

BIRTHDAYS

GEORGE LUCAS

Born in California in 1944, he wrote and produced the blockbuster *Star Wars* series, including its 2005 Sydney spin-off *Revenge Of The Sith*. He also produced the three *Indiana Jones* films.

DAVID REYNE

Australian singer, actor and reporter born in Africa in 1959. He made his mark in music with The Chantoozies and starred in TV series *Sweet And Sour* and *The Flying Doctors*. He is now on the Channel 10 Sunday chat show *9am With David And Kim*.



CATE BLANCHETT

Born in Melbourne in 1969, she graduated from NIDA and started acting in theatre. She made her feature film debut in 1997 in *Paradise Road*. Her other films include the *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy and *The Aviator*, for which she won an Oscar in 2005 for best supporting actress.

ADA NICODEMOU

Born in Sydney in 1977, she began her television acting career at 13 and has been a regular on soaps from *Heartbreak High* to *Home And Away*. She married chef Chrys Xipolitas in February.



ON THIS DAY

1796 English physician Edward Jenner gives the first smallpox vaccination, to

Sydney's long rise to heights of fashion

The city has been moving up in the world for a century. TROY LENNON reports on apartment living

They say the Australian dream is a home on a reasonably sized block of land. But that does not mean apartment living is Australia's nightmare. More and more residential development in Sydney is going upwards rather than outwards, as the last few patches of land in the suburbs become dormitory estates.

While there seems to have been a spate of high-rise apartment building in recent times, apartments blocks have long had a presence in Sydney. Yet the history of the high rise in Australia has often been ignored.

Now a new book and an exhibition at the Museum of Sydney, both titled *Homes In The Sky*, focus on the more concentrated form of urban living (see cl@ssmate box for details of exhibition and book).

Apartment blocks were born of necessity and convenience. In the 1800s terrace houses proliferated in the inner city, making use of whatever space could be found. With shared walls, no front yard and usually featuring a tiny staircase to a second and even third storey, these cramped dwellings made sense because they made the most of the limited space available.

By the beginning of the 20th century, improvements in building techniques and the use of materials such as steel and concrete were making it possible to build much higher. Many people thought this was the solution to some of the chaos of slum areas. Problems such as the plague in *The Rocks* in 1900



Rising fashion . . . Wyldefel Gardens, Wylde St, Potts Point, in 1937. Left: The Albany apartment block in Macquarie St, Sydney, in 1925. It was demolished so Martin Place could be extended. Below: acclaimed architect Harry Seidler in 1995.

Main picture: MAX DUPAIN



ON THIS DAY

1796 English physician Edward Jenner gives the first smallpox vaccination, to 8-year-old James Phipps, in Berkeley village, Gloucestershire.

1831 The first steamship to operate in Australian waters, *Sophia Jane*, arrives at Port Jackson from Britain under sail. It then begins a Sydney-Newcastle service in June.

1855 A branch of the Royal Mint opens in central Sydney. It would operate continuously for 71 years.

1943 A Japanese submarine sinks the Australian hospital ship *Centaur* off Brisbane. Only 64 of the 332 people on board survive.

1948 Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion reads Israel's declaration of independence at Tel Aviv.



1984 Australia's first \$1 coins are released into circulation. The coins gradually replace \$1 notes.

1991 Winnie Mandela, wife of anti-apartheid campaigner Nelson Mandela, is sentenced to six years in jail by Rand Supreme Court for her part in the kidnap of four youths. The sentence is cut on appeal to a fine.

1986 Treasurer Paul Keating warns on Sydney radio that large trade deficits could make Australia a "banana republic".

2000 Swimmer Ian Thorpe breaks the 200m world record, during Olympic trials at Homebush Bay. It is his sixth world mark in 10 months.



By the beginning of the 20th century, improvements in building techniques and the use of materials such as steel and concrete were making it possible to build much higher. Many people thought this was the solution to some of the chaos of slum areas. Problems such as the plague in The Rocks in 1900, as well as the crime, congestion and general squalor, prompted a rethink of urban planning.

By 1900 the depression of the 1890s was over and trade was beginning to pick up, resulting in a population increase — particularly around port areas. Plans were drawn up to build a series of large tenement buildings in The Rocks to house workers. Each building would cover a city block and house about 4000 people.

High-rise tenements of six or seven storeys were already a feature of cities such as New York, London, Glasgow and Berlin. But Sydney was more resistant to the potential charms of multi-storey housing. Although there were supporters, others complained it would cause a whole new set of problems.

The 1908-09 Royal Commission for the Improvement of the City of Sydney concluded that flats were not for Sydney, that they would "never do other than burden the rates and produce a race of feeble physique that can never be the backbone of the nation".

They went instead with more terrace-style workers' flats.

While The Rocks was spared five-storey potential vertical slums, apartment buildings of a more salubrious kind were creeping into the area. In 1900, what is believed to be the first apartment block in the American style, was built on Windmill St. It is still there today.

In Potts Point, the first Manhattan-style apartment opened in 1913. The nine-storey, red-brick building was the tallest in the area for some time and had its own lifts. It inspired other builders to plan apartments projects in this part of the city.

The first large tenement housing estate was built at Chippendale in 1914. Engineer John Bradfield, known for his later work on the Harbour Bridge, said "these flats are certainly well built" but he complained about the lack of greenery and the tendency for people to hang their washing on the balconies. World War I prevented the council from building all of the 134 flats which had been proposed.



These apartment blocks were small buildings by comparison to what we would call high-rise. But when the 52m-tall Culwulla Chambers was built from 1911-12 it caused a storm of protest that Sydney would be swamped by American-style high-rise. This resulted in legislation to limit the height of buildings to 100ft (30.48m) above street level.

The building of high-rise apartments for workers stalled during the 1920s and '30s. But apartment living was gaining cachet among the middle class and the well-heeled who fancied themselves modernists and bohemians. Concentrations of flats in Darlinghurst, Potts Point and Kings Cross created a sort of bohemian village, attracting not only artists, poets, musicians and actors but also criminals.

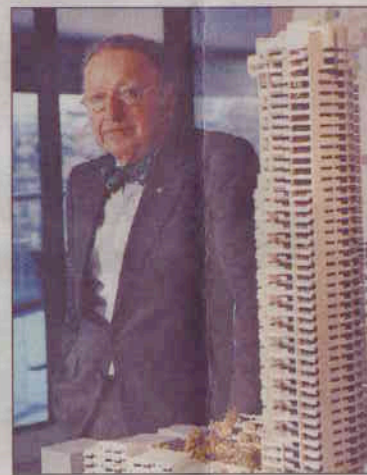
Poet Kenneth Slessor recounted to his mother that the idea of his brother taking a flat "was only one step away from announcing he was going to shack up with a prostitute".

Architects often employed the latest ideas in design to create comfortable urban living spaces. They showed off their debt to modern style in art-deco apartments, such as the 1934 Birtley Towers and the Mont Clair apartments in Darlinghurst.

For middle-class women a flat liberated them from much of the drudgery of looking after a house and garden. Not that they were all devoid of vegetation. In the 1930s

Rising fashion . . . Wyldel Gardens, Wylde St, Potts Point, in 1937. Left: The Albany apartment block in Macquarie St, Sydney, in 1925. It was demolished so Martin Place could be extended. Below: acclaimed architect Harry Seidler in 1995.

Main picture: MAX DUPAIN



cl@ssmate

ACTIVITY: See the *Homes In The Sky* exhibition and design an apartment block of the future.

PLACE: *Homes In The Sky*, Museum of Sydney. An exhibition about apartment living. See www.hht.net.au/museums/mos/main for details.

BOOK: *Homes In The Sky*, by Caroline Butler-Bowdon and Charles Pickett (Miegunyah, \$59.95). A history and pictorial survey of apartment living in Australia.

spoken critic of the bland rows of flats being built in the suburbs.

The apartment-building boom struck an obstacle in the 1970s with green bans imposed by unions on some building projects. A plan to turn the terrace houses in The Rocks into a high-rise development was thwarted, as were other high-rise projects in Kings Cross. It is believed green-ban supporter Juanita Neilsen, journalist heir to the Mark Foy fortune, was killed in 1975 for her opposition to high-rise development around Kings Cross.

Although many still crave the suburban cottage with a lawn, attitudes to high-rise have changed in the past few decades. Urban sprawl and its resultant infrastructure problems has led to attempts to lure people back into residential developments in the city.

Today's apartment blocks, however, are huge compared with Sydney's first flats. They are mini-cities unto themselves, with as many residents as some towns.

About 70 per cent of new housing construction in Sydney is multi-unit residential developments. A third of Sydney's population live in medium- or high-density housing.

This has brought plenty of opposition from people who feel the character of their suburbs is being destroyed, but the trend is expected to continue despite our wistful dreams of a house and backyard.