

# Show and sell

Star power and big bucks in the battle of the display suites. Pages 4-5



Jodhi Meares and developer Andrew Rettig in the Clara display suite.

PICTURE: JUSTIN McMANUS

## Tempting suites to make you feel right at home

Miele dishwashers, stone benchtops and integrated appliances are fairly standard display suite fare, but open tubs of ice-cream?

**Kate Robertson reports.**

**T**HE display suite for Clara, a luxury development on the site of the former South Yarra transfer station, is stunning. You see it the

moment you step through the sculptural wrought-iron gates to the grand vertical garden, where an entire courtyard wall has been turned into a living work of art.

The environment is an important selling point of this development,

which will include the creation of a linear park.

But it is the freezer that is the most intriguing. Inside are two tubs of ice-cream. Opened. And ultra-slim former model Jodhi Meares insists they are

hers; in fact, she ate some last night.

Ms Meares has left her personal touches throughout the display suite as part of her role as “lifestyle collaborator”; from messy noticeboards to antiques and knick-knacks. Ms Meares says her task was to help people envisage how they could turn the contemporary spaces into a home.

“How do you integrate your own furniture into something that’s been designed? Can you bring in that funky light you bought in Spain in your 20s?” she asks

“I hope it helps, I have been a designer for 10 years; bikinis are different to interiors but designing is designing.”

Extravagant display suites are the frontline in the battle for the hearts and wallets of potential off-the-plan buyers. The bar has been substantially lifted since the days of the demountable with the stack of photocopied floor plans and stills of the local area.

Now it’s possible to wander around

the bathroom and living areas, take a virtual tour of the entire development and use a push-button screen to see which of the available furnishings are more to your taste. But with millions at stake, developers are increasingly working out ways to help potential home owners visualise not only the physical residence, but the lifestyle that comes with it, hence the creation of Ms Meares’ job title.

There are two other major off-the-plan luxury developments within six kilometres of Clara, and so the CEO of Clara developer R.Corporation, Andrew Rettig, is leaving nothing to chance.

A man who pays attention to detail, he’s on top of everything in the display suite, from a change in the colour of the tea-towels neatly displayed in the kitchen drawers to tackling wayward branches in the garden, secateurs in hand.

Great display suites are vital, he says. “It really helps someone understand what they are buying into.”

At Clara, they will be buying into a staged development of villas and townhouses contained within new parklands. The display includes the kitchen, bathroom and lounge for the villa and townhouses.

The entry is framed by sliding doors that invite the outside in. Architect Graham Burrows, who designed the townhouses, is proud of the cabinets that have been created to encourage residents to hide their technology and enjoy the views.

Up the road, Stockland’s Toorong development is also emphasising the views that will be available when stage one of their \$600-million residential, commercial and retail redevelopment is complete. Visitors can flick through a photo album to see the actual view from each level of the sloping site on the corner of Toorong and Toorak roads.

The entry to Toorong’s display suite is via a bluestone foyer featuring



R.Corporation’s Clara display suite in South Yarra has swimsuit designer and “lifestyle collaborator” Jodhi Meares’ touch, complete with open tubs of ice-cream.

a beautiful modern chandelier, unique leather wall panels and a desk manned by a concierge. It is designed to ensure even the most imagination-challenged individual will be able to get a feel for the finished development.

A “fly-through” video provides computer-generated images of a possible day-in-the-life of a resident, from waking at 8am, to a stroll in the piazza, to a swim in the 25-metre pool, and a steaming cup of coffee in a restaurant.

Other visual aids include a large model of the development that could awaken the child within. It has buttons that light up different sections of the development, including the boutique retail areas, rooftop garden and day spa.

An interactive display invites visitors to choose which level of the development they would like to be on, rotate the building to see it from every angle, and change the finishes in the kitchen and colour schemes in the bathroom, living room and bedrooms.

If the cruciform display of the various levels and floor plans of the development aren't adequate, upstairs is a three-bedroom apartment, minus two bedrooms. The open-plan living area has floor-to-ceiling windows and sliding doors to a balcony large enough to fit an outdoor setting, with a to-scale display of the night-time view of the city skyline as it would be from an apartment on level eight.

Salesperson Ben Khong says potential buyers are getting better at reading plans, but nothing beats a good display suite. “There's an apprehension about buying off the plan. In a display, they can touch and feel and sit down and smell an apartment and see a model.”

Sitting down is actively encouraged at Ashington's Stonington display suite

around the corner in Malvern. The display includes a sofa for people to sit and watch a six-minute video of the development with rendered footage taking in 360-degree views of the residences and grounds, interspersed with short interviews with some of the project's key players, including the architect, interior designer and landscape architect. The computer-generated footage is so lifelike that project sales manager Leone Steele says clients often find it difficult to believe the development is not already complete.

The display is housed in a purpose-built section in the heritage-listed former Stonington Mansion stables. It was months in the making, with a “substantial” budget, and its design followed extensive research into the target market.

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**BEN KHONG, salesperson**

Stonington is a long way from Ms Steele's first forays into selling off-the-plan 25 years ago, when buyers were ushered into portables to look at the plans. The light-filled entry with large leather Ottoman draws visitors to a tabletop map to orientate them to the scale of the entire \$150-million development, which will include 12 single-level residences, 14 apartments, 31 terraces and 19 townhouses, with prices ranging from \$2.1 million to \$3.8 million.

Off to one side is a display of the kitchen/living area of the mansion

garden apartments, complete with vases of flowers and see-through containers overflowing with biscuits and fruit. There is a large model of the apartments complete with people and outdoor settings.

Upstairs there is a model and photos of the Stonington Terraces, and a touch screen that visitors can manipulate to gain an insight into the site's history, take a video tour of the development and view useful information such as the size of the different apartments and a map of the site in relation to amenities such as the tram and train routes, the CBD, Royal Botanic Gardens and Albert Park.

On the other side of the entry is the display of the Somers Avenue residences filled with the scent of freshly cut orchids. The impeccable decor, with filled bookcases, prints on the wall, expensive coffee table books and plush rug before the fireplace, sets the scene for visitors to imagine a quiet night in. Perhaps sharing an ice-cream with Jodhi Meares.

### Five things we like

- Vertical gardens
- Fly-throughs
- Touchscreens
- Interactive models
- Hideaway technology cabinets

### Five things we don't

- Unclear entry signs
- Tiny tiles that would be hell to clean
- Oversized appliances
- Lack of choice for finishings
- Lack of practical information, such as local transport options

## Setting the scene



**"World-class apartment building" – Barton Tower, open weekdays from 10am-5pm, display suite at 90 Collins Street, city.**



**"Sublimely sophisticated" – The Artist, open daily noon to 4pm, 341 Napier Street, Fitzroy.**



**"Six-star energy efficiency" – Bank apartments. Open noon to 6pm daily, 263 City Road, Southbank.**



**"South Melbourne's premium residential address" – Elm, open weekdays by appointment, weekends 1pm-4pm, 18 Dorcas Street, South Melbourne.**



**Stockland's Tooronga display not only recreates the apartment but also the foyer with chandelier and concierge.**



**At Ashington's Stonington display suite, in the heritage-listed former Stonington Mansion stables, potential buyers are invited to sit and relax.**