Trade and Industry's Low Carbon Buildings Programme. Schemes eligible for grants include PV roofs, roof-top wind turbines, solar-heated hot water,

### HOT TIPS

Simon Roberts' tile installer was Cholwell Energy Systems: www.cholwell.org.uk. As well as using the panels to generate electricity for his home, Simon also uses the system to power his electric Peugeot via an on-street charging point, pictured.

If you generate your own electricity you still have to be energy efficient. There is no point spending £10,000 on solar panels if you're blowing away every watt you make in incandescent (tungsten) light bulbs, halogen spotlights and inefficient appliances.



For details of government grants for micro-generation, go to the Energy Saving's Trust's website: www.est.org.uk Windsave: www.windsave.com; PV tile maker Solar Century: www.solarcentury.co.uk

ground source heat pumps and combined heat and power (CHP) boiler systems. With the PV tiles now in their second year, the electricity they generate covers around two thirds of Roberts' car use, saving nearly 330kg of carbon every year.

"At the moment, taking start-up costs into account, the amount of money I have saved isn't enormous," says Roberts. "But in the not too distant future, with fuel costs rising, the savings will be bigger. For me it wasn't so much about the money, it was about me as an individual taking the threat of climate change seriously and doing something about it."

He says the only major problem has been bird droppings covering up the tiles, but the problem was resolved when he moved the aerial the birds used to perch on. Another man who generates some of his own power is Tom Morton, who from his inter-war semi just outside Oxford generates both solar heating from roof panels and water heating from his wood-burning stove, which is plumbed into his hot water tank.

"We had the system installed about 18 months ago, to try and reduce the amount of fossil fuels we use," says Morton who lives with his wife and two children in the village of Yarnton. Again, Morton, who is managing director of the environmental charity Climate Care, made use of government grants, reducing the cost of installing his solar

water heater from £2,700 to £2,000. He says that, when wind turbine technology becomes more widely available he will invest in one for his roof. "Although the solar panels give us free hot water between April and September, and the wood burner tops it up during winter, we still use more fossil fuels than I would like," he says.

Rooftop wind turbines are currently only widely available in a few pilot areas, says David Gordon, of Windsave, whose Glasgow-based firm makes the eight-foot-tall turbines. "We estimate that, over the year, our turbines will generate one kilowatt - enough electricity to power an average household's television, DVD player, fridge and several light-bulbs. In addition, any home or business generating more than half a kilowatt of its own electricity will earn £60 a year through a government scheme to encourage the growth of small-scale renewable technologies."

The wind turbine will cost £1,500 fully installed, reduced to £1,000 through the DTI grant scheme. Micro-generation is no longer a gimmick for the extreme greens. Tory leader David Cameron is even planning to install wind turbines on the roof of his London home. And, with a recent YouGov survey revealing that 77 per cent of adults now worry about not being able to pay their fuel bills in the future, turbines and solar panels seem certain to become a common sight across the capital.

### WHY LONDON?

Architect Matteo Cainer was born in Canada to Italian parents and grew up in cities throughout the world. He was deputy director of the Venice Architecture Biennale and is organising an exhibition for the London Architecture Biennale from June 16: World in One City - a sketch for London.

I moved to London from New York last September because I was looking for another city that has that kind of energy. London had just won the Olympic bid and you could feel the London buzz everywhere, especially within the architectural world where London has been the focus of attention for quite some time.

What I like best about London is that you can have a great intellectual life. There's always something happening here. If you stand in Piccadilly, there are dozens of talks and lectures to go to, all within walking distance, every day, at the Architectural Association, the Tate or Tate Modern.

Everything is so inter-related but varied, it's like a big kaleidoscope.

London is definitely the focal point for Europe. I like the fact that people are on the move here, whether they are heading to Milan for the furniture fair or to Paris for the weekend. People go to New York and stay there, it is not so much a starting point as a final destination, whereas people treat London as point to hop off to other parts of Europe and the US.

In London I like the way ethnic communities live in close proximity to one another and are not so ghettoised. However, these groups seem to create a hierarchy within themselves. It's like they pick up on the British class system.

London is very money driven and everyone has a schedule they stick to. It's not so spur of the moment as in New York or Italy. And people don't like you asking your friend to a dinner party in case he or she doesn't mix.

In other parts of the world they don't care who turns up. But in London, for my taste, people can be a bit too correct.

● Matteo Cainer was talking to Catherine Moye.

