



Alex Perry takes brand indoors

Designer-branded buildings are the latest story

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ONE of Australia's most visible fashion personalities has swapped catwalks for corridors with the launch of Alex Perry Residential. Construction for the 11-level building in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley is due to begin next year followed by a planned rollout of 10 buildings across Australia.

Although Australia was one of the first countries to welcome the concept of fashion-branded buildings with the Palazzo Versace Gold Coast opening in 2000, it now lags behind the rest of the world.

Last year marked the opening of the Armani Hotel in Dubai, Maison Moschino in Milan and Hotel Missoni in Edinburgh. Other examples include Paris's Hotel du Petit Moulin designed by Christian Lacroix, the Bulgari Resorts and Spas, and Armani's hotels, residences and resorts.

Although other Australian fashion designers have flirted with interiors (Melbourne's Clara Townhouse development enlisted Tigerlily's Jodhi Meares as "lifestyle collaborator" and Collette Dinnigan designed the Dom Perignon lounge at Sydney's Hemisphere Bar), this is the first time a local fashion designer will boast an eponymous property portfolio spread across the country.

"I'm by no means an architect

but I do know visually what I like," says Perry, who is the project's creative director.

"I had images of things I thought it should feel like and input into some things that were tweaked on the outside of the building, but it was really about how the inside looked; not decoration so much as how the spaces felt and what finishes were used."

Geoff Parker, architectural director on Alex Perry Residential, initially had "severe reservations" about working with a fashion designer because he didn't know how educated Perry would be in the property development arena.

"Alex surprised me. He's very receptive and extremely intuitive," Parker says. "Typically clothing designers, I would think, have a terrific ability with colours and fabric. Alex is very naturally perceptive and quite specific. We'd be sitting at our boardroom table looking at various options and almost instantly he goes to the combination and picks them out. His ability to get the right mix of colour is terrific."

For Perry, the creative process was similar to creating a fashion range. "The principles that make a good dress work — line, colour, texture, quality, the way that you execute something — it's the same inside a building, in a sense," he



Alex Perry-designed block

says, drawing parallels between the two disciplines.

Philip Vivian, director at Bates Smart Architects, which designed Melbourne's Crown Metropol and Sydney's Four Seasons, agrees with the sentiment but adds: "It takes years of dedication to understand the effects of line, colour and texture in a good dress; and the same is true of a good building.

"While fashion tends to be transient by nature, buildings are built to last. If a designer recognises this then they will aim for something that is not a passing fashion. Design and creativity is a way of thinking, rather than a



body of knowledge. There is no reason architects couldn't collaborate with a fashion designer.

"The legitimacy and integrity will depend on the design that is produced."

Working closely with Cottee Parker Architects from his project's inception, Perry maintains it was entirely a collaborative process from the ground up.

"People sometimes don't understand the distinction between a collaboration and a straight-out sponsorship. I haven't endorsed this. I designed these interiors; I selected everything that goes into them; I had input in the way that they were shaped, so there's a design integrity there.

"So at the end of the day, once this is built I can stand outside it with 150 per cent confidence that these are Alex Perry interiors."

The Alex Perry Residential identity features on the exterior

signage in addition to logos on concrete, screenings and pergolas throughout the property.

Mark Ritson, branding professor at Melbourne Business School and adviser to luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton, Fendi, Dior and Hennessy, says that, from a marketing perspective, Perry's brand extension is likely to be a commercial success.

"Within brand equity you're buying two things," Ritson says. "First, brand awareness. There's a significant proportion of the target market for this property that will have heard of the Alex Perry brand and I'd argue that's in the 40-50 per cent range and that's pretty good.

"And the other issue is: what do you think of when you think of Alex Perry? The answer will probably come back to certain associations such as taste, fashion and being trendy. And why that's im-

portant is because there doesn't need to be a practical connection. The high-end associations can be transferred across."

Renowned for his flamboyant personality, Perry is mindful of how people may perceive his interior design sensibility. "I think that when a lot of people think of me they expect that I would live in a Liberace-style house, dripping in chandeliers," he says.

"But my interior aesthetic is solid and clean. I like things to feel expensive. I like the stone counters to be thick and wide.

"I want that sense of luxury. It's not that it's tricky with cornices and panelled walls but there's a classicism about it.

"Clean, beautiful, solid, good finishes: that's what I've tried to imbue on this rather than walking in the Grand Palais in Paris."