

# Apartments

CARLI PHILIPS

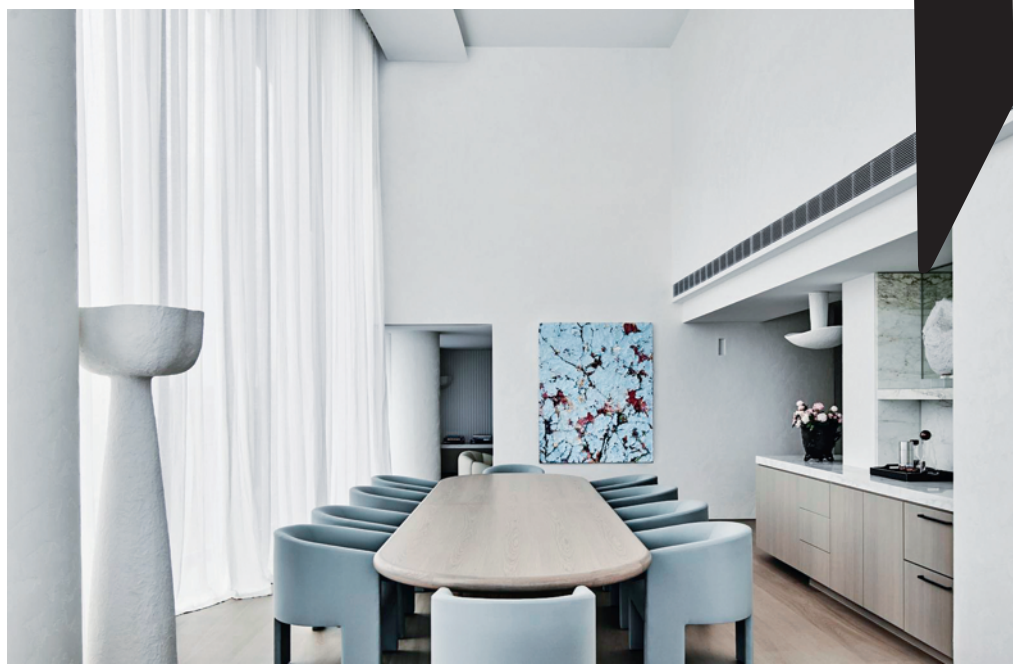


At St Moritz, 14-16 The Esplanade, St Kilda, most of the 120-plus apartments were amalgamated and customised, some reaching a floor size of up to 1000sq m.



PICTURES: TOM BLACHFORD

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# Make it a DOUBLE

*Walls come tumbling down in a movement led by owner-occupiers to join properties for more spacious 'lock-up-and leave' homes*

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With penthouses flying out the door, developers and designers are reporting a sharp uptick in buyers coveting larger apartments.

Not necessarily wanting to compromise on a building or location, many are opting to buy two or more and merging them into one.

"Purchasers sometimes like a certain part of the building or its aspect but need more space than what's allotted to a single apartment, so they combine," explains interior designer David Hicks, who created the schemes and amenity spaces at Gurner Group's uber-luxe Saint Moritz residences on Saint Kilda's beachfront – where a majority of the 120-plus apartments were amalgamated and customised, some reaching a floor size of up to 1000sq m.

Hicks says merging apartments in high-end residential developments is happening with such frequency that many are now being marketed as an option from the outset.

Architects at Elenberg Fraser have designed Melbourne's Aspire residences, a development by ICD Property, so that the kitchens and bathrooms align on each floor.

Hicks, who designed the interiors, says the format offers buyers greater options.

"The planning of these apartments was carefully undertaken to allow the flexibility of potential amalgamation: a quarter-floor combining to become a half-floor, a half-floor combining to become a whole-floor."

The buyer demographic is overwhelmingly owner-occupiers who have decided to scale down from larger homes.

"We are seeing increasing demand for larger apartments across our projects, particularly from customers seeking to downsize their home but upsize to luxury amenity and enjoy a 'lock-up-and leave' lifestyle," says Mirvac CEO of Development Stuart Penklis. "It offers [them] space without the need for the maintenance that large family homes require."

At the company's Bates Smart-designed Eastbourne complex, a triple amalgamation has resulted in a 547sq m "super apartment," while at their Isle Waterfront Newstead project in Queensland, which is still under construction, an amalgamation of some individual apartments has resulted in 377sq m worth of floorspace with five bedrooms and four bathrooms.

Penklis says there has been so much demand for "house-sized apartments" that it has started filtering into key decision-making at the earliest stages of development.

"Amalgamation requires quite a significant amount of redesign and additional approvals which adds to the cost," he says.

"Generally, this means we still have to work within the predefined parameters of services and structure with careful consideration to ensure that there's no negative impact on the neighbouring apartments."



PICTURES: JAMES GEER

While the company's design arm, Mirvac Design, can customise, there are still design and structural parameters. For its sellout Tulloch House, Ascot Green development in Brisbane, Mirvac worked with clients to accommodate a bespoke wine cellar.

Yet the trend to consolidate multiple apartments into one title isn't exclusive to off-the-plan developments.

Earlier this month, the \$19 million Mosman waterfront mansion – owned by outgoing Qantas chief executive Alan Joyce and husband Shane Lloyd – went back on the market even though they had only owned it for just more than 12 months.

The couple instead doubled down on their existing inner-city apartment in The Rocks, purchasing an adjoining second half-level penthouse to the tune of about \$9 million, with a plan to merge, renovate and expand into a six-bedroom whole-floor.

Main Properties directors Danny and Uschi Schwartz spent two years converting three titles on the ground floor of a 1900s Sir John Monash

building in Melbourne's CBD into a 500sq m home for themselves and their young son.

The old manufacturing warehouse had been subdivided into private apartments in the 1990s and the couple bought one on street level in 2014. A few years later they secured another one on the ground floor, engaging architects O'Connor and Houle to gut and connect them.

During renovations, the couple also managed to negotiate the purchase of a single-car garage abutting the adjacent building, making a penetration in the walls to create a generous courtyard adorned with plants, creepers and even a garden fence on the facade.

They also bought some common areas off the body corporate to create an elegant and communal central foyer with handmade lighting and timber-lined maple walls.

"It makes you feel like you're entering a home rather than a brightly lit foyer," says Danny.

While the process was legally difficult, having a house-sized property in the heart of Melbourne's CBD speaks volumes.