

For interview: Stephen Cox, Samantha Reece

Rethinking density – buyers want high-amenity living

Public perception of high-density living has previously been seen as an antithesis to the “Great Australian Dream” of suburban homeownership. But today, urban sprawl, rising property prices and limited land availability have made apartment living a necessity and increasingly desirable through good design.

Australian Apartment Advocacy (AAA) Director Samantha Reece says there’s a need to shift the narrative from ‘high density’ to ‘high-amenity living’, emphasising the importance of lifestyle benefits and increased apartment choice.

According to the AAA’s biennial research, 80 per cent of apartment buyers prioritise amenity and proximity to public transport, shops, cafes and parks.

“What people are looking for is convenience,” Samantha says. “They want to be able to walk down the street and buy some milk. They want everything they need within a four-minute-radius.”

Samantha notes that “people have no issue with high-rise development if it’s interesting and attractive. They have an issue with dull, monotonous buildings in areas with zero amenity.”

Stephen Cox, Director at Sydney architecture and design studio TURNER, says the success of high-amenity living depends not only on the buildings themselves, but also on the surrounding spaces. “It’s not about the architecture anywhere near as much as it’s about the spaces in-between,” says Stephen. “It’s about what’s happening on the street, which parks are nearby and whether there’s good access to public transport.”

He emphasises the importance of considered urban design in creating liveable, vibrant communities, referencing TURNER’s Wicks Park project in Marrickville, which he says illustrates how apartment living can successfully combine with high amenity. The project provides a range of boutique residential, retail and commercial spaces that are embraced by open green areas, with extensive landscaped gardens and close proximity to transport and retail offerings.

“Good quality, high-density living has long been popular in our cities,” he says. “In Sydney, places like Potts Point, Manly and Cronulla, for example, have had high densities for a long time, and they’re popular because they offer an interesting lifestyle. They have a vibrant food and beverage culture, they’re close to transport or a recreational offering like the beach. The best examples of high density offer high amenity.”

Further afield, Stephen says cities like Singapore and Tokyo provide examples of how to successfully incorporate high-amenity living into urban environments. “Singapore does high-density living incredibly well,” Stephen says. “There, architects like WOHA have mastered the concept of blending vertical living with accessible public amenities, parks, bicycle networks and efficient transport options. Singapore’s public transport system, greening of the city, and intentional approach to creating amenity has benefits for both residents and visitors to the city.”

High-amenity living extends beyond public or shared facilities to include considered design features within an apartment. According to Stephen, well-designed apartments prioritise

functionality and incorporate elements like great natural light, ample storage and flexible spaces to enhance a living experience. The AAA's research reflects these sentiments, indicating that 70 per cent of buyers want more storage space and more than 70 per cent use a second bedroom as a study, reflecting a growing demand for multifunctional areas, especially post-COVID.

The research also found that apartment choice is vital, with Samantha noting a need for different types of developments, from boutique style residences to large high amenity, high-density buildings.

"Some people are sensitive to levies and don't want amenities within their building, while others seek a lifestyle with all the amenities, and don't mind the associated costs," she says, highlighting the need for high amenity offerings beyond the building itself.

Both Stephen and Samantha emphasise that high-density living should not be seen as a compromise.

Stephen says "the future of urban living lies in creating dynamic communities that offer high-quality amenities. As cities grow and evolve, embracing this perspective will be essential to creating vibrant, liveable environments that meet the needs of a diverse population."

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About TURNER

TURNER is a multi-award-winning design firm, specialising in Architecture and Urban, Interior and Experiential Design.

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About AAA

Australian Apartment Advocacy represents the 2.5 million Australians who choose an apartment as their home. The agency undertakes research with apartment owners and residents so as to advise government and developers about the needs of the apartment community. The AAA also focuses on educating the general public about the benefits of apartment living and about the need for housing choice across the nation.

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