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THE film *Downton Abbey: The Grand Finale* has, if nothing else, rekindled our love of huge country houses. Who can fail to be impressed by those rolling lawns, the high-ceilinged library and the magnificent staircase?

And while a house like *Downton* is far beyond the budgets of most, there is a way to get a taste of life as a landed aristocrat: buying an apartment in a country house conversion.



Attractive: Eastbourne, East Sussex. Inset, Melinda Hughes and Christopher Gould

‘More of these properties are coming on the market nowadays,’ says James Greenwood of Stacks Property Search. ‘Enormous houses are expensive to heat and maintain – and difficult to sell – so converting them makes sense.’

Greenwood advises buyers to take extra care over the sales details. Be clear about the terms of the leasehold agreement. Who pays for the upkeep of the grounds and the public areas?

What about the fabric of the building – what if the roof needs attention and you have the ground floor apartment? Do you have a private area in the garden?

But many are perfectly happy living the Downton life at a fraction of the price. Tim Hunt, a retired BT boss, has lived with his wife at Beech House in Brough Hall, Richmond, North Yorkshire, for five ‘wonderful’ years. ‘I have wanted to live in a castle since childhood, so when I saw this place I had to buy it,’ says Tim, 60, who has the two-bedroom apartment on the market for £225,000.