

Welcome to the vertical village

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GONE are the days when a pool or gym would suffice in a new apartment building.

Now nightclubs, bars, shared dining facilities, poker rooms and yoga are being included to create "vertical villages" and provide communal spaces for residents.

As a result, modern apartment blocks are becoming more like pseudo hotels.

The large array of lifestyle services on offer caters for an increasingly sophisticated set of high-rise dwellers wanting spaces and facilities not found in older buildings.

Developer Hamton's new Fifty Albert building near Albert Park Lake offers residents a health club, day spa, on-site yoga, indoor garden retreat and concierge service at ground level.

On the top floor are a sun deck, hot tubs, fully equipped barbecue, kitchens, dining, lounge, cinema and poker rooms — all shared.

Another architecturally striking building about to begin construction in A'Beckett Street called MY80 will feature a private rooftop nightclub-bar and lounge on the 53rd floor.

As well as a pool, residents get a business centre, cinema and barbecue terrace.

The move to add lifestyle features is not just a marketing gimmick, leading architects say.

"What's interesting about these buildings is that there's a real attempt to construct a vertical community," said Fifty Albert's designer Callum Fraser from Elenberg Fraser architects.

Research for Fifty Albert showed people were less interested in a gym or pool and their associated costs and more focused on services and "break-out" areas, Mr Fraser said.

"You have a mixture of different kinds of spaces in the building that allow people to come together whether that's a gym, spa or communal dining facilities," he said.

In Fifty Albert that focus even extends to Friday night drinks with the building's manager given a bar stipend to provide beverages for residents in the lobby, Mr



New apartment blocks, such as Fifty Albert as seen in an artist's impression, are emphasising communal space.

Fraser said. "That's part of the real service side of a building."

The drive for more facilities was also the result of apartments being squeezed by construction and land costs, said architect Tom Jordan from Hayball, the firm behind MY80.

The average entry-level one-bedroom apartment in Melbourne has shrunk nearly 8 per cent over the past three years, according to Oliver Hume Real Estate Group.

Two-bedroom apartments were about 19 per cent smaller.

But diminished size does not necessarily equate to bad design, Mr Jordan said.

"It's really a matter of ensuring every last square metre is exploited to the full, is maximised from a design point of view," he said.

A building needs to provide design alternatives. While a large dinner party in a regular apartment was impossible, MY80

residents could "book a large dining room with kitchen and roof terrace and have dinner for 15 people or so," he said.

And it has to fit within its surrounds. "It's important that whatever's offered in the building is complementary to what's available next door."

The trend towards vertical villages was also being driven by a recent surge in foreign developers, both architects said.

"They come from a highly urbanised culture. So they understand this principal of the vertical community," Mr Fraser said.

"What they're bringing with them is a different kind of sensibility and while the apartments are structured to be affordable, the communal spaces fulfil the role of the balance in life."

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