

Up by the riverside

Alison Barclay takes a look at a new kind of waterfront living



The second stage of a controversial project on the Abbotsford riverfront will go on sale next month, with luxury apartments costing as much as \$3.9 million.

The 148-dwelling "Haven" will sit beside "Eden", an 11-storey development whose plans caused uproar among Kew residents whose homes face the site across the Yarra. Haven will span 200 metres of riverbank with water views on three sides of the building. Like Eden, it will be terraced up to 11 storeys at its rear.

Developer Hamton's permit allows for a third stage of building on the ex-industrial site once owned by Honeywell. Despite the sluggish market for off-the-plan apartments, Hamton joint managing director Paul Hameister says Eden has sold out, with its waiting list transferred to Haven.

"I'd like to claim it was because of our beautiful design, but it is the location," Hameister says. "Almost exclusively, the interest has come from the affluent suburbs

across the river; Kew and Hawthorn. We will have 70 per cent owner-occupiers in Eden. They are essentially staying in the same location but making a million dollars from the sale of their big home.

"All the reservations for Haven are owner-occupiers. We haven't released them to investors yet."

The Rothe Lowman-designed Haven will have apartments of one to four bedrooms with balconies or terraces, plus several two-storey riverfront terraces. A health spa, outdoor lap pool, lobby bar and rooftop leisure area will amuse the residents, but the project will also include public facilities such as bicycle and kayak hire, a health food store and riverfront restaurants in a new street called Acacia Close.

The entire Honeywell site has just been cleared, with construction set to begin on stage one, Eden, in December. When all three stages are complete, the precinct will have about 500 apartments and probably more than 1000

residents. About a third of the site will be accessible to the public, including landscaped parkland along the Yarra Trail.

Hameister, who noted objections from residents, says Hamton is working with Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water "to maintain the integrity of the riverbank".

"We also have a permit for off-site works outside our title, and this is where the objections came in," he says. "So we have reduced them to a small pontoon, extending our bike track to meet the existing bike track and running a set of stairs down to the river. We are also doing significant landscaping on the river bank."

Just across Victoria Street, Salta Properties is marketing Riverside Richmond, soon to be a crescent-shaped building of 17 townhouses.

"This is a very special site because it directly abuts the River Street public park," says David Cole, director of The Buchan Group architects. "There is access to and views of the

river, but the site can't be built out relative to neighbouring developments."

He, too, is treading carefully on sensitive land. "There have been exhaustive geotechnical tests of the soil and foundation condition. We have a very good, stable base to the site. There's no excavation required, because all the car parking is at ground level."

Riverside's four-bedroom dwellings, priced from \$1.9 million to \$2.5 million, are aimed at owner-occupiers, especially those of a green mind – all the townhouses will have double glazing and solar panels, and the gardens will have biofiltration for stormwater harvesting.

Both projects are on the market at a time of vigorous debate about Melbourne's density, with the Richmond/Abbotsford area a hot spot.

Victoria's Associate Government Architect, Jill Garner, says Australians have a limited history, and tolerance, of higher-density living – but she is noticing "apartments with amenity" on the rise in popularity.

"What I find most interesting are those cases where this amenity is more than just nearby transport or open space, but might extend to shared facilities such as a common large dining room that can be booked out for a dinner party by any resident in a complex," Garner says.

"Architects have always been interested in intriguing issues such as 'the minimal dwelling' – and the take-up of such ideas in some of Melbourne's amenity-rich urban areas is exciting and in line with global trends." ■

Haven's display suite is at 679 Victoria Street, Abbotsford; open from November 5, 1pm–4pm daily. Riverside Richmond's suite is on River Boulevard; open Tuesday–Sunday, noon–1pm or by appointment on 9426 4050.