



STARCK RAVING

PHILIPPE STARCK, THE MAN WHO BROUGHT DESIGN TO THE MASSES, HAS COLLABORATED IN THE AMBITIOUS REDEVELOPMENT OF MELBOURNE'S VICTORIA BREWERY, BRINGING TO THE PROJECT HIS THEORIES OF CULTURAL DEFINITION AND APARTMENT DESIGN. >

PHILIPPE STARCK IS A PHENOMENON – more popstar than designer, more actionman than academic. The enthusiastic Frenchman, who is arguably solely responsible for bringing high design to the mass market, now resides in Venice with his American wife and children, Ara, Oa and the soon to arrive K. The designer of over 2000 products and approximately 6000 projects, Starck was in town to speak at the *Melbourne Fashion Festival* and launch his new apartment project in East Melbourne and meet some kangaroos.

Tribeca, East Melbourne, is the first project from *R. yoo* – the collaboration of Starck's property development company, *yoo*, and *R Corporation* headed by Melbourne based developer Andrew Rettig. The project is a highly ambitious \$250 million occupation of the historic *Victoria Brewery*.

Starck's role is strangely ambiguous. He is part of a huge project team that includes architects Denton Corker Marshall and Bruce Henderson, heritage architect Allom Lovell and interior designers Rice + Skinner, Hassell, Hecker Phelan and SJB Interior Design. Each designer will be teamed with an architect to create a collection of distinctive buildings and spaces. With this sort of firepower, project meetings will become interesting sport.

MARTYN HOOK went along to enjoy the show.

STARCK I am not a designer, I am not an architect, I am not interested in the final product, I am interested in what are the real problems of people now. I'll always try to find a solution. When John [fellow director of *yoo*] said, 'Let's make an apartment' I said, 'Yes, but why?' because there is a problem if you want to buy an apartment. If you are rich, you can rent an interior designer and you will have a

beautiful apartment and in the end you will spend your life in the brain of your interior designer. I am an interior designer and I can tell you to live in my brain is, I think, not a good idea. I don't believe in interior design in residential. I think it's unhealthy. I never do interior residential work. The only residential work I have made is for the President of the French Republic.

I don't like architecture. I think where architecture is just to show the talent of the architect it's not very good to live in. It's so complicated. It's a masterpiece of architecture but how can you live in it? In my experience, I have 15 houses around the world, and for me I need to have the most simple volume, with a very serene environment, very calm, that allows you create your own space. A good shoe box well done, with good light and good proportion is better than some incredibly designed design.

So if you are not so rich and you don't know, you can be lost, you can make a big mistake. One [person] will have a problem because he will have too much design and the other will be lost because he won't know what is a good or bad [design]. That's why I said perhaps we can help. Me, I don't like apartments but I am a very good specialist – to know what is the meaning of the colour, what is the meaning of the material, of a shape, what are the best materials, what is the best quality, what is the best couture quality of a piece of furniture. I know my job. [We] find the best place or the right building. We work to make a very crude aristocratic floor plan, something very noble with good proportion, good for your life. But, at the end, I refuse to do interior design so I say, 'OK, we can just help'. We find the best products and say everything on the table is good and invite them to choose.

HOOK Would people in Melbourne make the same choice as people in Paris or New York?

STARCK Yes, because there is no more geography. The world has changed. Before there was a world made of countries but now the geography is replaced by the action of cultural tribes. That means the same cultural tribe is in Milan, in Paris, in Melbourne, in New York. And every tribe has his political guy, his designer, his journalist, his singer. Me. I am the designer of a tribe. That's why we speak to our own tribe and it's almost the same tribe everywhere in the world. That does not mean that everything we make is the same because the areas are not the same, the program is not the same, the weather is not the same, the economy is not the same. There is difference only by functional parameter but the spirit of the soul is the same. We are the same. It's a big change made in the world. And it's because of you, the media. Today people read the same magazine, see the same TV, use the same Internet and people recognise themselves and their tribe.

HOOK There has been discussion in the media about design being used as a commodity. How do you feel if the only reason someone would buy an apartment was because your name was attached to it?

STARCK Oh my God! If somebody buys an apartment just because of my name, it's stupid and I want nothing to do with it. If people want to pay more for a belt with an initial on it or sunglasses with a big name on it [exasperated], I hope it's not my tribe. If people are stupid enough to buy a product for the name ... OK, I'm not a policeman, if they can recognise the right product – perfect.

For more information on *tribeca east melbourne* www.tribecaapartments.com.au