

Upwardly mobile Sydney resettles in the skies



Heaven's above . . . Steve and Julie Hogan, who have bought a two-bedroom flat on level 59 of the World Tower, inspect the view they will enjoy when they move in next year. Photo: Peter Morris

Welcome to Steve and Julie Hogan's new dream home. At 59 storeys above central Sydney's traffic-choked streets, it will come complete with full-frontal skyline views extending beyond the Heads.

The two-bedroom flat, in the heart of the CBD, will place the Balmain couple firmly at the top of a high-rise boom that will see up to 42,000 apartments built in towering "vertical villages" in the next four years.

When they move in next year, the Hogans will also become the highest full-time residents of the nation's tallest apartment development - Meriton's 75-storey World Tower, now under construction on the corner of Liverpool and George streets.

"It was the views that lured us to the city," Mrs Hogan says, "and the fact that we spend so much time here anyway."

Tens of thousands of homeowners like the Hogans are

A high-rise population explosion is transforming Sydney's landscape and lifestyle. A new Herald series, starting today, reveals a revolution that will mean two in five new residences will be in towers within four years. In the first report, Anthony Dennis and Sean Nicholls examine the reasons for Sydney's sudden upward push.

helping to change Sydney's urban and social fabric by opting for a lifestyle shift away from the classic Australian house and garden or typical Sydney suburban unit block.

"In a sense we value privacy less," says urban historian Peter Spearritt. "We valued privacy in the past because we could have it and put up the fence to promote it. Now we have a preparedness to contemplate high-rise living on a scale we had never conceived of."

Nearly 250,000 people already live in apartment blocks of more

than four storeys in the city dubbed the "engine room of Australia".

Such is the size of the boom that even the development industry concedes Sydney could be heading for a period of apartment oversupply, which would see them holding planned projects back from the market.

But for the moment, apartment dwellings are on the up and up. High-rise residents represent about 20 per cent of the rise in Sydney's population in the past 10 years, 2001 census figures reveal.



VERTICAL VILLAGES
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New high-rise blocks planned for the next four years will house an extra 92,000 Sydneysiders, says the Housing Industry Association. They will account for nearly 40 per cent of all new residences due for construction in Sydney by then.

However, not all residents of the new vertical villages are there through choice.

The boom has been driven by rising prices and the State Government's policy of urban consolidation, which have put land even on Sydney's fringes out

of many people's reach. Once confined to Kings Cross and the CBD, the high-rise, high-density phenomenon is occurring in areas as geographically diverse as South Sydney, Parramatta, Strathfield, Chatswood, Rockdale and Hurstville.

In many cases the trade-off allows people to stay close to families, friends or work, rather than being forced away to more affordable suburbs.

"This is part of Australia's evolving culture," says Caroline Pidcock, NSW president of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. "Just as the way we eat and work is changing, we're living differently too."

While there are no exact figures for the number of high-rise flats - 10 storeys and above - property experts believe they account for a third of unit blocks. In the inner-city, growth has been

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