

Close watch on high-rises

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THE building of Torbreck was a spectator sport for Brisbane.

A half-page advertisement in this newspaper in February 1959 made a seductive offer: "A cordial invitation is extended to all interested persons to visit the Torbreck site at 182 Dornoch Terrace, Highgate Hill, and watch the progress of the construction."

But wait, there was more, with a promise of delights to come: "Details will be published later regarding the lift-slab operations."

For stickybeaks with specialist interests, there was a floor-by-floor calendar of upcoming events: "Garden block garage bricklayers begin March 24, third-floor plasterers April 28; tower block 13th-floor joiners October 17, roof finishers October 30."

The number of visitors to the site was so great on Sunday afternoons that the builders had to put up a viewing platform and hire a couple of blokes for crowd control.

Torbreck was a big deal because it was a big structure; it was a giant by 1959 standards, with its 140-plus units, and was a pioneer in the development of apartment blocks in Queensland.

"It has historical significance as the first company-titled multi-storeyed home unit development erected in Queensland based on 1950s North American models," the Queensland Government Environment Protection Agency says in an analysis of our cultural history.

The building was heritage-listed in 2000.

The suburban residential skyscraper idea was so new in the late 1950s that Brisbane City Council regulations didn't even cover that sort of high-density living.

The lift-slab operations that were advertised to woo an audience were a first in this part of the world: the concrete floor slabs were poured on the ground, one on top of the other, and then lifted into place by jacks for the eight-storey Garden Block.

The crowd was entranced.

The real estate spruikers were as relentlessly enthusiastic then, when Torbreck was "the single greatest contribution to home development in Queensland", as they are in today's search for the latest molto trendissimo suburb ("Yeronga is the new Bulimba").

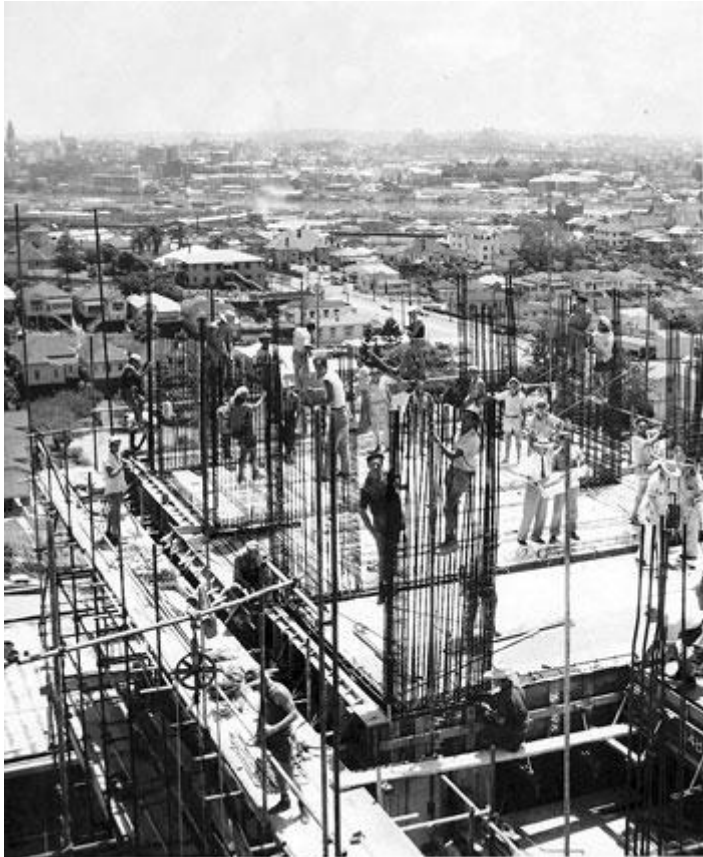
Torbreck was so modern it had unimaginable luxuries such as "automatic lifts with self-opening doors".

Its line-of-sight to Mount Coot-tha meant the TV transmitters there "will seem to link with the Torbreck antenna to ensure the ultimate in television reception", which was a hot-ticket selling point in the year that small-screen broadcasts began in Queensland.

Water was "pumped from the city reservoirs to large storage tanks on the roof . . . treated by the latest in American water-softening equipment".

The hard sell worked.

Most of the units were sold off the plan, although that phrase wasn't yet in use.



EXCITING ... crowds flocked to see the building of Torbreck, the Dornoch Terrace icon, making its commercial success a formality.