



# Intuitive Apartment Living

From a promising career in law to developing a new standard of high-density living, Steven Yu is changing the face of Sydney's residential market.

Images by Scott Ehler



As featured in  
*The CEO Magazine*  
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Technology continues to become more pervasive and intelligent as time goes by. Phones have turned into miniature computers and there are software apps for basically every need people can come up with. So why hasn't similar technology been incorporated into Australia's residential market? We've been so focused on the technological advancement of mobility that we've neglected the domain that means the most to us: our homes.

This trend is not an international standard; numerous homes across Asia have integrated technology to make living more streamlined and convenient. Automation technology is slowly making its mark on the local market, but one developer has revolutionised the way technology and home services can create a new lifestyle for high-density dwellings.

CEO of Longton Property Group  
Steven Yu began his career as a

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lawyer before launching one of the most innovative developers in the national sector. "I didn't see the transition from law to property development coming myself," Steven explains. "I think that's the beauty of life: you never know where it will take you to. A few years back, I was at law school and working as a lawyer. Now I'm in property development, which I believe gives you more satisfaction. In law, you work on documentation, fight court cases, and draft hundreds of pages of legal documents, and you never really get any satisfaction out of it. Property development is something quite different: you build apartments and deliver a home to someone, and that is quite satisfying and the thing that has really brought me into this sector."

The satisfaction of providing homes for people isn't the only motivator behind Steven's career choice. Steven enjoys high quality when it comes to décor and design, which has been a major element of Longton's developments. "I was

reading an article on the plane that said, 'The competitiveness of the product depends on how unique the product is because you have to compete with similar competitors,' so I started thinking about how we could make our developments 'more unique'."

The other defining aspect of Longton's development comes from the seamless integration of technology. "I was looking into home automation and using iPads and iPhones to control the lights with a simple touch, and that really makes life easier," Steven notes. "Then we started incorporating some of the home technology into our first project, Futra. That was very successful; it was a small development of 54 apartments, and 90 per cent was presold in about a month, so that was good."

Following the successful pre-sales of Futra in Mascot, many were impressed by the use of in-home technology, but others were turned off by it. "They were concerned about the cost, the maintenance, >





and whether it would be easy to use,” Steven highlights. “Once they experienced the app, we started receiving additional requests on smart services, and that has become the focal part of my career: the birth of iButler.”

The development of iButler was a defining moment for Steven and Longton Property Group. It’s an iPad and iPhone app that allows optional automation for Longton’s residents to manage and book a host of different home services with ease. “iButler is simply a lifestyle revolution, a platform for your ultimate convenience, services, and goods. Life is busy; enjoy what matters.

“We tried to put in services that you will need such as babysitting, building services, car washes, chiropractors, massage, groceries, dry-cleaning, home cleaning, personal training, and take-away. One key part of this software is its simplicity and useability. It has to be easy to use for whoever is making the booking.

“Let’s say you’re booking a cleaner. We have a list of cleaners to choose from so you can see which one you prefer. Then we give you the timetable of that cleaner with a real-time availability schedule. You can also add a note such as the Samsung Digital Smart Lock temporary passcode you have created for your front door so you don’t have to wait around for your home cleaner to come by, nor do you have to give them a key to access your home. You can also add additional notes in there like, ‘Fold my clothes’. You pay online and then your cleaning has been organised. It’s so easy.”

As ubiquitous and simple as this technology is, people still carried misconceptions about it. “People think it’s hard to use and expensive, but it’s not. With the Avantra building, we have more than 300 residents, and more than 200 residents in Uptown. Together, we represent 500 households. Can you imagine how much you can

save on services if you are negotiating on behalf of a large group of clients? You’ll get a lower price with the convenience of having your chiropractor, masseuse, or personal trainer come to your home, and you still get a better rate.

“The third misconception is that this will increase strata costs, but it won’t. This isn’t part of strata; it’s separate and optional. While most of the services available through iButler are in-home services, others such as dry-cleaning and groceries require a delivery point. We’ve developed a partnership with Woolworths for groceries. All you have to do is choose your items and proceed,” Steven says. “Once that’s done, you receive an automatic SMS that says, ‘Your groceries are ready’. You can then pick up your dry-cleaning, groceries, or parcel delivery direct from the lockers in the basement. Delivery doesn’t cost a thing because the 300 apartments are treated as one order, so you can order a bottle of milk and have it delivered for free. I think this is the future way for people to live their lives. It’s really convenient for high-density living, and it’s for individuals who actually want more time to do things they want to do. We’re helping people squeeze time out of their busy lives. I really think it’s a win-win for everyone.”

Another industry-changing feature that has been included in Longton’s recent developments is iCommunity. “The way iCommunity works is really



simple,” Steven highlights. “We set up a master Twitter account as well as Twitter accounts for individuals. Because we’ve got the iButler and iCommunity apps, we install a free iPad for every resident with a preset social media account. When you tweet, all the messages will appear on the master Twitter account. We’ve put a public screen in the lobby, so residential announcements, local events, birthday parties, fundraising events, or gym classes all appear on the notice board in the lobby as well as on their device.”

Steven notes that this idea of technology-integrated living is modelled on the conveniences of Asian lifestyle. “I spend a bit of time in Beijing, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. Residential developments in Asia are always designed with restaurants, convenience stores, and dry-cleaners within the community,” he explains. “Australia is not like this. But people in Beijing have little telephone directories where you can call a dry-cleaner and ask to have clothes delivered. Delivery is a

## Avantra iCommunity

Avantra iCommunity is a new 309-apartment development at Mascot that will be one of the world’s first high-density complexes to deliver 100-per-cent natural ventilation and natural light to every habitable room. The lift cores within the atria open to the sky. On alighting from a lift, residents will access their apartments via suspended walkways, sheltered from rain by a glass rooftop ‘lid’. These full-height atria resemble ‘windpipes’ that capture and circulate cool air to apartments, reducing the need for air-conditioning. The ‘windpipes’ will also help naturally illuminate each building, and allow views to show through. Architect Brent Marvin of MD+A describes the overall design concept for Avantra as ‘streets in the sky’.

“Avantra is a breakthrough in traditional architecture,” Steven says. “We’ve created a world first by duplicating the concept of the small suburban street and reassembling its elements vertically. We have six metres between front doors, which is typical of a small lane, and we have pocket parks at each level where residents can sit in the sun.

“We understand our residents’ needs to connect and be part of the community. Within the building, we have areas to work as well as communal socialising and entertaining zones with full-scale pools and barbecue areas. But instead of these being spread out at ground level, we have designed them in the sky.”

## Uptown

The Uptown apartments are located in the heart of Roseville, surrounded by three national parks, all within 10 kilometres distance of Sydney CBD and one kilometre from Chatswood shopping centre.

Uptown is where luxury meets technology, featuring home automation and iButler, the ultimate lifestyle provider. “Sydneyiders appreciate their lifestyles, and we aim to give them their time back by taking care of inconveniences,” Steven explains. “Our clientele is astute, so we have to give them top-quality appointments and finishes, which we do at excellent value. Our apartments are designed to enrich daily life, and we are doing everything possible to provide an unparalleled lifestyle for our residents.”

common thing, but no-one does it in Australia. Whatever the restriction is, we have to compromise on the lifestyle, but we’ve streamlined the whole delivery and home-services part so everyone can enjoy that lifestyle.”

Whether it’s the services, the technology, the quality of the finishes, or the sheer simplicity of design, Longton has meticulously sourced and planned out the individual elements that go into its developments. “The designer we’re actually using is Archer + Wright, which is an award-winning interior-design company,” Steven notes. “We are also using MD+A Architects and 360 Degree Landscape for Avantra and Uptown. With finishes, we’re using the Samsung intercom system. The intercom is actually unique in the way that you can register your credit card and open the door with it, so you don’t need an extra card to get access to the main building.

“When it comes to the doors, there is fingerprint, password, or

traditional key. But we try to make the whole thing keyless, even with the car park, where we use a licence-plate-recognition system. For all the tapware, we’re using Grohe from Germany and either DeLonghi or Miele for the appliances.”

In setting a new standard for high-density living in Sydney, Longton is hopeful for the future and will continue producing superior-quality residences. “I think the fundamentals are still the location and the quality of the projects, and we’re adding lifestyle to that.”

The residential market has gone through some difficult times and appears stagnant in most urban centres across the country. New ideas and features are necessary to garner new interest and investment. Longton Property Group is breathing a breath of fresh air into the market and is sure to develop some unique and intuitive residences in the market. •

