

Meet the developers helping to shape Melbourne



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Danny Ciarma, owner of Urban DC, pictured on the penthouse level of his St Kilda development, is one of the developers shaping Melbourne. Picture: Josie Hayden

MELBOURNE'S apartment market has had its share of criticism.

But as much as we might not want to believe it, the Australian dream ain't what it used to be. With big house prices and a soaring population, apartments are a part of life.

And while high-density living is still evolving, some of the industry's key figures believe the sky's the limit.

WHERE WE'VE BEEN AND WHERE WE'RE AT

Our city's apartment market has attracted some colourful names over the years: dog boxes, pigeon holes and even towers of misery.

But the development scene has come a long way, according to industry stalwart Danny Ciarma.

Mr Ciarma has been in the property game for 20 years and spearheaded his own firm, Urban DC, after working with development bigwigs, including the Docklands Authority which shaped the harbourside suburb.

While an investor-driven apartment boom that started in 1998 ended with an oversupply in 2004, since 2005 the market has gradually shifted toward owner-occupier stock, according to Mr Ciarma.

"From 1998, we saw huge growth in investment driven apartments... and in 2004 it ended; there was a massive oversupply in the CBD and Docklands," Mr Ciarma said.

"It killed the market, you could not give apartments away," Mr Ciarma said.

Nowadays, Baby Boomers are testing the apartment-living waters, despite a lifetime in houses with backyards.

He expected them to break the ice for younger generations.

"In my anecdotal experience ... no one has said, 'I can't live here. I'm selling this apartment and going back to a house'," Mr Ciarma said.

"I think their kids will see their parents living in them and think, 'this ain't bad'."

CREATING PLACES PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE IN

Developments today offer everything from communal spaces decked out with barbecues, to pools and gyms.

But the shift hasn't been entirely developer led. The Victorian Government introduced the Better Apartment Design Standards in 2017, mandating outdoor space, ample natural light and "functional layouts".

Mr Ciarma said it had been a welcome addition, but prices could creep upward as a result.

If dwelling numbers fell due to the minimum requirements for storage, windows, accessibility and functional layouts, prices would have to rise.

"If there's less yield, developers will pay less for the land. You can't just keep paying more and more, and add 20 per cent on to the price of an apartment, because the market won't accept it," Mr Ciarma said.

"There'll be a bit of a teething period, but I think it's for the better."

He said it was important for buyers to provide honest feedback to developers to assist them in staying ahead of the curve.

"We got our Caulfield development, No. 818, in just before the new design standards were introduced, and we ticked every box and more."