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October 17, 2017

The timeless appeal of Toorak



The much-beloved Toorak Road. Photo: Domain

In recent years, Toorak, Melbourne's quintessentially blue ribbon suburb, has taken a turn for the hip. The Toorak Village shopping strip along Toorak Road, sometimes called "the Rodeo Drive of Australia", has welcomed cafes Townhouse and Yardmill to the mix, and their good coffee, innovative food and cool interior design have helped bring a fresh young generation to the neighbourhood. A few blocks away on Malvern Road, hip boutiques, such as the bazaar-like Husk and on-trend Grace with its own espresso bazaar provide an array of fashion inspiration.

Additionally, Toorak has an artistic side. Each year during May and the first half of June, the Toorak Village Sculpture Exhibition sees shop windows and the street itself morph into a pop-up public art gallery, exhibiting almost 100 contemporary Australian works. Last year, the event won an award at the Mainstreet Australia Awards, which recognise and celebrate the vibrancy of traditional retail strips and main streets. Additionally, there's also the Toorak Village Art Walk every October.

This combination of contemporary lifestyle and arts culture is one of many reasons Toorak is Melbourne's most prestigious suburb.

"It has that cache," says Domain Group chief economist Andrew Wilson. "It's also a suburb that offers plenty of amenity. It's got good access through train, tram and of course the freeway into the city and it does have adjacent parklands which give it a little bit of a leafy feel as well to an inner suburban environment," he says, adding that nearby private schools, medical, commercial and retail all add to the appeal.

Located south-east of the city, the 3142 postcode is Melbourne's **most expensive suburb**. Famed for its mix of established period homes and more modern mansions, Wilson believes Toorak is "back in town" when it comes to the property market; strong growth last year revived it after having a quieter period post-GFC.

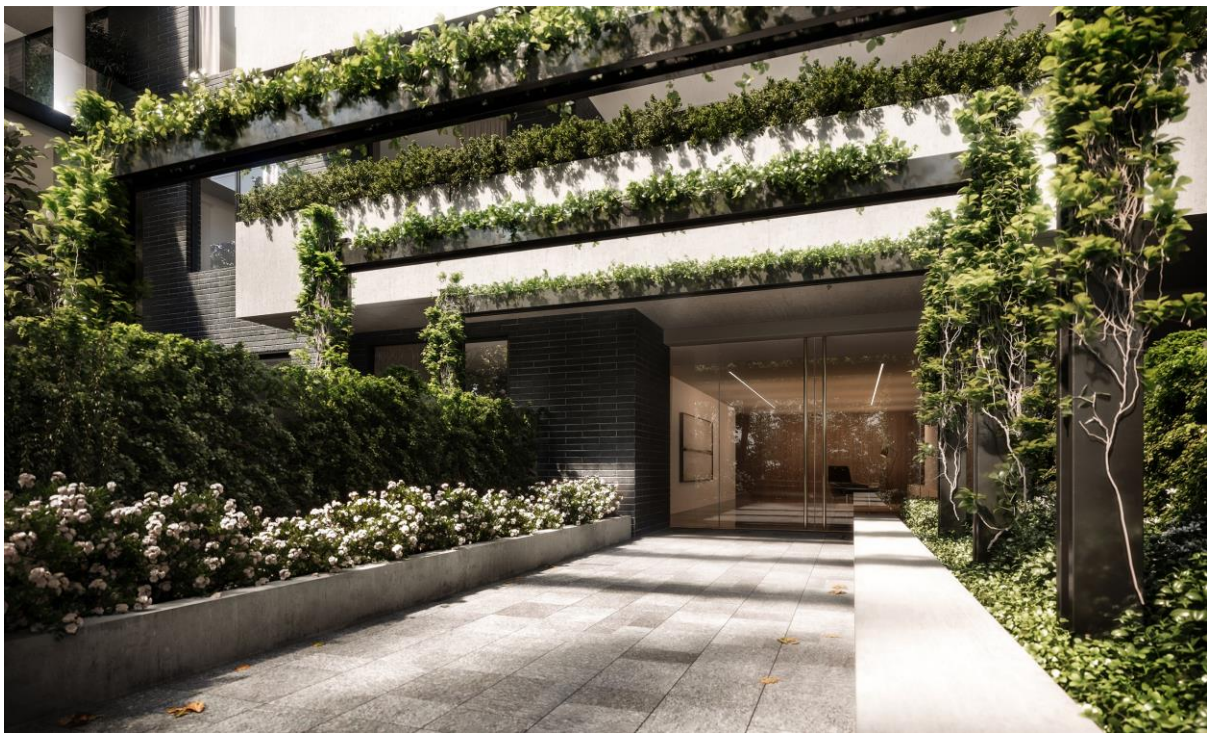
"We had median house price **up by 30 per cent** to just under \$4 million, and that's a very big number ... over the six months ending December," says Wilson.

A new state record was set in December for the **most expensive home** ever sold when 9 Towers Road went for \$26.25 million. While Toorak is seeing "some movement at the station" in terms of turnover, not all who are selling their massive homes want to move out of the neighbourhood.

"This is the conundrum, of course, because the issue we have is that there's still quite tight restrictions for development in these low rise established areas," says Wilson. "The issue in all of Melbourne's leafy eastern suburbs is that there's plenty of demand for medium density property but there are very significant roadblocks to development and it's very tough to get a development through in Stonnington and Boroondara," he explains.

Chapter Group has been successful in that regard. The local developers recently purchased two lots of land on the corner of Orrong Road and Springfield Avenue, where they will be creating 19 residences over four levels, including two penthouses with city views, mansion-style foyers and exceptionally large living areas. Penthouse residents will also have the luxury of master bedroom suites with spacious walk-in-robos, a butler's pantry as well as Dada kitchens by Italy's Molteni group and climate-controlled wine cellars.

“The brief was basically to provide a quality of living that would not compromise the ingredients that you would get in a mansion, but on a smaller scale,” says Tisha Lee, principal of K2LD Architects, the firm responsible for the architecture and interiors of The Springfield. “They really wanted to make sure that we weren’t providing what people traditionally think of as apartments, but rather providing homes in this beautiful garden setting.”



Artists' impression of The Springfield's entrance. Photo: Supplied

The original property included a large private garden, where the former owner, an older lady, often held parties. “What we want to do is reference that spirit of what the garden was previously,” says Lee.

The design was inspired by master architect Frank Lloyd Wright and his famous Falling Water.

“What he does really well is fit buildings into their context really beautifully. One of the things we were really passionate about doing was turning the site into a garden that people could appreciate from the outside,” Lee says.

While the apartments – which will range in size from 180 to 450 square metres – should hold broad appeal, the design isn’t as masculine as some other developments, and has a softer, more feminine sense of style. Chapter Group hopes The Springfield will be particularly attractive to Toorak residents who are downsizing, offering the luxury their former mansions provided but without the maintenance they required.

“A garden is such a beautiful part of grounding your house and we wanted to make sure that same idea finds itself in these residences as well. So even though you may be living in a smaller version of what you had before, you’ve still got that idea of the gated garden, you’ve got beautiful established trees and foliage around which provide that sense of privacy,” Lee says of the external foliage walls and landscaped balconies.

Internally, “it was a no compromise approach to design,” says Lee. Generous living spaces, entrance foyers, laundry rooms, often absent in other apartment developments, will be features of **The Springfield**. There’ll also be wall space for family photos and, handily, given the location on Orrong Road is walking distance from Toorak Village, artworks.



Artists' impression of The Springfield's interior design. Photo: Supplied