

INNOVATION DENISE GADD

INTERNATIONALLY renowned French designer, Philippe Starck, is synonymous with weird and wonderful gadgets. Gadgets, believe it or not, such as a designer fly swat that takes swatting insects to creative new heights.

The Starck name is also synonymous with the whimsical spider-like Salif lemon juicer, clocks, stylish kettles, state-of-the-art vegetable strainers, witty cheese graters, funky lamps, and even the ubiquitous loo brush.

Then there's his famous Bubble Club chair and cutting-edge bathroom appliances that grace contemporary spaces the world over, including the Prince of Wales Hotel in St Kilda.

Not to mention the hip hotels, night clubs, shops, bars and eateries with Starck's indelible designer stamp — the Mondrian in Los Angeles, the Felix restaurant in Hong Kong's prestigious Peninsula Hotel, the Royalton and Paramount in New York and London's Sanderson Hotel.

But Starck hasn't rested on his creative laurels and three years ago formed, with Manhattan loft developer, John Hitchcox, the yoo company.

Together they scour the world for interesting inner-city buildings to convert into flexible living spaces similar to the loft apartments in Manhattan's TriBeCa (Triangle below Canal), home to the hip, rich and famous including the late John Kennedy Junior and his wife, Carolyn, who were killed in a plane crash in June 1999.

Australian Starckophiles can now rejoice

in the news, hot from the Melbourne Fashion Festival program launch last Thursday, that the creative entrepreneur is bringing his interior design talents to Australia for the first time.

Starck has joined forces with Andrew Rettig's R. Corporation — developer of the Metropol complex in St Kilda — to create R. yoo.

Rettig and Starck's first joint venture, along with Red C and Babcock & Brown, is the Tribeca development at the former Victoria Brewery site in East Melbourne.

Located on the corner of Victoria Parade and Powlett and Albert Streets, the historic 150-year-old buildings will be transformed into a designer urban village comprising 427 apartments, a gourmet supermarket and cafe, business centre, gym, pool and health centre. Several interior designers will work on the eight restored buildings.

Apartment prices are expected to range from \$250,000 to \$1 million.

Starck's specific involvement in the project is under wraps at this stage but all will be revealed when he appears as a special guest at Melbourne Fashion Week in March.

Yoo's philosophy is to create more flexible living for city dwellers.

The residential development of a building starts with large open spaces, then Starck designs three basic layouts for each one. Purchasers are offered four of his interior design concepts: the Classic; Minimal; Culture and Nature. They can either choose one of these options or create their own individual spaces.



The totally Starck look

Designer Philippe Starck is planning his first Australian residential venture.