



From left: Laureate in Albert Park; Airlie Bank in South Yarra; and Garden House in Carlton.

Garden city

Horticulture and architecture are joining forces in city apartment developments, reports **Renee Barnes**.

IF INNER-suburban apartments were fashion statements, gardens would be the new trendsetters. They are integral components of several new developments.

"It can best be described as where horticulture meets architecture," says James Tutton, the director of Neometro, which has begun construction of Airlie Bank, a nine-unit South Yarra block that includes a vertical garden.

Vertical gardens are created by encasing walls or external cladding in vines, or installing a hydroponic system

of stacked planters that simulates a natural cliff. Both versions provide environmental and aesthetic qualities.

"The garden creates a natural green exterior for the building, as well as a leafy outlook for the apartments," says Mr Tutton. "It also provides insulation and shade, which has energy-reduction benefits."

The vertical garden is one of many environmentally sustainable design elements of the development; others include rainwater tanks for toilet flushing, and thermal heating and cooling. Airlie Bank will have a six-star rating and apartments are priced from \$1.2 million.

"For buyers, particularly those in the luxury market, this [environmental sustainability] is not negotiable any more," says Mr Tutton.

Buyers' advocate Chris Koren says he will never look at an apartment for

a client unless it has an outdoor space. "It needs to have a balcony, terrace or courtyard, or good access to a communal outdoor space. Otherwise, you might as well be living in your office," he says.

"Apartment living is a way of life now," Mr Koren says.

"I think developers have realised they are selling a lifestyle as well as a house. Gone are the days where people just want to sit in an air-conditioned room where the only saving grace is the view — and sometimes even that is questionable."

THINK GREEN ON TOP

RESEARCHERS at the University of Melbourne are examining how the environment in our cities can be improved by growing gardens on top of buildings.

Growing plants on top of new office buildings is mandated in several cities in Europe, North America and Japan, but Australia has few examples of such high-rise horticulture and little understanding of their benefits and possibilities.

Horticulture lecturer Dr Nick Williams blames Australia's climate. "Green roof plants used overseas are typically from arid, mountainous or coastal environments. In Australia, plants need to be robust, have good drought tolerance, like exposure to

full sun and [be easy] to maintain."

Green roofs, defined as roofs that support planted vegetation, have several demonstrable benefits, including reduced runoff of rain water, aesthetically pleasing cityscapes, longer roof life, significantly reduced building energy use and a reduction of the urban heat-island effect.

"It's about people's quality of life," Dr Williams says. "As our cities become higher density, this is something that will become more prevalent."

The research will be used to provide information to architects, landscape designers and public policymakers.

RENEE BARNES

Piccolo Development's Garden House, on Rathdowne Street, Carlton, is another new complex that has focused its marketing on its garden. Paul Hecker, of Hecker Phelan & Guthrie, the project's interior designer, says the developer wanted the building to be in keeping with the adjacent Carlton Gardens.

"We all have a requirement for an oasis, a place to get in touch with nature," he says. "That was vital for this project."

A narrow courtyard provides access to greenery from the main bedroom and ensuite, and is extended into the

apartments through clever design.

The \$50 million project of 46 apartments and three terraces will begin construction next year.

Another development capitalising on its garden appeal is Mirvac's new \$90 million Laureate project opposite the Gasworks Arts Park in Albert Park.

Rick Eckersley, of Eckersley Garden Architecture, the landscape designer on the project, says apartment and townhouse buyers are looking for outdoor spaces that "stimulate the senses through touch, sight and smell".

The development includes three-bedroom residences starting from \$1.35 million through to five-bedroom properties starting at \$3 million. The three and four-storey townhouses include a mix of private courtyards, rooftop terraces and large outdoor decks. The overall development is also focused on garden habitat, with a central quadrangle that includes cantilever arbours wrapped in vines and a higher canopy of established trees.

"It is all about creating form and mood," Mr Eckersley says. "It is

about getting dappled sunlight and encouraging birds and bees."

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