

BRINGING BACK COMMUNITY THROUGH STRATA LIVING **(In Australia)**

Growing up I remember being part of a community, whilst I had my parents and siblings as my direct family, the whole town lived as a small extended family community. The community support system assisted greatly in general living from; everyone pitching in with busy bees to build a shed or fence, barbeques and social activities such as watching the football and community dances. Even so far as Santa and the Easter Bunny travelling the streets with lollies and eggs for the children. If you didn't know someone, you at least knew of them. As time has gone by, the way people live has changed, the general public are becoming isolated, not even knowing their next-door neighbours in suburbia. Society has created little niches of their own space. Families are not living close together anymore as they travel further away for work. The community support system for living has decreased. The need for creating a little space away from everyone has created an insular society. Strata living is changing this. Strata living is bringing back community.

Strata living allows us to have our own space, and yet be part of a community also by having neighbours living nearer. From the simple duplex, to the larger apartment blocks, our neighbours are closer and as such we are more inclined to know them, even if it is only to say hello and wave as we pull in from work. We all need our space, and our privacy at times, this insulates us from other people's lives and drama when we want to be left alone to enjoy our own quiet space after a hectic day. Strata living makes it possible to have this quiet space and also the close community around: a true benefit for security and peace of mind to know assistance if needed, is not far away.

There are different kinds of strata living. This accommodates for different needs with regards to how much or how little of the quiet space as opposed to community we desire around ourselves. For the person who prefers a more insular life, something from a duplex to a small group of individual abodes with a shared driveway may be preferred. In this way community, can still be encouraged by a simple wave and hello to gatherings for special occasions like birthdays which may include the neighbours. Being close, in this not so crowded strata living also allows for neighbours to assist if going away on a holiday or if sudden illness befalls someone. Chances are the group of neighbours has already met in some form, and someone is willing to help and keep an eye on things, removing mail and watering plants, maybe even looking after a pet.

A more social person has the option of apartment living, possibly in a strip with cafés and restaurants nearby or underneath even. Pools, gyms, barbeque areas, and even common games and movie rooms are now some of the features provided in strata complexes to allow the community to grow together. Being able to socialise without having to travel far is a great benefit. Someone might have plans suddenly change, or find themselves finishing the work assignment they brought home early, maybe they just need a break from being stuck inside. Living in an apartment complex with amenities makes it easy to take a quick break and get back to things, or meet up with neighbours at the gym, in the pool or at the coffee shop downstairs. If it is a nice day out, a group of neighbours may even get together for a barbeque dinner or lunch.

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Australia is a multicultural country and as such, getting to know neighbours through cultural events also assists with understanding different ethnic origins. Allowing for different cultural celebrations not only brings the strata community closer together, it also assists in the understanding of the different people's behaviour and beliefs through their ethnic upbringing, to bring about a more community orientated Australia. If we live close to someone who is new to Australia, it assists them with understanding of the diverse Australian culture, and in return assists us with understanding theirs and what brought them to Australia. Immigrants living in Australia have the benefit of neighbours close by to assist in their English, and can even help with those Australians to learn another language.

Living in a strata community, I find myself reminiscing the history of my upbringing. Watching the children play together on the community lawn, heading inside for dinner when the evening lights come on, safe and secure within the complex. Parents having time out relaxing with their neighbours, or knowing the neighbours are close by watching out for the children while they get some much-needed housework completed. Barbeques and picnics together, helping with minor maintenance when assistance is needed, getting to know and understand others differences and diversities. The elderly pottering around in the gardens, conversations whilst hanging out the washing, having someone close by to watch the place, pets, plants and collect the mail when needing or wishing to go away.

Whether preference is towards a duplex, a small group of individual apartments, an apartment block or complex, community living within strata is on the rise. The common area living space gives this benefit. Not only do those in strata have their own little private space, they also have neighbours close enough if the need for companionship, or if helpful assistance is ever required. Living in strata is the new way of bringing back the old community spirit which has played a major part in Australia's heritage for the betterment, convenience and prosperity of all Australians.