



A new boutique hotel in Sydney, Australia celebrates the heritage of two iconic buildings, with designs by Nic Graham & Associates, Indyk Architects, Fabio Ongarato Design and Woodhead.

QT Sydney

Words: Mandi Keighran Photography: Courtesy of QT Sydney

Sydney is undoubtedly Australia's harbour-side jewel. The first city in Australia to be settled by Europeans, the city crowds around Sydney Harbour, the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House; indeed, alongside koalas and kangaroos there is hardly a more iconic representation of the country. Accordingly, it seems nearly every high-end hotel in Sydney is competing for a prized glimpse of the water. But there's more to Sydney than spectacular harbour views, and there is a new player in town determined to showcase another side of the city's heritage.

The QT Sydney is a much-needed addition to Sydney's tired hotel offerings – and is the first five-star hotel to be built in Sydney in over a decade.

Established in 1868, Gowings was Sydney's first department store chain, and for decades, the building housed tailors, barbers, shoemakers, and other artisans. The neighbouring State Theatre was built in 1927, and is an eclectic mix of Gothic, Italian and Art Deco design. Over the years, the two buildings had been badly refurbished and many of the heritage features had been lost. QT Sydney has reunited the iconic buildings, and ▶



ABOVE: Accessories and decorative items in the Gilt Lounge include mannequins painted by David Bromley, a huge vintage leather rhinoceros found in London, and old theatre stage lights. Italian furniture manufacturer Interna, along with its Shanghai sister company Interna China, was chosen to supply custom-made furniture to selected public areas and guestrooms. Interna supplies tailor-made products and installation services to throughout the Asia-Pacific region, including recent projects in Perth and Melbourne

► restored many of the heritage features. The result is a nostalgic nod to Sydney at the turn of the century, a pastiche of Art Deco and Gothic architecture, bespoke and found objects, with playful touches that speak to a young, creative audience looking for something new. “Each of the QT properties has its own feel based on location,” says Stephen Howard, PR Manager for QT. “This is inner city – very New York-style but Sydney-centric.”

A number of local architects and designers were brought on board to bring the QT vision to life. Local architect Nic Graham – who also worked on the QT Gold Coast and W Hotels in Hong Kong and Shanghai – was responsible for the public areas, including reception, bars, restaurants, and spaQ. Indyk Architects, led by Shelley Indyk, designed the 200 guest suites, while Fabio Ongarato Design

(also known for their work with W Hotels) was commissioned to create whimsical nods to the heritage of the buildings throughout the corridors. Woodhead were commissioned as master architects for the project, and interior designers for parts of the building. The brief to all involved: to create an exciting and unexpected five-star plus boutique hotel, the likes of which had never before been seen in Australia.

“As stand alone buildings, the Gowings and State Theatre buildings were not large enough to be economically viable in terms of adaptive re-use as commercial office buildings, retail, or individual hotels,” says Juliette Churchill, Associate Director at Woodhead. “By linking them, we gave both buildings a new future, with a use that is intrinsically attuned with their history and aesthetic.”

QT describes its hotels as ‘playgrounds for

those who love art, design, fashion, music and food’. From the moment guests step through the Market Street entry, the history of the site is evoked. Greeted by bellhops clothed in dramatic cabaret-style costumes, guests are ushered past the bustling Parlour Lane Café (at the old State Theatre entrance) and into elevators that deliver them to the first floor reception and a guest lounge. The guest lounge is home to ‘QT-ique’ – a retail concept in which guests can purchase quirky items – jewellery, home accessories, even tattoo preserver – which reflect the QT philosophy, and are exhibited in original Gowings display cases.

The 200 guest suites – which are divided into six room types – are spread across the two buildings, with 120 in the State Theatre and 80 in Gowings. Designed by Shelley Indyk, the State Theatre and Gowings rooms are ►



► slightly different in their furnishings and palette. “There are similar elements,” says Indyk. “But the idea was not to make them so different that it didn’t feel like the one hotel. The State rooms have a slightly richer feel, while the Gowings rooms feature beautiful restored tallow-wood floorboards.”

The rooms employ an autumnal palette of reds and yellows, are eclectically furnished, and each features a large bathtub. They speak of the history of the site, and the old Gowings boardroom and chairman’s office have even been converted (heritage protection meant that the bathroom in the boardroom couldn’t be extended to fit a tub, so instead the tub sits on a platform in the room itself). The views from many of the rooms are unusual for Sydney – instead of Harbour views, windows look down city streets, or onto heritage façades. It is astonishing that these New York-

style views exist in Sydney.

Curator Amanda Love worked with QT Sydney on selection of the artwork throughout. From the digital art in the elevators (a contemporary take on Aboriginal dot paintings by Daniel Boyd) to the Grant Stevens-designed video installations in each room, art is a key feature of the hotel’s design.

As Gowings and the State Theatre were not initially connected on any level and each floor level was different, the connection proved challenging for Woodhead. As a result, the two buildings are linked only on two levels – level one, which includes reception and the Gowings Bar & Grill, and the mezzanine level, which houses two meeting rooms and spaQ.

Gowings Bar & Grill shares the same quirky design language as the rest of the public spaces, and careful details pay homage to the history of Gowings. “Even the seats reflect ►

ABOVE: Guest suites have an autumnal palette of reds and yellows, with designs which reference the heritage of the two historic buildings within which they are located