

A lifestyle of difference

Melbourne's culture is being revealed in a new chain of apartments at Southbank, writes Majella Corrigan

HOTEL tourists should know there is more to Melbourne culture beyond stuffed toy kangaroos and dot paintings of dry creek beds, according to Christina Salvo, operator of Southbank's Aria Hotel and Apartments.

On the verge of launching the reimaged hotel-cum-gallery on City Rd, Ms Salvo said her interior designs would feature bespoke selections across everything local, from etchings to artisan coffee.

Aria's walls will display contemporary art produced by Australians, but in a steep departure from outback bush scenes that other hotels traditionally flaunt.

She believes her artistic point of difference will appeal to investors who want to buy or lease her apartments because they are more than just bland hotel rooms.

Her company owns the freehold of some of the Aria serviced apartments and others are owned by investors.

The business plans to increase its managed portfolio

to 300 apartments in three years with a strategy involving handpicking sites where a minimum of 20 apartments can be bought or leased and marketed under the Aria brand.

Ms Salvo said investors were offered a number of flexible options, from a residential lease with a fixed term agreement where the landlord acknowledged Aria was using the property as serviced accommodation, or a management agreement, where the owner received a percentage of revenue.

Ms Salvo — whose father Mario sold the Europcar brand a decade ago — has come a long way since the days where she was paid by the family business to wash rental cars.

After exiting Europcar, the family went on to develop more than 3000 apartments, and Ms Salvo switched to marketing properties.

Nowadays, she said the serviced apartment sector had a role to play in helping tourists discover Melbourne's



Aria's Christina Salvo is committed to featuring contemporary Australian art in her apartments. Picture: NICOLE CLEARY

Also included in the refurbished rooms would be bespoke furniture pieces, such as locally carved footstools, and even the in-room coffee and tea would be sourced from local suppliers such as South Melbourne's ST. ALI.

Aria has strategically selected staff who will share their favourite Melbourne haunts with guests in a quasi-tour guide role. "Guests will be able to access the people, places and hideaways that aren't in the brochures, and each time they visit there will be new places recommended," Ms Salvo said.

"Soon, my staff and I will do a 'foodie crawl' around City Road to source even more spots our guests might enjoy."

Maps in the rooms will pinpoint the lesser known but highly appealing restaurants, venues, cafes and bars in the area.

The first batch of apartments and lobby will be fully refurbished this month, with other apartments to be completed next year.

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"hidden gems" as well as providing a comfortable place to stay.

In order to show the world this city has more to offer than Aussie cliches, Ms Salvo has enlisted four eclectic artists — Louise De Weger, Kirsten Jackson, Alexandra

Ethell and indie photographer Jeremiah Locke — to create commissions for all rooms at the hotel, with most of the pieces also for sale.

"Supporting local artists by showcasing their works in every apartment is part of the philosophy of bringing

Melbourne's favourite places to visitors," she said.

"I want the Aria brand to be more than a logo."

Ms Salvo said the artwork she looked for was local, modern and came at price points that matched the hotel apartments.