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House & Land Repackaging

ELYSIUM NOOSA, QUEENSLAND

NO MATTER THE industry, 'added value' has become its marketing mantra. For building developers looking for an edge, added value means good design. Of course, the time may come when good design is considered an intrinsic part of a new development. For the moment, however, design remains a competitive advantage. From 'designer hotels' around the world to the plethora of apartment blocks being built across our capitals, architects are being employed to distinguish one building from its competition. It's a win-win situation. For the community the added value is a better built environment; for the developer it can mean a better bottom line.

Having used Donovan Hill architects for his W4 Apartments project, Queensland developer David Pearson has applied this formula to an estate development on the Sunshine Coast, Elysium, Noosa. While Pearson says the formula could be applied to any estate development, Elysium is not your typical project home. Averaging \$2 million each, the 189 homes that will comprise Elysium, once its five stages are completed, occupy the last of the major land subdivisions permitted in the Noosa Heads area.

Launched in January 2005, the first stage of 41 blocks has been designed by 12 award-winning architects including Richard Kirk, Elizabeth Watson-Brown and Bligh Voller Nield whose experience in home design allows them to work both to a brief and an imaginary client. By the end of the project Pearson hopes to have employed 30 to 40 architects.

"People are now very savvy in terms of architecture," says Pearson, whose brief called for a "meticulously designed, beautiful, contemporary house suitable for the Noosa lifestyle". This translated as an "emphasis on living areas that promote cross-ventilation, the kitchen as the

heart of the house, and the main bedroom's en suite to be fantastic".

Set over 27.4 hectares, \$6 million has been allocated to landscape 12.7 hectares of parkland (including bike and pedestrian walkways) by Edaw Gillespies, whose past landscape projects include Brisbane's Southbank, Sydney's Olympic Village and Melbourne's Docklands.

Identifying what Pearson calls "the DNA for the project" meant market research and workshops. "We identified the demographics first," he explains. "We spoke to three groups of six people and had three different discussions about the whole project and the house designs. We identified our tag line as 'Ultimate Noosa'; that anything we thought about for the project had to be the ultimate."

For anxious consumers anticipating creative differences with architects or budget blowouts with builders, estate homes like Elysium present a cheaper, hassle-free option. From a planning and design perspective it also offers a canny way of avoiding the inevitable council delays. When you commission every building and all amenities no one will block your proposal. Controlling the project through group title has virtually the opposite effect of the typical suburban neighbourhood. Here everyone has to have an architect-designed home.

Not that disputes between neighbours did not occur. They just happened between architects thrashing out ideas at the drawing-board stage. "Every time we had a meeting with the architects it was never one-on-one, it was us with the 12 architects and their practices," says Pearson. "So every time we forced them to cooperate and collaborate. And then at the design process, everyone pinned up their designs, talked them through and collaborated with one another. So all the

designs would be sympathetic. We also set up a website on which they were able to hop in and talk to one another about this project."

For Richard Kirk this was probably the most rewarding part of the process: "Seeing how other architects responded to similar circumstances in terms of site and brief. Usually the biggest criticism of these projects that engage multiple designers is that the buildings sometimes unintentionally compete with one another, to the detriment of the public spaces. However, in the Elysium project there were genuine attempts to mitigate this problem by the architects working together to resolve some of these adjacency issues."

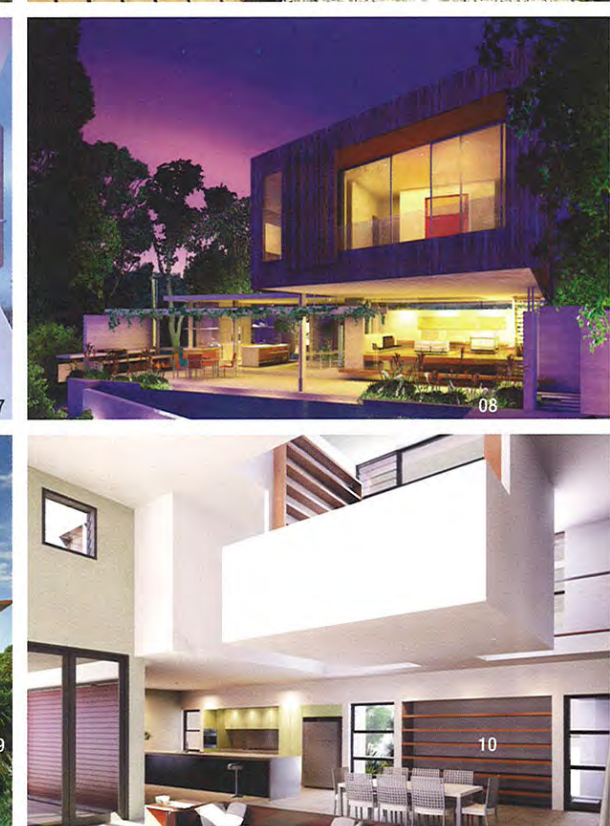
From an architects' point of view, the arrival of a developer prepared to give them a relatively open brief is rare and also challenging. One of the primary reasons Kirk says he agreed to be involved in the project was the undertaking the developer gave in "ensuring the architect was retained during the construction process, delivering a quality built project and consistent with the architect's ideas."

Just as architects conducted real and virtual appraisals of each other's work, potential Elysium buyers can view 3D models on site or online, before the display homes are finished. While the first stage is scheduled for completion at the end of 2006, demand has meant the early release of Stage Two designs, four months ahead of schedule.

If, as Pearson says, "every developer under the sun has been in to see the development", we may soon see the 'DNA' of this model being cloned in other suburban estates.

Ray Edgar

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