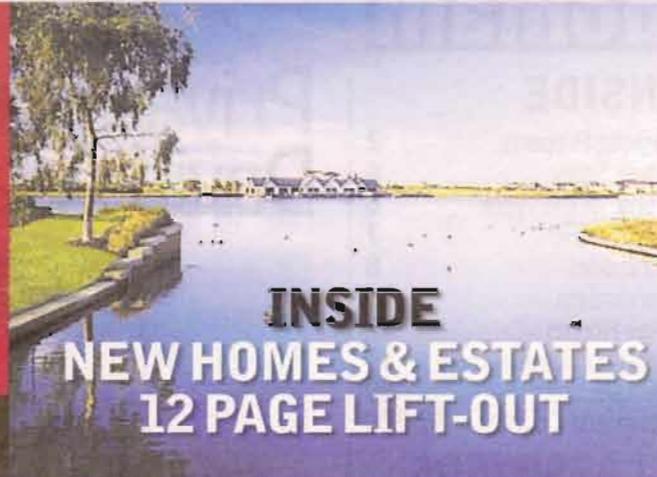


SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2006

# domain



**INSIDE**  
NEW HOMES & ESTATES  
12 PAGE LIFT-OUT

HOMES · APARTMENTS · INSPECTIONS · RENTALS

## The new Kew

Contemporary designs for cottages site. Page 4





## COVER STORY



A computer-generated image of the Kew Cottages development.

# Cottage industry

**Katherine Townsend** looks at a development sharing the ambience of Kew.

**T**HREE heritage-listed buildings in the middle, hundreds of trees that can't be touched, a 40-metre drop from the top of the site to the bottom and various community groups fighting disparate battles. No, the redevelopment of the Kew Cottages site was never going to be easy.

A challenging site with a complex history is a delicate way of putting it, but the team behind the new housing to be built on the 27-hectare site of the former residential hostel for people with intellectual disabilities has drawn inspiration from some of the innovative architecture dotted along Kew's leafy streets.

Their plans won't silence protests about choice in disability housing or the sale of public land, and not all in the leafy eastern suburbs will be convinced about the joys of medium-density living. But wandering around the site with the developer and architect on a hot windy day, it is easy

to see the thought and effort they've put in.

And, yes, the thought and effort does involve how to maximise the profit from the housing, while meeting all the heritage, social and green requirements that have been highlighted by the various groups who feel passionately about the site.

But for developer Kevin Hunt, of Walker Corporation, the key design focus is to join the Kew Cottages site into the broader suburb of Kew and end 100 years of isolation. This means no huge gates closing the area off. "We were offered historic gates to put along Main Drive, but we said no," he says.

It also means creating two-metre-wide tracks that invite walkers and cyclists in, with one track running along the southern edge leading people to the Yarra River at Studley Park, and the other winding its way up from the bottom north-eastern corner and past the new houses to the

top. On the way, the walking trails will have a natural stopping-off point in the site's centre, at the heritage-listed buildings that will be turned into \$3 million community recreation facilities including a European-style piazza, with cafe and playground. Mr Hunt says the paths will help "unlock the site" and draw walkers and cyclists to the community facilities.

He hopes this process will make the site's main thoroughfare, Main Drive, Kew, an "iconic address" that, one day, will be as instantly recognisable as Kew Junction, Sackville Street or Cotham Road.

At a time when inner-city house prices are going through the roof, and nowhere more so than in the inner east, Mr Hunt is fairly sure there is an unmet demand for what he is building.

The development will be built in stages, and accommodation to re-house Kew Cottage's present residents is already under con-

struction at the north-east corner, which, it has to be said, has probably the site's least favoured aspect — with fewer views and busier roads.

Translating the broad vision into housing and landscape design is the work of dKO architect Koos de Keijzer and landscape architect Andrew Moyle, of MDG Landscape. They began with a detailed and complex map showing the 1100 trees and 168 species, on site — with buildings and public areas designed around these features.

MDG has undertaken landscape design on many large residential projects, including Waverley Park, Docklands and Yarra's Edge. For Mr Moyle, the challenge is to enhance the existing greenery, recognising the expectation of buyers to have access to the "leafy eastern suburbs", while also recognising that public and private gardens will "have to survive prolonged dry periods".

## COVER STORY

domain



The Kew Cottages site, adjoining the already developed Willsmere Estate.  
PICTURE: CRAIG ABRAHAM

He says the original Kew Cottages grounds were laid out more than a century ago by the then director of the Royal Botanic Gardens and this sense of an arboretum, showcasing many species, will continue. It will not be like housing estates of old "with areas of emerald-green grass", but there will be a sense of living "among parkland".

The housing designs by Mr de Keijzer are also intended to work with the site — trees, slope and all. His contemporary designs for the townhouses and freestanding houses come in 50 variations.

"There is a high degree of individuality. We are working with the trees and the fall of the site. Trees are part of the bigger Kew story," he says.

The stand-alone housing features split-level designs reminiscent of the most innovative designs of 1950s and 1960s feel — not the suburban triple-fronted brick veneers that filled the suburbs, but the architecturally

innovative designs that some parts of Melbourne took to with gusto after the war.

Mr de Keijzer sees contemporary innovation as part of Kew's architectural history. "Kew is not like Camberwell or Brighton; I see Kew as an innovative architectural feeling. There is the work of Robin Boyd and Peter McIntyre and, really, most of Melbourne's pre-eminent architects have done some innovative work around Kew."

Mr de Keijzer's firm, dKO, has built three-dimensional models of all the houses so potential buyers can "lift the lid" on them and see exactly how the split-level homes will sit on the land.

The designs feature large windows facing on to greenery.

Both Mr de Keijzer and Mr Hunt are confident the houses will sell well, with prices ranging from \$900,000 to \$2 million.

"I see buyers coming from a five-kilometre radius," Mr Hunt says.

"It'll be people trading up, or trading down from larger houses in Kew or Balwyn."

The development includes several apartment blocks and these are, as ever, a greater challenge. Final designs are still being worked on and the apartments are likely to be built in the last stage of the project. "We've got to get the product right," Mr Hunt says.

So far, what is known is that there will be 14 blocks of apartments built in mansion-house style with six apartments in each "mansion". Mr de Keijzer says these will be in the "St Kilda-Elwood style", rather than massive apartment blocks, although, as they will be built on the top end of the site, they will be almost as high as the landmark Willsmere tower next door.

The project's on-site information centre is now open and the first display homes in the \$400 million project will be open by November 2008.



## Protesters slam secrecy over site

Between the Kew Cottages Coalition, the Kew Cottages Parents Association, and the Boroondara Residents Action Group, the voices of protest over the redevelopment of the prime 27-hectare site near the Yarra River have been loud and constant.

The protests have fired on different fronts — adequate care, decent facilities and accommodation choice for people with disabilities, the loss of ancient trees, the sale of government land to housing developers, the lack of consultation and discussion about that sale, and the building of medium-density housing on what the protesters believe should be public parkland.

Now, as the first buildings for the cottages' residents are under construction and the plans for the remainder of the housing are unveiled, the protesters remain unconvinced.

The president of the Kew Cottages Coalition, Brian Walsh, says the redevelopment of Kew has been shrouded in secrecy and badly handled by the State Government from the start. While he acknowledges the different protest groups have different aims and objectives, he says: "We are all united over one thing: the Government has never convinced any of us with the way they've gone about things."

KATHERINE TOWNSEND