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# SUMMERTIME

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# DRAMATIC ENTRANCE

*Sydney's city centre 'willkommens' a theatrical new hotel that upstages its counterparts with opulent decor, a 'cast' of staff and a decadent dose of humour.*

PHOTOGRAPHER: TONY AMOS PRODUCER/WRITER: LEE TULLOCH



OPPOSITE PAGE: concierge David Clarke. *THIS PAGE, FROM ABOVE LEFT:* the street level cafe/bar; Nic Graham, the designer behind the dramatic public spaces and furniture at QT; brasserie-style Gowings Bar & Grill.



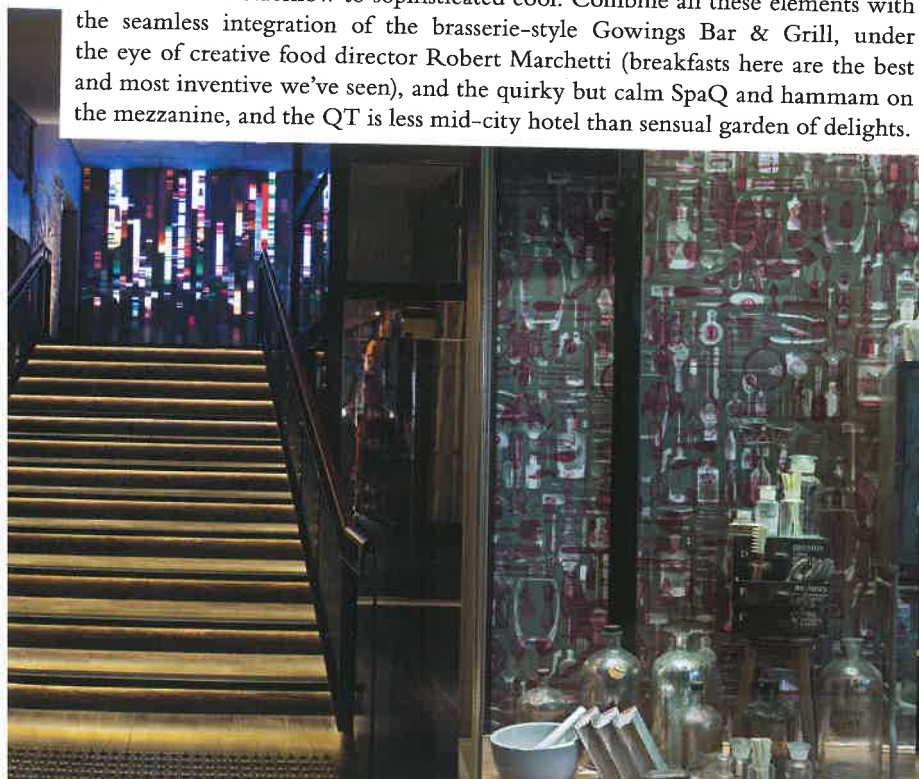


YOU HALF EXPECT *Cabaret's* Emcee to leap out from behind the red velvet curtain and start singing “*Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome*”. Sydney’s dazzling new QT hotel is more than a touch theatrical. The hotel might have been devised by Federico Fellini and Bob Fosse, with a bit of help from Jean Cocteau and glam rocker Marc Bolan. Exuberantly designed and cleverly appointed (and a sequin short of camp), it’s a bold and wonderful addition to Sydney’s mostly beige hotel scene.

The QT Sydney is the passion of David Seargeant, managing director of AHL, operators of hotels and resorts such as the Thredbo resort, and the new QT Port Douglas and QT Gold Coast. In creating the QT brand’s flagship hotel, he drew together an impressive collection of design talents to link two of Sydney’s most treasured heritage buildings, the Gowings men’s department store on George Street and its neighbour, the glorious Art Deco State Theatre, both dating from 1929, in a massive \$60 million plus restoration project that preserved many of the buildings’ original features while reinterpreting the special history of both – the showbiz pedigree of the State Theatre and the nostalgic ambience of the old retail store.

Brand designer Fabio Ongarato themed the hotel around a “collage of dynamic images” – Art Deco, innuendo, Surrealism, voyeurism, opulence and Noir – and left the interpretation to designer Nic Graham, who created the eye-popping public spaces and furniture; architect Shelley Indyk, who devised the 200 sexy guest rooms; costume designer Janet Hine, who dressed the staff in Weimar Republic-meets-neo-goth style; stylist Anna Roberts, who filled rooms and reclaimed shop cabinets with curiosities, and digital art curator Amanda Love, whose selection of luminous LED video installations changes the mood from sideshow to sophisticated cool. Combine all these elements with the seamless integration of the brasserie-style Gowings Bar & Grill, under the eye of creative food director Robert Marchetti (breakfasts here are the best and most inventive we’ve seen), and the quirky but calm SpaQ and hammam on the mezzanine, and the QT is less mid-city hotel than sensual garden of delights.

OPPOSITE: barber Tom South reinstates the art of the close shave in the SpaQ Barber Shop. The vintage Koken barbers’ chairs were imported from St Louis. THIS PAGE, FROM TOP LEFT: the Members Lounge; the hotel’s lobby walls are filled with suitcases and found objects, created by artist Michael Johansson; Parlour Lane Roasters, with expert waiter Maximilian Taccoli; vintage apothecary artefacts in an antique-style cabinet at SpaQ; an illuminated staircase connects the lobby to the Gowings Bar & Grill. The video art is by Daniel Crooks.





**OPPOSITE:** architect Shelley Indyk introduced a palette of reds, oranges, yellows and whites into one of 12 distinct room themes. Bedrooms in the Gowings building feature narrow floorboards from the original shop and soft touches such as custom-designed carpets and sheepskin throws. The comfortable QT Gel Bed has been specially imported. **THIS PAGE, FROM TOP LEFT:** in Surrealist style, the cast of a hand holds room numbers; eccentric touches in the rooms include glass cases displaying collectibles; signature espresso martini makings; brass room numbers pay homage to the Art Deco heritage of the buildings.

It's best not to spoil some surprises, but there are many things to love. The charming young staff, for a start, who were 'cast' for personality. Guests are greeted on the street by porter Emma Young, a double for *Cabaret's* Sally Bowles. Lanky concierge David Clarke, sharply dressed in dinner suit and bow tie, would not be out of place in a James Bond movie. Downstairs in the retro Barber Shop, tattooed barber Tom South administers cut-throat shaves with the aplomb of Sweeney Todd (although not, we are assured, with the deadly results).

Graham's exceptional furniture, such as the phallic silver sofa, created with Shanghai-based furniture collective Stellar Works, exist in the hyper-coloured spaces almost with personalities of their own. Other pieces, like the old radiogram in the Barber Shop, were bought on Ebay or scavenged from council clean-ups. In the guest room hallways, disembodied hands sprout from walls, Cocteau-like, holding room numbers. On the Gowings side, the hallways and rooms keep the feel of the old store with the original narrow floorboards and metal fire doors. The State Theatre side features wide halls with plush Rothko-style carpets, dark wood panelling and ornate ceilings. Sassy doorknob signs read 'Yes' or 'No', rather than 'Make Up My Room' or 'Do Not Disturb'. Step into the elevator alone and special sensors mean you might be serenaded with Eric Carmen's *All By Myself*; when you're in a crowd, it's a thumping disco beat.

Bedroom amenities include black robes and leopard-print eyemasks, plus free digital movies, high-speed WiFi and EPG. In an Australian first, guests can stream content from the hotel's network to their own mobile device. When all the technology gets exhausting, the ingredients for the hotel's signature espresso martini sit on a cocktail table with instructions on how to make it.

Witty touches and thoughtful details abound. Perhaps the creativity might be too much for those with conventional tastes. But whatever your preference in hotels, you can't deny that the QT Sydney has made quite an entrance. **VL**

