

THE CITY — POPULATION 7 MILLION

Modern suburbia



CAROLINE JAMES looks at what type of homes and which suburbs we'll be living in by 2050

IF STREET auctions still happen on Saturdays across Melbourne in 2050, nervous buyers may gather outside concrete pods, apartment towers and underground houses, ready to sign \$1 million deposit cheques if their bids are successful.

Today, in part two of the *Sunday Herald Sun's* series on what Melbourne could look like with seven million residents, we examine our most precious assets — our homes.

What will they look like; what will we sacrifice; what will it cost to buy quality?

Heritage home-lovers need not fret. Australia's auction capital will continue offering "period" homes, pre-dating 1999, industry heads claim.

But the pundits expect the number of original homes pre-dating 1980 will shrink as land becomes scarce and demand for denser housing on subdivided lots grows.

"I cannot see us completely moving from our desire for a single-fronted house in the suburbs," Lord Mayor Robert Doyle said. "The single-fronted house on the suburban block will still be our central imperative. But there is no way it will be as big as it is today in our new suburban areas."

Demographer Bernard Salt — who predicted last week Melbourne would change from a "fried egg" layout with one main CBD to a "scrambled egg" of several city hubs — continued his egg metaphor this week. He said that as the city approached 2050, "we are going to see the 'podification' of our urban landscape" and live in "egg" homes.

"Hard" concrete front

facades with hi-tech security would become the norm, Mr Salt predicted. A benefit of such ugly buildings is that they could be slotted into any odd-shaped bare land in the inner suburbs.

"These homes with hard shells will be very unattractive to ward off unwanted attention," he said. "Fronts of houses will be somewhere to pull your car up and there will be a roller door through which you will access your beautiful private sanctuary inside."

But Real Estate Institute of Victoria spokesman Robert Larocca says "the vast bulk" of housing stock will not change beyond recognition.

"If you look at Melbourne's suburbs up to 20km from the CBD, it is predominantly housing that was built decades ago and there will always be ongoing renovations to reflect advancements in technology and our environmental concerns," Mr Larocca said. "What this essentially means is the outer facades of our houses will not change — what may change is what we do inside our homes."

New house designs in outer suburbs would change as attitudes to space-saving evolved, Mr Salt said.

"We will move away from all these rooms — separate living rooms, dining rooms, family rooms — to more open-plan designing," he said. "Homes may become one big room that can be adjusted to reflect a family's changing needs and size."

Gardens and garages will become lesser priorities as buyers accept smaller blocks in return for smaller prices.

Mr Salt sees the end of separate laundries replaced by Euro-style built-in facilities.



Still favoured: Housing on the suburban block will remain our central imperative, says Lord Mayor Robert Doyle.

"This idea of having a whole room for washing clothes is growing out-of-date," he said.

"As homes become smaller, people will decide they would prefer using that space for other things, like home gyms."

"We will see, by the 2020s, the original houses of Box Hill, Monash, all the way to the Kingston municipality, places developed in the '50s and '60s, start vanishing. When the original inhabitants are dead and the new generation come in,

These homes with hard shells will be very unattractive to ward off unwanted attention

DEMOGRAPHER BERNARD SALT

they will say 1000sq m is too generous, let's build two townhouses or a townhouse and some units on the block."

Average homes built today are 40 per cent bigger than homes built in the 1970s, according to VicUrban chief executive Pru Sanderson.

Yet average home block sizes have shrunk to 512sq m and will continue shrinking.

Green thumbs will pay for the privilege of gardens, REIV chief Enzo Raimondo predicts.

Land prices are tipped to double every seven to 10 years. Today's median house price in Melbourne is \$540,500 and that means the city's house price — which is directly linked to the underlying value of its land — is poised to rise to almost \$9 million by 2050.

Average apartment prices are set to reach more than \$7 million, so with Melbourne

swelling by about 1700 people a week, according to ABS figures, rising land values in established suburbs will motivate existing owners to sub-divide.

"This infill development is already a trend — just look at the number of times a single weatherboard house on a quarter acre block is replaced by three or four two-storey townhouses," Mr Raimondo said.

A trend towards sub-division: With Melbourne's population swelling, expect to see existing owners to sub-divide and add townhouses such as these (above).

Ms Sanderson said: "Large gardens will still be in the mix for people who want a big backyard. But so, too, will be an increasing amount of smaller housing and lots for people whose lifestyles do not suit or require large private spaces."

With growing calls for more affordable housing options — last week Mr Raimondo warned the median house price could hit \$1 million by 2015 — pressure could mount on schools and universities to develop their valuable land parcels, Mr Salt said.

It is an idea backed by Urban Development Institute of Australia (Victoria) chief executive Tony De Domenico.

"Why should we limit our use of schools' land to just these school buildings?" Mr De Domenico said.

"We could mix student accommodation with aged-care accommodation and other forms of housing and develop unused land on campuses."

"It is already happening in California. You would make La Trobe (the UDIA boss is on its board) its own planning authority. Imagine a home at the University of Melbourne."

Other future housing ideas touted by Mr De Domenico include:

BUILDING "vertical" retirement homes above rail stations.

SHRINKING home designs as entertainment options outside the home — and public transport — expand.

GARAGES reducing in size, as will backyards, as blocks become smaller.

FIVE-PLUS bedroom McMansions losing favour with home buyers.

UNDERGROUND housing at transport hubs.

REDUCING apartment costs by axing car spaces.

"We may follow the lead of overseas cities like Milan, Seattle, Portland and see unit block body corporates offering a small number of electric cars and parking spaces for residents to rent if cars are needed," Mr De Domenico said.

"We are moving away from the old 500sq m box in the suburbs with four bedrooms and two garages."

"And when you think about how badly we use our rail stations... I mean we have all this untapped space underground and why don't we build some housing on top?"

Planning Minister Justin Madden agreed Melbourne must develop a more varied mix of housing stock to satisfy its diverse households.

"In a lot of people's minds, when they think of new fringe suburbs, their views are based on what was happening in the '50s and '60s when they built the houses and the rest came later," Mr Madden said.

"I grew up in Airport West, an outer suburb in its day, where the houses were built and the services came along later. That will not be the case moving forward."

The final word belongs to Mr Salt, who says home values can only head in one direction as Melbourne nears 2050.

"The value of every property will increase because when you contain a city within a perimeter, it creates a pressure cooker if you keep pushing people in," Mr Salt said.

"Pakenham won't feel as remote, as desolate as there will be grand old oak trees like you find in Camberwell."

"You may feel like you live on the edge of town."

"But by 2050 your children or grandchildren will be inheriting what feels like living in the Burwoods of today."