





It's a new hotel that could save the day and rock the boat all at once. QT Sydney has entered the hotel market like a true fashionista with plenty of hype, intrigue, and glamour. Even before opening in late September it was making every head turn and had everyone wanting to be part of the excitement.

It breaks all the rules, with costumes instead of uniforms, an oh-so-now fit-out, and all the bells and whistles that the fashion pack of Sydney could ever want. It has an iPhone app to ensure the ultimate Sydney experience, military style "Door Bitches" who can reportedly get guests whatever they want, boutique baristas with cocktail skills, a restaurant headed by Bondi's coolest chef, a barbershop that works in old world style, and a private cinema from wartimes.

The vision of Amalgamated Holdings Limited (AHL), QT is a new hotel brand that is breaking the safe, blank-canvas mould we're so used to in formulaic Australian properties. Instead, it favours individuality and character, taking on the style of the city, and positioning itself as an insider to Sydney's soul.

Managing director of AHL, David Seargeant, says QT Sydney has a philosophy that its staff act as city insiders, "giving guests a unique insight into the fabric of Sydney".

Enveloped in the Gowings Building and State Theatre, the 200 moody suites of black, gold and bronze are embellished with eccentric touches that hint at the buildings' history of theatre and fashion. The hotel has the mood of a suave city slicker and connoisseur of culture, with a touch of mystery and after-dark naughtiness.

Its sibling venues on the Gold Coast and in Port Douglas each have their own flavour, splashed together with retro stylings, bright colours and charismatic staff in sexy red dresses, or board shorts and blazers. Port Douglas feels a little Mad-Men-on-tropical-holiday, while the Gold Coast property is more nostalgic-surfer-chic-meets-Miami-catwalk.

So where did the confidence come from to introduce design-driven hotels to Australia and make such an eccentric concept a reality? According to one report it came from Mr Seargeant's own travels and research into boutique accommodation around the world.

"This style of bold, creatively-focused hotel is one of the highest-

yielding segments in the industry internationally, and one that hasn't been fully explored in Australia until now," Mr Seargeant told *micenet AUSTRALIA*.

"We had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take two iconic buildings and do something really unique while setting a new standard in a profitable segment of the market, so we jumped at it.

"It [QT Sydney] appeals to experienced travellers seeking something different, as well as creatively-minded residents. For the former, QT Sydney connects visitors with the fabric of the city, giving the kind of insider experiences that can only come with local insight. For the latter, it becomes a place where the cool crowd converge to hang out, dine, party and soak up the creative ambience."

The innovative new hotel comes at a time when the Australian tourism industry is suffering from the strong Aussie dollar and high labour costs, while the tightening of wallets is seeing a move away from luxury experiences. Moreover, Sydney has seen few developments since the Olympics, and there's not exactly a trend in exuberant spending right now.

Yet this is exactly how QT will lead the crowd, because as sharp business people will tell you, you have to spend money to make money. And spend they did. *The Australian* that AHL bought the Gowings building in Sydney's CBD six years ago for nearly \$70 million and is spending another \$60 million to transform it into the QT Sydney.

Not only will it help rejuvenate the tourism sector, but it has clearly saved The State Theatre and the old Gowings building from an uncertain future. The iconic store has seen many short-lived and failed attempts at inhabiting its floorspace since Gowings closed down in 2006 after 87 years based on that famous perch. Since its purchase, AHL worked carefully to honour its history while recreating it as something Sydney had never seen before, again marking the buildings' significance to the hospitality industry.

"We took great effort to retain many original features of the Gowings and State Theatre buildings," Mr Seargeant says.

"The design quality and workmanship of those details lends a timelessness to the space. By the same token, the investment put into distinctive art and cutting-edge design was to curate elements that carry far more weight than fashion. State-of-the-art technology, like the digital art wall, is ahead of the curve and

allows us to evolve and update the art and ambience."

During wartimes, Sydneysiders went to The State Theatre for the latest news on the wars. The intimate 50-seat private cinema has been restored, and a high definition 2K digital projector installed, so city slickers of the 21st millennium can experience its vintage glamour in a new age.

Matching the fashion-forward style, the hotel will sit above the highly anticipated British stores TopShop and TopMan – the first of the outlets to be opened in Sydney, and reportedly with fit-outs of \$2 million.

AHL is determined to start the trend throughout Australia with future properties to be designed in Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne and Canberra. No two establishments will be the same, each with unique concepts that range from the staff's uniform to the coffee beans used at the café.

### staff style

QT isn't just talking the talk when it comes to its staff. Its strategy prior to opening to find the best of the best frontline employees involved hosting auditions rather than holding standard interviews.

"We are searching for stars who are front of house masters, street front meet and greeters, bellhops with their fingers on the pulse, style savvy boutique beauties, film-worthy front deskers, and everything in between," the audition ad enticed.

Staff are one of the many defining features of the new QT Sydney, but not just because they are dedicated to service (like every hotel claims), but because they've been chosen for their youthful energy, switched-on attitude, and insider knowledge of Sydney's culture of cool.

"They go beyond the tourist icons to really tailor the visitor experience and reveal the rawness of the city, quirky hotspots, design stores," Mr Seargeant says.

"The QT Sydney staff reflect our guests in that sense—creative types with their finger on the pulse, hungry for stimulating, out-of-the-ordinary experiences."

These are people who aren't going to direct you towards the aquarium if you're looking for something to do, but who will tell you about the latest wine bar to have opened up, the

controversial exhibitions creating conversation, the underground jazz clubs where night owls hide, or the one event all Sydneysiders are anticipating. It's all about spectacle and the highest standards.

### the bells and whistles

It's not just the costumes and apps that QT has to put it at the forefront of the fashion pack, but an amazing new restaurant, stop-by café, exclusive spa and boutique barbershop.

#### spaQ

When the working day is over or some chill time is in order, spaQ will be the home of the lavishly pampered. Its six treatment rooms are complemented by a Turkish Hammam-inspired thermal room. For the distinguished gentlemen, a barbershop will be the men's den where they can enjoy cut-throat shaves and the type of old world pampering the modern man desires, along with a bit of secret men's business.

#### Gilt Lounge

After that massage, a single malt whisky or Cosmo cocktail in the Gilt Lounge will be the next location. The lounge will be a sleek hideout for the fashion pack and glitterati, and the foodies whetting their palate before dinner.

#### Gowings Bar & Grill

Moving onto the food Sydney is so fussy about, Gowings Bar & Grill is set to be *the* next dining hotspot. The creative food director is chef Robert Marchetti who readers should know from the Bondi cool kids' favourite hangout, North Bondi Italian, along with Icebergs and Neild Avenue. He's the leader of this European-style brasserie, while the wine list is by the impressive Five Way Cellars' Ian Cook.

#### Parlour Lane Roasters

For those who don't have time for a proper sit down, the caffeine corner should hit the spot. Wafts of espresso now float from the "busiest street corner in Australia", thanks to the boutique barista café, Parlour Lane Roasters. From the morning corporate caffeine hit and the frenetic eat-in lunch, to the late afternoon aperitivo, Parlour Lane is a buzzing business-time hotspot.

