

Design rethink inside the box

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DEALING with difficult sites or council planning restrictions puts pressure on architects to come up with an innovative solution. Rothelowman faced this dilemma when planning projects for two sites in South Melbourne — at 58 Clarke Street and 150 Clarendon Street.

The former is a small, four-sided site tucked in next to the West Gate Freeway, while with the latter, council planning required that the building be set right back from the street.

At Clarke Street, Rothelowman managing principal Shane Rothe said a key problem in designing Habitat, a 34-storey tower with 147 apartments, was dealing with noise from the freeway.

"Rather than have large expanses of glass facing the freeway, we developed some thinking about sound waves, and how sound waves may affect the architecture and protect the building from freeway noise," he told BusinessDay. "We developed the idea — take the sound waves and put them in the facade."

In practice, this means the windows change in size. Each wall has two different window rows — different aperture sizes in each apartment. "They change as they go up the building. Each apartment gets a different personality because of the actual design of the windows. They're not all the same," Mr Rothe said. "The sound-wave effect makes it look like the building is moving, which is an optical illusion. It also makes the building more elegant and look taller. It helps the acoustics because we have double-glazing, minimising the quantity of glazing. As the building gets higher, the noise



Rothelowman found signature design solutions to problem sites at Clarendon Street (top) and Clarke Street.

dissipates. The biggest problem is down below."

The firm applied the treatment to north and south sides where the noise problem was. "All apartments still have east-west views," he said.

Mr Rothe said the architects were concerned that multistorey towers tended to be a lonely existence for many occupiers. The company's solution was to incorporate three levels of apartments into one communal area. With each floor having five apartments, the common area will serve 15 units.

"We have created a sky village, or sky garden, developed as a community space. There will be 10 of these vertical villages, and all have a different 'feel.'"

No apartment has a balcony. The communal areas, which have only one access, are screened from the wind with glass up to two or three metres



high to retain views. The ground floor will have retail space, including a bicycle workshop, where residents can work on their bike, or get someone in to do the work.

Demolition of the existing

buildings will start within weeks, with construction set to start in October and take about 18 months to complete.

At 150 Clarendon Street, the architects faced the local council's strict controls on the street front with the 78-unit apartment block, Harvest. The resulting front low building section will feature six, double-storey lofts. In the rear section is a larger block of 64 apartments.

"We were left with a 'hole' behind that street wall, but we had to build a structure there," said Rothelowman lead architect Stuart Marsland. This led to the concept of a pole screen, almost like a forest — a series of aluminium grey and silver tubes. "Clarendon Street is very well vegetated, very leafy — why not pick up on that," he said. "The poles are staggered in an orderly way, but appear to be random to create the forest effect."