

Hotel Profile

The Oaks, Neutral Bay

Still at the top of its game

A truly iconic hotel both in NSW and Australia-wide, *The Oaks* in Neutral Bay has completed its \$4 million upgrade.

A local institution in many ways, *The Oaks* has been serving patrons in the lower north shore since 1885. The history of the hotel is a long one that has culminated in it becoming one of the state's most well-known hotels.

The Oaks was destined to become a pillar of historical significance and contrary to common belief that its name stems from the famous Oak tree in the courtyard, the hotel was in fact named after the *Oaks Steam Bricks Company* which used to be next door.

In 1975, present owner David Thomas took over the hotel from Tooth & Co. to make it an entirely family-owned and operated business. It has stayed with the Thomas family, now run by son Andrew Thomas, who continues its legacy as an important part of the local community and its history.

His goal was to look at the hotel's existing operations and how they compared to the increasing amount of boutique bars opening around Sydney. He set out to re-invigorate what they have been doing well for so many years and attract younger, savvier customers.

This latest transformation by designer Paul Kelly has elevated *The Oaks* into the modern age, whilst retaining many of its art deco features and old-world charm.

"We wanted the hotel's customers to feel a connection with the new space, which reaches out to the depths of the old school charm that everybody loves," Kelly said.

The hotel's new bar and grill, aptly named *The Oaks Butcher*, focuses on the hotel's family values and features materials that customers can relate to – rich timber wall cladding, soft steel framing, glass, ribbed leather banquette seating, bold Tartan carpet and 1830s hand-drawn artwork on the walls.

Split into three sections, this space is divided into intimate dining areas, each with its own dynamic where lighting and acoustics are key.

"The butcher concept at *The Oaks* brings the customer into the phase of a restaurant that they don't normally engage with," Kelly continued.



Andrew Thomas continues the hotel's legacy as an important part of the local community and its history.

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"That is, offering a glimpse into the kitchen and the art of the preparation of their individually crafted meal."

Innovative chef Danny Russo has collaborated with *Oaks* chef Denise Brinson on the new menu which is a great mix of pub-style mains, gourmet pizzas and signature steaks.

The *Garden Pavilion* is the most recent addition to the function spaces, drawing inspiration from Victorian Greenhouse Conservatories incorporating elements such as an abundance of natural light and exotic plantation on display.

Surrounded by white timber framed glass doors, this new space opens-ups to the view of the famous Oak tree (pictured right). When fully closed, the white timber glass doors emulate that of a greenhouse conservatory.

Project management company Artazan Property Group (APG) was brought in to work with the Thomas' during the construction process and, according to project manager Cian Fitzgerald, the end result is one of a very high standard.

"APG was brought in to complete the contract negotiations and manage



the project team through the build," Fitzgerald told *Hotel News*.

"The builder has been working with Thomas family for many years and a collaborative approach ensured the success of the project."

APG offers professional client side development and project management, allowing hoteliers to concentrate on running their business and not on the administration of building contracts.

"Our advice to hoteliers is to first set project objectives and develop a clear

brief, but keep in mind there will be some disruption to your normal operations," Fitzgerald said.

"We help our clients compile their development briefs, set workable budgets and consider the impacts on trade during the process."

Trading through the entire project, there was no shortage of curious customers who wanted to see the improvements made to their favourite local. Attracting the new whilst not alienating the old, *The Oaks* has once again set a new bar in Australian hotel experiences. **HN**

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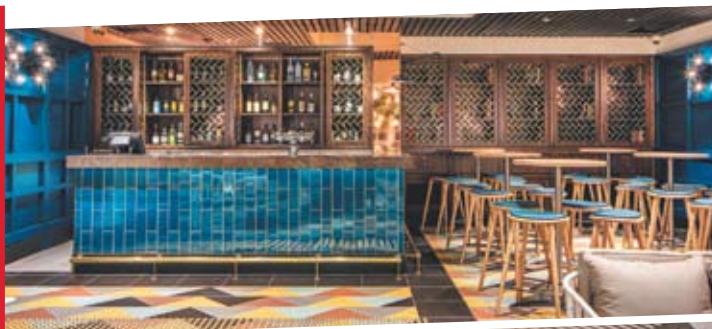
Congratulations to the Thomas family on the sensational refurbishment of The Oaks, Neutral Bay. Artazan Property Group is now looking for the next project management opportunity to add to our showcase hotel refurbishment work including The Oaks, The Bourbon and Ivanhoe Hotel.

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The Oaks