

Niche market for the fashion conscious

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Few could have foreseen the humble serviced apartment becoming a hot topic for gossip and society columnists. But with more swish boutique outlets being set up that is the trend.

Dinesh Nihalchand and Alex Bent run Kush and have properties a short stroll from SoHo and Central. They soon found themselves posing for the paparazzi at parties to celebrate the success of their venture.

Likewise, mother-and-daughter team Vivien Chan and Anna Mae Koo caught the attention of the *Post's* CitySeen column when they invited the press to view the uniquely cave-style yet modern lobby interiors of their new trendy apartment building V Wan Chai.

So it seems this niche market is here to stay with prospective tenants undaunted by the five-figure monthly rents.

The main attraction of this youthful sector is its appeal to a well-heeled fashion conscious guest who wants to enjoy the more sophisticated side of Hong Kong's nightlife, whether that be in the company of top international DJs spinning at exclusive clubs or sipping cocktails with local film stars.

Despite the chicness portrayed by the marketing machines involved with this new sector, people at the core of the Kush campaign tell of the founding duo's down-to-earth attitude and how their passion for what they do is far removed from the banking mentality of many other property investors.

The Kush pair met up in 2005 and found a shared vision about how their investing strategy should develop. They had in mind a brand defined by style, locality and a way in which urban premises could blend with modern and traditional environments.

"We found that the serviced apartment landscape was very fragmented, boring and generic. There was nothing superior or different about them, so we decided to do something about it," Mr Nihalchand said. "We came up with something we could wrap a brand around - Kush."

After "Kush-ifying" several individual apartments around town, investors they approached saw the potential in the concept, and the



Kush portfolio was born. Each of the Kush buildings has its own personality, but with one thing in common. Mr Bent said: "We wanted to retain the essence of being in Hong Kong. We didn't want to try to be a serviced apartment that you could transport to New York."

Central to catering for guests' leisure time and home comforts, a Kush Envy Card provides access and privileges to the city's best gyms, spas, restaurants and clubs. "We

only team up with the best, the places we would go to," he said. There is also the Kush Go card, a branded Octopus card to give residents instant access to public transport.

Perks are enjoyed by guests at V Serviced Apartments with complimentary access to California Fitness gyms and privileges at some of the best bars and clubs in town. And, with properties in Causeway Bay, Wan Chai and Happy Valley, V Serviced Apartments has set its sights on even more expansion.

Managing director Vivien Chan said: "V is not just about property investment, it is about creating a living experience. With V, I want to build a Hong Kong home-grown brand with uncompromising standards that can add value to the simple bricks and mortar business."

Another boutique serviced

apartment operator, home2home, is finding a niche in the serviced office sector by extending its trendy, innovative concepts to target the many freelancers around town.

Finishing touches are being put to the Izi tower in Hollywood Road, which will house 24-hour work spaces aimed at the creative, from designers and architects, to consultants and copywriters.

For Girish Jhunjhnuwala, home2home's managing director, it is about offering choice to tenants who don't want to be confined by rigid working hours or austere surroundings of the city's mega-offices.

"It's hard to tell when I can finish a working day. Work for many of us is not a set nine to five. It may happen whenever the idea or energy comes - and can often be a Sunday morning," Mr Jhunjhnuwala said.



Kush serviced apartments on Hollywood Road have clean lines and are bright and airy. Photos: Dickson Lee



V Wan Chai: comes with privileges



V Wan Chai: a home-grown brand



V Happy Valley: a living experience