

**The recently completed
\$7.8m Tamworth Regional
Gallery and Library is
a highly successful new
cultural facility –
beautiful, functional
... and very popular.**

**Meg Larkin, Cultural and
Community Services Manager
for Tamworth Regional Council
and Chair of Regional Arts NSW,
explains the secret of the
building's success.**

A CULTURAL BUILDING IS AN PLACE FOR ACTIVITY, A MEETING PLACE, a place with great potential for things to happen and for engaging with our community. There are several distinct stages in the construction of a such a building but perhaps the most important, particularly for a public cultural facility, are the concept design and design development stages. Time and effort invested early on, exploring all the potential opportunities for the building, is the only guarantee of long term success.

When Council decided to construct a new facility containing both a Regional Gallery and a City Library (which had long outgrown the space they shared), the value of the keeping both facilities together was obvious – both to encourage their attraction to a mutual audience and to gain economies from shared spaces, such as meeting rooms and studio space – but beyond that, everything else was up for examination. Apart from the purely physical practicalities of the site, the architects needed to know everything about ‘who we were’ and how we saw our future: What future trends would affect the provision of library services? What will be the proportion of print material to online services in ten years? What would our Gallery’s collection be like in the future? How would we store and preserve what we had? How would we cater for artworks in the new media? What public programs and activities would we be running in ten, or twenty, years?

We undertook a long and comprehensive consultation over the next few months. Councillors and user groups met for formal and informal discussions. Friends of the Gallery and Friends of the Library became deeply involved – providing both a historical perspective of the development of the two facilities to the present, and a shrewd assessment of what activities they would like to be able to participate in the new building. Staff travelled to other centres to look at new buildings and quiz their managers about what worked well and what didn’t. At home Library and Gallery staff submitted to intense questioning and scrutiny of their work practices. Every employee was consulted.

April

21 – 30 April

 Tom Roberts Festival Celebrating the artist's connection to the town of **INVERELL**. Tel 02 6721 2727 Website www.tomrobertsfestival.com.au

22 April

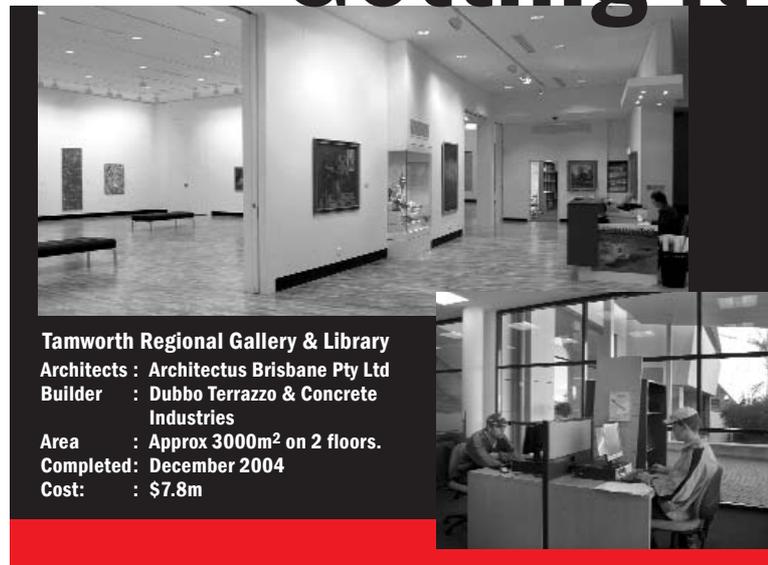
 Back to Bowra Festival – Traditional activities of the area, celebrating the culture of **BOWRAVILLE** Tel 02 6564 7041

Our patient architects were very painstaking, posing questions and scenarios, getting the ‘feel’ of the place, looking for indications of the ambience we wished to create in the new building. Ideas and wish lists emerged, were tested, were adopted or discarded. Sketches appeared of relationships of one part of the building to another, were discussed and modified.

To some, it seemed to take a very long time; but I cannot stress enough the value of those early discussions and the wealth of ideas and opinions that emerged. Listening is an important skill for any building team.

We wanted it all, of course, the perfect building rising grandly from its foundations, with facilities for everything and space to spare. We wrote and rewrote our Briefs, gradually refining the abundance of ideas into ones that would work, and that were achievable, given the very real constraints of site and budget. The process continued until we were satisfied that we had

Getting it



Tamworth Regional Gallery & Library
Architects : Architectus Brisbane Pty Ltd
Builder : Dubbo Terrazzo & Concrete Industries
Area : Approx 3000m² on 2 floors.
Completed: December 2004
Cost: : \$7.8m

a balance between what was ideal and what the site and budget allowed. Compromise was necessary, of course, and we reined in some of those schemes of grandeur. But not too much.

Once Council had accepted the design the architectural work proceeded, moving through the detail design and documentation phases to the letting of the tender for construction. This phase involved more intense discussion with staff and Council’s

22 – 24 April

 Ironfest – Celebrating technological and artistic innovation with demos, workshops + exhibitions. At the **LITHGOW** Showgrounds. Tel 02 6353 1638 www.ironfest.com.au

22 – 30 April

 Camden Haven Music Festival International and local musicians. **PORT MACQUARIE** area. Tel 02 6556 9622 www.camdenhavenmusicfestival.org.au

Working Group as colour schemes, furniture and fit out, room layouts, data and power points were placed in the scheme.

The result is a building with strong presence, of which the residents can be, and are, very proud. It is located in the CBD, in the main street, a short walk from the main shops. The building follows the 'high street' model of lively shop front, but is set back to provide civic and future public art space at the front. It is on two levels, with the Library on ground floor and the Gallery above. The combined area of just under 3,000 metres comprises public library spaces, regional library administration, galleries, art storage, community meeting room and artists' studio, a substantial kitchen and interconnecting foyers.

The sloping site has enabled a ground level loading dock at the rear of the Gallery. Side and rear elevations are strong. The north wall, which is built without windows along the boundary of the site, is clad in metal in a bright chequer board pattern in

comfortable secluded areas with broad subject grouping in all formats shelved together. Public access computers are generously placed around the public areas and many default to the appropriate online data bases for the adjacent subject areas. Young adults and children have their special areas, again, designed specifically to their needs.

The Gallery is built to international exhibition standards with all of the necessary climate controls and security. It has two large and versatile exhibition spaces with the flexibility to have two separate exhibitions or one larger exhibition at any one time. The exhibition spaces are free of columns, the ceiling height is 4.8 metres, with excellent provision for track lighting. Parquetry floors in Blackbutt with a soft sheen provide a warm and welcoming feel. The foyer is also an exhibition space and has reception desk and a generous display area for the Gallery shop. Behind the scenes in the Gallery there is a substantial collection store, with high security and its own climate control, a conservation work room, adequate space for crate handling and storage and a spacious loading dock.

Shared spaces used frequently by both the Library and the Gallery include a meeting room and studio with access to a kitchen. This part of the building can operate independently of the Library and Gallery and is proving to be very popular for weekend and school holiday arts activities.

The new space has enabled us to increase our public programs with, for example, some wonderful (and well attended) author talks, poetry readings and cartooning workshops. After its first year of operation there has not only been a massive increase in visitors to the Library but people are coming more frequently and staying longer. We have also been able to host more exhibitions from the major arts institutions and touring agencies in the Gallery. Artists' talks and weekend workshops keep the building abuzz with activity and interest. Interest in the new Gallery is strong, and growing. People are taking to their new cultural facility like ducks to water. When you come to Tamworth, we hope to see you there too. ■

just right



Above: The Gallery & Library at Night. Photo: courtesy Northern Daily Leader
Left: Gallery (top) and Library (bottom). Photos: Lou Farina

burgundy and silver. The southern wall, which has a covered walkway at upper level linking the building to a rear car park, has a warm timber finish in Blackbutt. Low maintenance metal cladding provides an attractive and durable solution to essential security and light control factors for the Gallery.

The use of colour in the Library has given it a lively, active feel. It is laid out in 'living rooms' encouraging quiet browsing in

April – May

28 April – 7 May

👁️ Lillipilli Arts and Crafts Exhibition

Local arts and crafts. Free. **COFFS**

HARBOUR Showground Tel 02 6656 2221

29 April

📣 Artist in Residence Open day outside the art gallery on Evans St, **INVERELL**

Tel 02 6721 2727

29 April – 5 May

🎭 *Windmill Baby*. Set in the Kimberley, written by David Milroy. Hothouse Theatre.

WODONGA Tel 02 6021 7433

www.hothousetheatre.com.au

Until 30 April

👁️ Petite Art Miniature paintings. Kalari Art Gallery **COWRA** Tel 02 6342 1465

 The Tamworth Gallery & Library building was funded by Tamworth Regional Council, with assistance from the NSW Ministry for the Arts which provided a grant of \$145,000 to assist with the fit out of the Gallery.

The \$7.8 million budget included the cost of land, consultants' fees, construction and fit out. The Council was well aware of the need for this facility and had been working towards its construction for many years. A significant portion of the budget was provided through loan funds, a common practice in local government which ensures that facilities are provided and paid for by the people who will use them in the future.