



A TRULY ICONIC PUB IN ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST HISTORIC AREAS, WITH A RICH PEDIGREE OF STEWARDSHIP AND SURPRISINGLY JUST TWO OWNERS IN 128 YEARS, THE OAKS IS UNDOUBTEDLY ONE OF OUR NATIONAL TREASURES.

# THE OAKS OUTLINE A

**B**uilt in 1885 on the corner of Military Road, so named after its mandate to haul munitions to fortifications at Bradley's Head, and Ben Boyd Road, eponymously named after the Scottish immigrant that went on to found the Royal Bank of Australia, for the first 90 years **The Oaks** was owned and operated by the State's largest brewer, **Tooth and Co. Ltd.**

Contrary to popular belief, the hotel was in fact named after **The Oaks Steam Bricks Company**, formerly next door, and not after the famous tree that adorns its courtyard. The tree was in fact a seedling from old **Anthony Horden's Department Store** (in the George St building that later became synonymous with Gowings), which was not planted until 1938.

Neutral Bay itself dates back to 1789 when

Governor Arthur Phillip declared the bay "neutral", allowing foreign ships to take on supplies. As a landmark in a destination city, **The Oaks** draws tourists from around the world, and to a degree carries a burden of responsibility to Aussie hospitality.

In 1975 present owner David Thomas took control and consolidated it as a family-run family pub. Himself the product of pub life, whose father served chilled beer dressed every day in a starched white shirt and bow tie, David instilled an ethic in his employees and prodigy that has seen the venue become an institution, and can still be seen on the premises doing whatever is required, seven days a week.

Andrew Thomas, son of David, now runs the show and is openly proud of both the historic significance of the predominantly Art

Deco structure, and the family legacy of the last four decades. Himself a local, Andrew is engrained in the erudition that is Neutral Bay and pub management. Winding up exhaustive renovations at work and at home, Andrew says "I'll stay [here] for the rest of my life".

## THE PLAN

Boasting undeniable historic relevance, it was with considerable caution the Thomas' approached modernisation amid Sydney's highly gentrified lower North Shore. Andrew could see a number of issues looming, and with the benefit of comparison to their two other venues – both with massive food operations – the reality really struck when their **Winston Hills Hotel** began outperforming **The Oaks**.

"Small bars in the area are growing, and our