When building luxury apartments, it is important for the developer to remain focused on the target market, especially when it comes to features such as home automation. Fortunately, this was very much at the forefront of design considerations when Sammut Developments embarked on the luxury Drift Apartment complex in the Sydney beachside suburb of Cronulla, in conjunction with Cameron Jones Architects and Smart Home Solutions. The 11-apartment development is set over six floors, with two apartments per storey and one large penthouse crowning the top level.

All standard apartments feature three bedrooms, a media room and approximately 80 square-meters of balcony space. The building also includes two basement levels of car parking with a double garage for each apartment, plus a further single garage for each apartment to cater for visitors. All apartments were sold prior to project completion – a sure sign that Sammut had correctly gauged the market – with the penthouse selling for $11 million and the remaining apartments starting at a cool $2 million.

According to Smart Home Solutions Operations Manager and Projects Coordinator, Frank Gergelifi, his company has worked together successfully with Sammut Developments and Cameron Jones Architects on many previous projects. “Sammut always includes automation systems into their developments because it creates a point of difference,” says Gergelifi. “Having worked with Sammut as installer, integrator and electrical/technology consultants, we know from experience that by using Philips Dynalite control solutions it is possible to create a true home automation environment in which lighting, AV systems, security, heating, cooling and motorized blinds are all seamlessly integrated into one control platform.”

Ease of operation
The target market for Drift Apartments is for discerning ‘empty-nesters’ and retirees, many of whom are downsizing from larger homes to maximize their amenities and sense of security, while simplifying their lifestyle. It was understood that many potential residents would already be familiar with home automation systems and would have expectations to match. However, providing smart home systems for a mature market can be quite different compared with the features demanded by younger families.

“The main design criteria for the home automation was for ease of operation, security and consolidation of all integrated systems onto one control platform,” says Gergelifi. “The Dynalite platform is second to none in these respects, offering premium levels of integration into the various building systems and services.”

For a visitor arriving by car, an IP-based intercom in the driveway on the approach to the basement carpark allows communication with the relevant apartment. When the apartment owner grants access to their guest, the garage door is released and a message is sent to the Dynalite system, which illuminates a pathway to the visitor’s garage for that apartment, opens the garage door and automatically switches on the lights. After parking their car, visitors are directed by lights to the managed lift, waiting for them on the appropriate parking level. The lift is then cleared for access to the relevant floor.

The security for the individual apartments is also integrated into the Dynalite control platform, as it was acknowledged that security is a key factor to this target market.
A Dynalite user interface allows the resident to unlock and release the door without even having to turn a handle,” Gergelfi explains. “The keyless entry also includes an external concealed fob reader, which saves the resident from fumbling for keys. Once inside, the door operation is disabled once the security system is armed.”

Individualized apartment
Inside the apartments, the home automation has been configured to maximize simplicity while minimizing unnecessary wall or ceiling clutter. As standard, the lights, blinds, under-floor heating, air conditioning, fireplace and AV systems are all controllable through the Dynalite interface. However, recognizing that even within this target market, residents will have their own preferences, there is also a great scope for ‘individualizing’ each apartment.

As such, each apartment has an extensive structured cabling system in place to allow each owner to decide exactly where they want their TV located, whether they want the AV system to provide music throughout the apartment and exactly how they want their lights to respond. A popular option was for an RTI remote control unit to enable wireless control of all integrated systems from anywhere in the apartment.

“During initial commissioning, standard functions and scenes were programmed into each system, but once the owners had taken up residence, the settings were customized to match their individual dreams and expectations,” says Gergelfi. “Standard lighting scenes include high, medium and low settings for all areas, but additional modes can also be programmed – such as ‘entertaining’, ‘party’ and ‘night’ – which can be selected from a centralized control panel located in the kitchen.”

Behind the scenes, control is achieved through a combination of Dynalite DDLE802 leading-edge dimmers for the halogen and LED lighting circuits and Dynalite relay controllers for the integrated services. User interfaces comprise a combination of single- and double-column DR2P panels, while Dynalite DUS804C universal sensors are used to automatically activate lighting in bathrooms, walk-in-robos, pantries and hallways when somebody is present. An inbuilt system timeclock also allows functions to occur at specified times or relative to sunrise and sunset times.

Award winning
“Each of the ten main apartments has 24 dimmed lighting circuits and 32 relay channels for blind control, access control, heating, cooling and AV systems,” says Gergelfi. “Each apartment is treated as an entirely separate standalone network, with a twelfth network covering the common and outdoor areas.”

From the initial design meetings to project completion, this development lasted for two years. Upon commissioning of the various systems – using Dynalite’s DLightII commissioning tool – in March 2011, all the apartments were occupied immediately, allowing Smart Home Solutions to work with the proud new owners to fine-tune lighting levels, presets and button functionality to meet their own preferences.

From the pre-construction design stage through to final handover and beyond, the close working relationship between the developers, the architect and the integrator enabled the creation of a cost-effective, high-performing solution worthy of the caliber of this luxury development. This was reflected when the development won the prestigious Australia-wide HIA Australian Apartment Project of the Year in 2012.

“Building on this success, we are now working with the same developer and architect on a new project – ‘Breeze Apartments’ – just across the road from the Drift Apartments,” says Gergelfi. “While this will be bigger project, comprising 26 apartments plus a retail space, we will be basing the automation on the very successful design of the Drift Apartments. Naturally, we will use a Dynalite solution as the basis for the integration for this development as this delivers the best functionality and value for money.”