

Room with a view but little space

Michael Bleby

Cassie Lee moves into her new apartment next month. The one-bedroom unit in Melbourne's Abbotsford is small, but the single lawyer says she does not need much space.

Ms Lee is moving out of her parents' home in Melbourne's south-east suburbs and says her new home, on a tram line and just 3.5 kilometres from the central business district, was more important than a lot of private space.

"I spend a lot of time at work and there's not necessarily that much time spent at home," she says.

The 160-apartment Haven development has communal areas such as an outdoor retreat with a fireplace, a dining room and rooftop pool, where Ms Lee says she can entertain friends.

"I'm probably not getting a lot in terms of real estate – it's a 42-square-metre apartment with a five-metre balcony. If I need that bigger space to invite friends... there (are) those areas."

With young professionals increasingly choosing apartments over traditional detached houses for the proximity to jobs and centres of activity they offer, developers and designers are rethinking usage of the space in which

we live. But it presents a challenge both to architects and the planning regimes within which they work.

Some designers are already doing bespoke redevelopments to permit occupants to stay in apartments and make them useful for longer – such as when a couple has children – but more flexible use of space is becoming a mainstream offering.

Ms Lee is trading off private space for communal space.

"The savvy developers are on to facilities in developments that appeal to those people that want a typical suburban home, but can't afford the commute," says John Meagher, the managing director of marketing company 360° Property Group.

"So they're putting facilities in the development like common gardens, common dining rooms that can accommodate social activities like dinner parties, special occasions."

A separate development in Essendon in Melbourne's north offers one-bedroom apartments with a flexible wall that moves on runners to create a second bedroom, study or dining area.

"We have to try and find ingenious ways to find storage and be as flexible as we can with what we've got," says Fei