

HAWTHORN TOWN HALL RE-EMERGES AS THE HAWTHORN ARTS CENTRE, HERALDING A NEW ERA OF ARTS & CULTURE IN MELBOURNE'S EAST

On Tuesday 1 October 2013, Melbourne's newest arts centre opened its doors.

After 18 months of redevelopment the former Hawthorn Town Hall was reopened as the Hawthorn Arts Centre. The new Hawthorn Arts Centre is the City of Boroondara's flagship arts venue and exists alongside the municipality's other established cultural facilities, Town Hall Gallery and Kew Court House.

With the vision to create 'a city of harmony where citizens can celebrate, share, express and experience a rich arts and cultural life' (City of Boroondara Arts and Cultural Strategy 2008 - 2013), the aim of the transformation was to preserve the proud heritage of the Hawthorn Town Hall, whilst creating a premier cultural precinct for the wider community.

Hawthorn Town Hall was originally designed by architect John Beswicke in the Second Empire style, and was completed in 1890. In addition to his skills as an architect and designer, Beswicke was an acknowledged draftsman as shown by his other commissions - Malvern, Brighton and Essendon Town Halls, and his mansion houses in Harcourt Street, Hawthorn East where virtually the entire street has been heritage listed.

Second Empire architecture is recognised by its detailed ornamentation and decorative details featuring towers, balustrades, ornate cornices and embellished windows. Large and elaborative porticos clearly designate the position of the main entrance.

With a budget of \$17.9 million, Peddle Thorp Melbourne Pty Ltd., one of Australasia's largest and most established practices, was appointed as the architects for the redevelopment in June 2010.

Virtually every square metre of the building has undergone a transformation of some kind - the foyer to the Main Hall has been completely renovated, a fully operational commercial kitchen has been installed, top floor turrets have been converted into artist studios, forgotten basement spaces into multi-purpose rehearsal rooms. Other changes include:

- Refurbishment of the Main Hall and Chandelier Room including the installation of the latest audio visual, lighting and communications technology;
- A refreshed annex building – with updated façade & entry;
- A relocated and expanded Town Hall Gallery with three exhibition spaces and an additional retail area, *The Emporium by Town Hall Gallery*; and
- A new eatery, Second Empire Cafe, the naming of which pays homage to the building's beautiful Second Empire architecture, and events bar both run by the Centre's in house caterer EPICURE.

Also as part of the redevelopment, many of the spaces in the new Hawthorn Arts Centre have been renamed; some of them in honour of people prominent in Hawthorn's history.

The Centre was officially launched to the community with a three day celebration held from 22-24 November 2013. Celebration events included a VIP cocktail party featuring performances by Rhonda Burchmore, a keynote concert featuring an exclusive collaboration between MSO musician Brett Kelly, The RAah Project and Kylie Auldish and finishing with a

free community open day which welcomed people to enjoy a diverse and eclectic program of performances, workshops and activities held throughout the entire venue.

Since its opening, the Centre had hosted a range of visual and performing arts programs as well as large scale civic events and community and corporate activities. From the Australia Day Citizenship Ceremony and *Marker*, an exhibition celebrating 10 years of acquisitions to the Town Hall Gallery Collection, to an outstanding recital by David Helfgott, the Centre has demonstrated its flexibility, versatility and demand with glowing reports from hirers and audience members alike.

In the months ahead, the Centre looks forward to building on its relationship with old and new audiences within the municipality and across Melbourne.

The Hawthorn Arts Centre is located at 360 Burwood Road, Hawthorn.

More information on the Centre, its programming and spaces for hire can be found online at hawthornartscentre.com.au .