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apartment living

# Life in the clouds

..... High-rises are back in fashion but more astute buyers are now demanding well-designed space, reports Jacinta Le Plastrier Aboukhater

PERCEPTIONS of what living in an apartment means — for the lifestyle and the status — have been turned on their head in recent years. Social changes and lifestyle pressures have seen a boom in the development of new-styled apartments in our capital cities. And along with the growth has come the need to create affordable housing — capturing the first-home budgets of singles and young couples in inner-city Melbourne, for example, with developments such as the Era apartments in Richmond's Cremorne enclave, designed by Plus Architecture.

Even though many apartments in this \$55 million-plus development are mid-range in price, the expectations among buyers has altered significantly, says Plus Architecture director Ian Briggs.

The young professional consumers taking an interest in the development have expectations of a level of design and finish that is part of an emerging trend for more glamorous apartment living.

"It's now more like having houses in the sky, rather than living in traditional apartments," Briggs says.

He says one shift in design ideas is driven by an emerging owner-occupier-investor market. Rather than have a two-bedroom apartment with one big main bedroom and a small second bedroom, firms such as Plus are creating units with two equally sized bedrooms, with two bathrooms.

"Many of Era's buyers are young single professionals who want to buy a



CLOCKWISE from left: The Luxe, in St Kilda, is built for a mixed-used lifestyle; its internal courtyard allows the building to "breathe"; and a studio apartment at a Neometro development in South Yarra.

first property but intend to rent out the second bedroom," Briggs says. "And no one wants to play second-fiddle any more, so the bedrooms need to be equal in attractiveness, rather than a large master with a second bedroom."

The challenge is creating "apartments that are small enough to be affordable but with facilities to serve two (or more) people", he says.

These first-property developments aren't the only drivers of new-style apartment buildings. Jeff Provans, director of design, construction and development company Neometro, says as much as 10 years ago the company noticed a shift in demand for environmentally sensitive structures "that breathe", after creating mixed-use buildings with residential space plus offices and cafes, with the Luxe development and its internal courtyard at Inkerman Street, St Kilda, and later, at Wilson Street, South Yarra. ➤

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► “The inner courtyard was basically essential to the needs of the building,” Provans says. “Regardless of where you’re living, you need a space that allows natural ventilation, a place where people can sit and relax, rather than just a token balcony.”

His recently completed project at 91 Wellington Street, St Kilda, incorporates a northern aspect and cross-ventilation, solar hot water and extra thermal and acoustic insulation. But the project also responds to the desire of many inner-city professionals to work from home without feeling isolated. Thus Wellington Street incorporates studios and a communal open area “designed to invoke interaction”, Provans says.

“So you have people living in the development, or living and working there.” An on-site cafe is another hub. People are adapting to a smaller



living space to be able to afford an inner-city location, but they are demanding a well-designed space. “People want a space they can enjoy, and one they are not a slave to,” he says. “It’s about quality rather than size.”

However, size is fundamental at the premium

end of the market, where apartments throughout a project are built on the scale of penthouses and carry prices in the Toorak mansion range.

Plus’ Briggs says: “It’s like being a long-term resident in an exclusive hotel, getting back to the 1920s and the lifestyle attached with The Ritz

ABOVE from left: Developers boast of “environmentally sensitive” projects such as 91 Wellington Street, St Kilda, and the Era apartments in Richmond.



— an overall expectation that you enter a grand foyer with friends and are greeted by a concierge who knows your name and has already booked your tickets for the opera.”

That description fits the just-launched 150 Clarendon Street project in East Melbourne on the old Mercy Hospital site at the edge of Fitzroy Gardens. Designed by Bates Smart, the average price in this development — with demolition now under way — is \$4 million. The premier penthouse was recently valued at \$15 million, almost double the \$8.3 million quoted for the yet-to-be-built, top-of-the-range penthouse at St Kilda Road’s Lucient.

The Clarendon Street complex comprises 87 apartments in an “unprecedented scale”, says

Bates Smart associate Carolyn White.

An average apartment is 280 square metres, plus terraces of 20 square metres. On the 11th floor will be three apartments at about 450 square metres each plus 250-square-metre terraces.

The penthouse features five separate living areas, billiard room, three bedrooms and guest quarters, covering about 840 square metres, plus a rooftop garden of about 690 square metres.

Expect such interior touches as lofty ceilings, bedrooms designed for king-size beds, Wilton woven carpets, solid timber floors and a choice of two colour palettes in kitchens and bathrooms, based on Calacatta or Amadora marble. Kitchens will have a mix of these natural stones.

The demand for sensational views, location ►



## The lure of apartments

- Potentially affordable inner-city living.
- Hotel-like services and security, especially for those who travel extensively.
- Low maintenance.
- Proximity to shops and other amenities.
- Communal aspects along with individual spaces.
- Combined working and living spaces that can suit part-time, contract work or at-home businesses.
- Designers are creating smart, space-effective yet well-finished spaces using a wide range of materials and colours that remain open to individual modifications.

ABOVE from left: The display mock-up of a penthouse at the 150 Clarendon Street project; an artist’s impression of the Lucient, being built on St Kilda Road.