

Gaggenau
new spaces 10

10,000

cycles

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Homesteading in the City

The Garden House in Melbourne, located between a colonial monument and the vibrant city centre, successfully breaks with Australian traditions

Text: Barbara Blerácz Photography: Floodsalicer



Colonial heritage and modernism
The Garden House, with its 46 apartments and three townhouses, is located in the centre of Melbourne, just a stone's throw from the Royal Exhibition Building of 1880.

Australians don't really like apartments. For over 200 years, the immigrants coming to this sparsely populated continent in the Southern Pacific have dreamed the "quarter-acre dream" — having a freestanding home of their own on about 1,000 square metres of land. Thanks to this house-proud mentality, Australian cities are quite sprawling. Outside the historic city centres, they consist of gigantic anonymous residential areas dominated by the conventions of suburbia. In Sydney, for example, the population density is only about 2,000 inhabitants per square kilometre — in Berlin that figure is 3,870, and in London it's 4,800.

But when the construction project "The Garden House" in the centre of Melbourne went on the market in September 2009, the living units were sold within three weeks on the basis of the plans alone. All of the buyers were locals, despite the fact that the 46 apartments and three townhouses are, unusually for Australia, compactly stacked together on five floors on foundations measuring just 1,750 square metres. How could this be?

This success is due to 710 steps. That's the number of steps the residents must take in order to get from the Garden

House in Rathdowne Street to the historic Princess Theatre in the city centre to see the latest play. It takes only 230 steps to get to the famous coffeehouses and wine bars in the narrow lanes winding between Melbourne's main streets. And 85 steps will take them to the Royal Exhibition Building, which was built in 1880. Apart from the Sydney Opera, this is Australia's only building designated as a UN World Heritage Site. It is situated in Carlton Gardens, a park laid out in traditional British style, right across from the new apartment complex. In other words, the Garden House is located in a green oasis — and within walking distance of the centre of this city of four million.

As one might expect, this luxurious complex offers spectacular views. Thanks to the gigantic panorama windows — a central idea of the Woods Bagot architecture firm — and the layout created by the interior designer Paul Hecker, residents will be able to see the neighbouring Royal Exhibition Building even while they're cooking. Because the architecture considers the stove and the sofa equally important, the dining and living areas flow together seamlessly. Moreover, in many apartments this living space is extended by a terrace or a courtyard garden. Sliding glass doors make it possible to bring the indoors outdoors and vice versa. Residents can cook, live and dine with a view of the park and its jewel of colonial architecture. "The kitchen is the social and communication centre of a home, and the architecture has to reflect that," says Hecker. This unity of cooking and living, indoors and outdoors, is emphasised by the light-coloured tundra-green limestone flooring throughout, which connects all the spaces and functions.

The kitchen appliances in all 49 units of the Garden House come from Gaggenau. "Australians love German industrial design," says Hecker, who heads the 18-person Melbourne-based design company Hecker & Guthrie. "We're crazy about German brands. Everything we've used in the Garden House is absolutely top-quality, and when it comes to kitchens, Gaggenau is simply the best." Hecker believes that the built-in gas cook-



Individuality rules
There are 26 different ground plans for the apartments. The built-in cupboards are of course customised, and the basic appliances in the kitchens always come from Gaggenau.



Indoors is outdoors...

...and vice versa. The apartments in the Garden House open onto a terrace or a garden — each in its own way — to give their owners the feeling of living on their own plot of land.

tops, ovens, microwaves and dishwashers from Gaggenau have helped to sell these luxury apartments. "The residents bought their new homes while they were still in the planning stage. And everyone understands a well-known brand and its claim to quality," explains Hecker, who has been a fan of traditional German cuisine ever since he made a journey through Europe. His memories of meat roulades and "Sauerbraten" are still quite fresh, he says — and of course the kitchen appliances in his own home come from Gaggenau.

The decision to use Gaggenau appliances in all of the living units in the Garden House was important, because the units in this project — which represents a total investment of 60 million Australian dollars (equivalent to 45 million euros) — cost between 500,000 and 4 million AUD. That's a tremendous range. "Customers who have spent 4 million AUD want to experience extreme luxury everywhere they look," says Hecker. "But their neighbours in an apartment that cost 500,000 AUD don't want to live with the feeling that they've missed out on something either." That's why the smaller units have a set of Gaggenau basic equipment consisting of an oven, a cooktop and a dishwasher; the larger ones also have a Combi-steam oven, a microwave and a wok. "This sense of lasting value is the great thing about working with a boutique construction company

that takes the quality factor seriously," says Hecker in praise of Piccolo, the developer of the complex. This Melbourne-based company, which is run by the mother-and-son team Mima and Michael Piccolo, always works on only one project at a time, with loving attention to detail. The family had to fight for a building permit for the Garden House for 18 months because it was to be built next to the city's domed icon — which, among other things, housed the young nation's first parliament in 1901. Mima Piccolo has invested so much emotion in the project that she has decided to move into one of the town houses herself.

The Piccolo project manager Toby Earle and the 140 skilled workers on the job have installed individually crafted cupboards in the variously structured living units. The cupboards run in a long, consistent line through the cooking, dining and living areas. When they're opened, they reveal a series of crockery cupboards, a home bar and a workspace. Not only the cupboards but also the panoramic windows are customised; wherever possible, both the windows and the doors are as high as the ceilings. Ultramodern building technology also helps to create a feeling of luxurious minimalism, which is not always a matter of course in sunny Australia. An energy consultant has made sure that the walls are properly insulated and the windows are double-glazed.

In the Garden House overall, individuality rules. Every living unit opens into a courtyard or a terrace, so that even the residents on the fourth floor can feel like early Australian settlers living on their own homesteads. ☐

Further information
www.thegardenhouse.net.au/steps.swf
www.piccolo.net.au
www.heckerguthrie.com