

Taj 'not too large'

By HAYLEY BOLTON

THE war of words over Perth's Taj-on-the-Swan mega mansion is hotting up, with WA's leading architects divided on its merits.

The Indian design has appealed to some architects, including University of WA senior lecturer Christopher Vernon, who said it would be no more out of place than Perth's multitude of Tuscan-style villas.

"I'd much rather look at a building referencing the Taj Mahal than the ubiquitous Tuscan villas studding our suburbs," he said.

The home is being built in Peppermint Grove by WA billionaire couple Radhika and Pankaj Oswal — originally from New Delhi — who own Pilbara fertiliser company Burrup Holdings.

When it is finished in three years, it will be the biggest home in the

country, on the most expensive block.

Mr Vernon said since the building plans were legal, and they had the money to build the palace, they should be left to build in peace.

"Why is it so terrible that they want an observatory?" he asked. "People seem to be happy seeing Tuscan homes dotting the suburbs, so why not Indian? It's a little bit closer to home. It's just attracting criticism because it doesn't fit our 'mould'."

Mr Vernon said West Australians were not happy seeing their multicultural tag reflected in architecture.

"If we are multicultural why do our suburbs and houses all look the same?" he asked. "Wouldn't we expect this multiculturalism to be reflected in our architecture?"

Mr Vernon's response comes after the chief of WA's peak architecture body, Rod Mollett, dubbed the Oswals' Indian-style mansion an "absolute tragedy".

Mr Mollett, the Royal Australian Institute of Architects WA president, told *The Sunday Times* last week: "I think it's a very poor piece of architecture and I can't understand how anyone can need that much space."

But Mr Vernon said: "If the Oswals can afford it and have secured all the necessary planning permissions, then why on earth shouldn't they be entitled to build whatever sort of house they want?"

"And, Mollett's remark 'I can't understand how anyone can need that much space'? When has that been a criterion for good architecture?"



HOT DEBATE: The mansion to be built in Peppermint Grove.