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HOME SANCTUARY

Enhancing wellbeing through design

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BLUESTONE WAY



Like no other time in living memory, this year has sharpened the focus on the role of our homes as places of sanctuary, safety and retreat.

A new apartment development in East Brunswick has elevated the notion of homes as safe havens to a level rarely seen in multi-residential projects, incorporating a suite of carefully considered features designed to enhance residents' mental health and wellbeing.

From the facade architecture to the inclusion of compost caddies and nooks where indoor plants will thrive, Bluestone Way at Banco Group's East Brunswick Village takes a holistic approach to promoting wellbeing through design.

This year's lockdowns have prompted an even closer examination of how the apartments can support pandemic-induced lifestyle changes. Adjustments include setting aside more flexible spaces that can be used as study areas, reconfiguring island benches so that they can double as work spaces and creating "productivity pods" on the rooftop.

Chris Manton is director at JAM Architects, part of the design team for the urban renewal project at the former Sidney Cooke Fasteners

site, six kilometres north of the Melbourne CBD.

The architect says Bluestone Way is shaped around the concept of biophilic design, enhancing people's connections to the natural world through the forms and materials used in the buildings. "It's about deliberately connecting the users of the building with nature," he says.

Biophilic design has become a buzzword in contemporary building design but the notion that people are happier and healthier when they interact with the natural world is nothing new.



From the mythical Hanging Gardens of Babylon to Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater and modern-day real estate listings highlighting water views or landscaped grounds, architecture that unites humans with nature is highly prized.

Even the proliferation of green walls in offices is tied to the idea that getting up close and personal with nature can promote a sense of wellbeing, improve air quality and boost productivity.

Bluestone Way takes its name from the quarries that operated in the neighbourhood in the 1800s.

The first stage is a five-storey, mixed-use building with 46 apartments, due for completion in mid-2022.

The facade is layered with materials linked to each floor's interior use. For the ground level, there are plans for a retail hub and restaurant alley with market-style supermarket, artisan bakery, distillery, florist and bike repair store.

"There's a masonry base that ties the building to the industrial history of the site," Manton says.

A first-floor wellness level is expected to include a gym, medical centre, allied health services, pilates and a yoga centre. The plan is for residents to be able to use these facilities at a discounted rate.

Above this are the residences and a rooftop garden landscaped by Very Edible Gardens, including a yoga platform, walking circuit, contemplation spaces and medicinal and edible plants that can be identified via an app.

"Where the residential uses start, we've used a robust off-form concrete panel with punctured openings and other things you'd expect from a privacy point of view," Manton says.

Residents will enter the building through a ground-floor lobby finished with timber, brick and stone, past art inspired by the natural environment. "You get out on your level and come into a courtyard, which is open, and you're immersed in a significant amount of landscaping," Manton says.

The combination of fresh air, lush plantings and a variety of seating areas are worlds away from run-of-the-mill apartment blocks.

"It's quite different from what you expect when you walk into a normal building," Manton says. "You walk on what is effectively a catwalk to get to your apartment."

For the apartment interiors, JAM Architects collaborated with Brave New Eco, a Melbourne-based interior design and ecologically sustainable design consulting studio.

Megan Norgate, director at Brave New Eco, says even before her firm's involvement, East Brunswick Village boasted impressive sustainability credentials from the perspective of urban planning, green spaces and energy initiatives. "I looked at the interiors of the apartments, interrogating the sustainable design outcomes within that context," Norgate says.



MY PERSPECTIVE

Chris Manton
Director, JAM Architects

"It's about deliberately connecting the users of the building with nature."



Bluestone Way takes a holistic approach to promoting wellbeing.

The result is a surprising mix of high-tech and low-fi inclusions. On the high-tech side, the introduction of induction cooktops meant gas wouldn't need to be run into the apartments. "It's a superior cooking technology and it's enormously more efficient in terms of energy use. It's also really good in a small kitchen because it's a flat, wipeable surface. It becomes like bench space."

Eco-friendly flooring and zero-emissions laminates were selected. Other measures are simpler, almost old-fashioned, such as ensuring the laundries have room to line-dry clothes. Private balconies, ceiling fans, compost caddies and the option of full blackout curtains make for environmentally-friendly spaces.

"We're making these low-impact ways of living a little bit easier and more ergonomic ... They're just built into the design," Norgate says.

The interior designer says the COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on how hard homes need to work to fully support residents' changed lifestyles. "The home needs to be a workplace, a place of retreat, an exercise location. It needs to do everything," Norgate says. "We're really thinking about how these spaces can function for all those diverse purposes."

Developer Mario LoGiudice, director at Banco Group, says East Brunswick Village is designed for long-time residents of the inner north (or those who want to be) who are ready to have a home to call their own. "The biggest cohort of buyers we've welcomed in so far are in the 25 to 35-year-old age bracket and we've got lots of downsizers coming in who have grown up in the area and want to be near family."

Bluestone Way is designed to achieve a 7.5-star rating under the Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme and an Operational Carbon Neutral Building status for all apartments, meaning it will have no net negative impact on the environment.

"Every single aspect of Bluestone Way has been carefully considered and designed to enable people to thrive," LoGiudice says.



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