

# The fine art of developing a hotel

By PHILIP HOPKINS

CHARLES Blackman is one of Australia's most famous contemporary artists, best known for his *Schoolgirl* and *Alice in Wonderland* series of the 1950s, which met with critical acclaim.

He has won many prizes and distinctions, culminating in a major retrospective in 1993 and an OBE for services to Australian art in 1997. A portrait of Charles Blackman by Jon Molvig won the Archibald Prize in 1966.

Now, Blackman's works are on display in a new format: a \$100 million, five-star hotel has been named after him, and more than 600 prints in digital reproduction are scattered throughout the building — in the passageways, the foyer and the bedrooms. Adorning the outside facade of the hotel are large reproductions of his works wrapped around with perforated metal.

The Blackman, at 452 St Kilda Road, tucked in behind Airlie Mansion, opens today, and is the third in a series of six art hotels, valued at \$500 million, that is being developed by the Deague family through its development arm, Asian Pacific Building Corporation (APCB). The Cullen and The Olsen were opened respectively last October and March. APCB is restoring Airlie and will sell it later.

The Blackman, with 18 storeys, 209 rooms and two trademark Deague penthouses, has views over Albert Park Lake towards Port Phillip Bay, and if you're high enough, over Fawkner Park. Blackman's daughter, Bertie, will live in the hotel. The CBD is just a short tram ride away.

APCB chief executive, Will

Deague, said a partnership had been forged between The Blackman and the Victorian Arts Centre. "It makes sense — we're both on St Kilda Rd," he told BusinessDay.

The Blackman will have the status of a "preferred hotel" with the Arts Centre, and those who stay there will receive priority ticketing.

The owners of the Belgian Beer Garden in St Kilda Road will run the hotel's two restaurants — a French and an Italian eatery.

The Blackman will have the same services as the other art hotels — an in-house art curator, an art channel and an art library in each room. The suites all have a balcony, kitchen, high-speed internet access, a 42-inch LCD screen and iPod docking station.

Mr Deague said he expected clientele to follow the same patterns as the other art hotels — about half business and the other half tourism. "Corporates tend to dominate during the week, while the leisure market rules on weekends," he said. The Blackman is already 60 per cent booked for its first night.

The opening special is \$169 per night. The Olsen and The Cullen tend to average about \$240 per night on weekends — cheap for a 5-star hotel.

A recent report by LandMark White Group found that demand for hotel rooms and serviced apartments in Melbourne's CBD had been strong in all grades, despite new hotels coming on to the market.

However the report tipped more discounting.

Revenue in the five-star hotel and serviced apartment market is expected to improve, after falling from a peak in 2008.



Charles Blackman is the inspiration behind a new five-star hotel.

PICTURE: LUIS ENRIQUE