

# Talk of the town

Get your townhouse project right with these expert tips, writes **Natasha Perera**

**T**OWNHOUSES have become hugely popular in Melbourne. They offer low-maintenance living and are an ideal way to accommodate our exploding population, particularly in our middle-ring suburbs where the blocks are often large and can be carved up.

They also provide an opportunity to get a foothold on the property ladder.

But, according to architect Steffen Welsch, it's important to understand the difference between a successful design and a not-so-successful design — the latter having a poorly planned layout, complex building form and overwhelming material palette.

“These developments can be costly to get through planning, provide limited comfort and enjoyment, and lack character,” he said.

Here, Mr Welsch, who designed the Sunshine townhouses pictured on this page, shares some tips on building townhouses.

## EXPERT EYE

It's important the design of the townhouse matches the land parcel, but sometimes planning and building controls can restrict what you want to do. And this can hinder creativity and limit your development options.

This is where hiring an architect can help as they are skilled at recognising ways to overcome any hurdles without sacrificing the integrity of the townhouse design.

“When an architect understands the intent of a rule, they can play with it,” Mr Welsch said.

When designing where the home will sit on the land, you'll need to consider the home's setback (how far it is from the footpath) and how to create a greater sense of space inside.

“In the Sunshine project, we were able to position the townhouse closer to the street so it does not overshadow neighbouring properties, and can allow for more private, open space and a more usable floorplan,” Mr Welsch said.

## THINK SMART

Big doesn't necessarily equate to better, according to Mr Welsch, who said, “sloppy design results in big, overly complex buildings that are more expensive to build and maintain than they need to be”.

However, this can be easily avoided as spaces don't have to be big to feel big.

Using natural light, framing beautiful vistas and creating multifunctional spaces are all ways you can introduce a more spacious feel.

Mr Welsch said by creating wider landings for a study or retreat, and optimising views outside, you could achieve a greater sense of space inside and an overall efficient and economic building footprint.

## PERSONAL TOUCH

One thing to avoid is having your townhouse look exactly the same as the next one. It needs to have a point of difference that sets it apart from the rest.

“Make sure the architect incorporates small, surprising gestures into the development,” Mr Welsch said.

“They don't have to be elaborate and expensive, but they do need to be placed strategically so they have impact and be unexpected.”

In the Sunshine project, Mr Welsch used a feature breeze brick wall in the entrance.

“A breeze wall is suited to climates like ours. It softens harsh light, provides shade and assists ventilation,” he said, adding it was synonymous with mid-century modern design and added character to the development.

He also said timber floors would



Photos: Rhiannon Slatter



inject warmth and personality to a townhouse and were an easy way to add instant character to a space.

## PLAN AHEAD

One of the biggest challenges with townhouse design is overshadowing and overlooking a neighbour's property.

And this is probably one of the key issues that can slow down the approval process of your project.

Mr Welsch said always think ahead on how your design will impact surrounding properties and devise creative solutions to satisfy everyone's needs, eliminating unnecessary planning-approval delays.

“In the Sunshine project, we did away with typical privacy screening upstairs by creating balconies enclosed with louvres to give character, provide sunlight and privacy and views to the distance,” Mr Welsch said.

## NEIGHBOURLY ADVICE

When designing a townhouse, you need to carefully consider the existing streetscape.

“Use materials predominant to the area, consider the impact on the immediate surroundings and connect to the surroundings through exploring views,” Mr Welsch said.

The key is to demonstrate to your neighbours the development will benefit them and increase the value and appeal of the street rather than detract from it.

Your neighbours will then be less likely to oppose your building plans and your development will run less risk of being subject to planning delays.

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