



life above ground

Apartment living has come of age with individual interiors and better designs.

Once upon a time, we couldn't imagine why anyone would swap the quarter-acre paradise for an apartment. Now, many of us couldn't imagine life without them.

So what has changed since our early forays into apartment living? Are they still fairly homogenised places with standardised layouts and all-white interiors?

Shannon Joe of Warren and Mahoney Architects says cheap and bland is out. "There's currently a lack of the middle ground apartments. It needs to be economical but well-designed, and offering flexibility."

Every inch of an apartment must be useable. Open-plan living has become the norm, but owners, especially retirees and grandparents, now also want a separate, smaller sitting room where they can relax, read or watch television.

Shannon says people are more aware of the benefits of paying for good design and materials. "We've learnt from the past that good design is worth paying for. We're no longer trying to pigeon-hole people into small spaces with no light or ventilation and poor orientation."

It's taken us a while to warm to apartment living, says interior designer Jennie Dunlop of Dunlop Design. "The original apartments had their faults as they weren't purpose-designed for living and many were very small."

Thanks to urban design panels and councils, that has changed. Says Jennie: "Now we have an aging population wanting to downsize and move from a house on a big piece of land. They're saying, 'I don't want to go to a retirement village and I don't want a tiny boxy



apartment. I'll get home help and move to a place that's like a house – big, comfortable and well-designed'."

Flexibility of spaces is important with, for example, second bedrooms being used as an office or TV snug.

Going natural

The choice of material palette and how spaces are detailed is important. For example, says Shannon, "you need a decent kitchen bench that will serve a couple as a table and bedrooms that open out to a courtyard or balcony."

The slick urban feel of earlier apartments has been replaced with a more grounded, natural palette and use of natural materials.

The underlying design, says Shannon, is clean and crisp, true to its



Left and above Interior designer Jennie Dunlop says that during the past two years, the trend for interiors has leaned towards glamour, which tends to happen when there's an economic downturn. "People want to surround themselves in comfort," she says. This apartment uses Resene Wan White from the Karen Walker range.

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material palette. "If you're using concrete, you don't try to hide it." Natural materials like stone, concrete and glass anchor many of the more sophisticated interiors today. And timber, especially sustainable timber, is in favour for its warmer feel. Painted walls enhance those natural materials. "You don't want too rich a palette as it gets heavy and the elements start to compete."

Jennie says that during the past two years, the trend for interiors has leaned towards glamour, which tends to happen when there's an economic downturn. Luxurious fabrics like velvets and linens are popular and glazed, crunchy chintz drapes have replaced sleek roller blinds. "People want to surround themselves in comfort," she says.

Shannon says that when people buy apartments, they like to add their own personality. "Nobody likes to be controlled by their environment. You need to look at the architectural features to see if they're compatible with your taste and lifestyle. You're paying for the design, so make sure it works for you."

Without spending a fortune, Jennie says, you can improve your living environment with nice furnishings, colour and lighting.

Communal areas are important, says Shannon. Many complexes now come with shared green areas, swimming pools, saunas and gyms. These are possibly pitched at the younger market because according to Jennie, older people don't use them. >

"They need maintenance and bump up the price of the body corp fees."

In demand

The economic recession has definitely dampened developer appetites for building new apartments. But while there are few under construction, apartment living is in strong demand and real estate agents are anticipating a shortage in the future.

More people are looking to swap their big house in the suburbs to a high-quality, purpose-built city apartment, says Jan McLeod of City Livin'. She herself lives in a luxurious 200sq m apartment that's one street back from Queen Street in Auckland city. And she has no desire to go back to a house. "I love the security, the warmth, the convenience. It's awesome. Living in an apartment is definitely becoming more popular. As we get older, we want a life. We are so into working, we don't have time to look after a house. People in this complex are aged from their early 30s up. They're buying for lifestyle."

Her company recently undertook a survey to find out what buyers want and top priorities were: great location near amenities; quality fit-outs; nice materials; bigger balconies and higher ceilings. **H**

words Vicki Holder

pictures Mark Heaslip and supplied



Top Natural materials like stone and glass anchor many of the more sophisticated interiors today, says Shannon Joe of Warren and Mahoney Architects.

Above Waters Edge Ferry Road Apartments in Christchurch designed by Warren & Mahoney Architects.

top tips

- Choose a location with neighbourhood amenities that suit you.
- Consider where your visitors will park – if there's no parking, they won't visit.
- Make sure the complex has a good body corporate committee.
- Look for versatile spaces.
- Remember, the higher up you go, the more vulnerable you are to the weather. You may need screens on balconies and the windows may need sun filters.
- Look for good storage.
- Don't be fooled by clever home-staging when buying – the furniture may be under-sized (ie a double bed instead of a queen-sized) to make the rooms look bigger.
- Before buying, get hold of the floor plan to work out your furniture layout.
- Be ruthless about the furniture that you take with you. Choose sofas that can be moved in sections. Consider a small dining table which can extend when needed. Put a sofa bed in the second bedroom. If there's only a small lift or narrow stairs for access, buy king-sized beds with a split base which are much easier to move than queen beds.