

Our tallest tower, at 388m, is highly pre-fab

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The nation's flattest capital city will in a little over three years boast its most vertiginous skyline after Victorian government approval was given for the 388m Australia 108 tower.

Expected on completion to be the tallest structure in the southern hemisphere and the 19th tallest in the world, it will be the first Australian tower to rise higher than New York's Empire State building. The green light for the \$600 million Australia 108, at 70 Southbank Boulevard, continues Melbourne's vertical enhancement following the completion in 2006 of the 297m-high Eureka Tower amid a bristling skyline.

Sydney's only rival is the 309m Sydney Tower. Sydney's tallest inhabited building is the 243m Citicorp centre. Brisbane also boasts a 243m residential tower, named Soleil. All are dwarfed by Dubai's sky-skewering 829m Khalifa Tower.

Australia 108 also marks the first use in a high-rise building of game-changing construction techniques pioneered by Melbourne firm Fender Katsalidis, which also designed Eureka Tower. Many of the 108-storey tower's interior spaces, including 646 apartments, 288 six-star hotel rooms, shops and offices – will be fabricated under cover at a \$10m factory, trucked to the site, craned into place and assembled around a concrete core. Katsalidis anticipates that this system will enable Australia 108 to be completed in three years, a saving of about 25 percent in construction time and cost. The architect has refined these techniques under the arm of a separate but related firm, Unitised Building, and it has been used on several new residential projects in Melbourne. Its Little Hero apartments at Russell Place was built in six months instead of 12 and has been referred to as Melbourne's first instant building.

"This is a great demonstration not just of the system we're using, which has real flexibility and makes a big contribution to productivity, but of the innovation that comes out of Australia and particularly out of Melbourne," a director of the firm, Nonda Katsalidis, told The Australian.

The architect has already been approached to adapt it for use in Singapore and across southeast Asia with Samsung.

"I would like to reduce the cost of construction, make it more efficient and cheaper," he said. "Construction costs are being driven increasingly by high labour costs in this country, and we're sending people up into high-rise buildings to do the work that they can do on the ground. As things stand they spend a lot of time in lifts, and there's a lot of down time. "And when you do things on the ground in safe and controlled conditions it increases the quality of the product."