

High rise by assembly line

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ARCHITECTURE firm Elenberg Fraser claims to have developed a new factory-based model for building everything from single houses to high-rise apartment blocks that will cut buyers' costs, increase developers' profits — and reduce the need for architects.

The firm has developed an off-the-shelf, predesigned, prefabricated system for houses, hotels, apartments and residential towers using pioneering manufacturing technology developed by another well-known architect, Nonda Katsalidis.

The predesigned building system called Klik will allow developers to preview modular apartment buildings online and the firm hopes it will save 15 per cent of the cost and halve the time it takes to build, Elenberg Fraser director Callum Fraser said.

The system uses modular components that can be pieced together on an assembly line in Brooklyn, in Melbourne's west, using techniques similar to car manufacturing.

Despite the buildings' standardised design and pre-engineered nature, architects would still be needed, architect and *Grand Designs Australia* host Peter Maddison said.

Modular systems had been tried over the years, some with more success than others, he said. "I would be very surprised if it took the market by storm and put all architects in Melbourne out of work."

The firm's ambitious "off-the-shelf" system allows for predesigned houses, multi-level apartments, a high-rise and hotel with either square, linear, C-shape or L-shape bases that can house up to 14 different one-to-three-bedroom apartment types.

Each building was made to look different using a unique facade.

Mr Fraser said the system was being used in the construction of a Melbourne hotel.

"If you're an architect or developer, you can deliver a 75-square-metre apartment using Klik for the same price you can deliver a 65-square-metre apartment using conventional construction," he said.

Katsalidis' Unitted Building technology has manufactured four apartment buildings in Melbourne, including The Nicholson in Brunswick and Little Hero in the city. But each of



An artist's impression of a Klik apartment tower that would start on a factory floor.

those buildings was designed and engineered from scratch, a process that was standardised under the Klik system, Fraser said.

RMIT architecture professor Philip Goad said architects had "long dreamed" about being able to mass produce housing.

"Unitted building is something the construction industry needs to embrace," he said.

A modular UB Australia apartment will be placed in Federation Square today as part of The New Joneses sustainable living event.