

Sparkling the imagination

Port Macquarie's new arts, conference and entertainment centre — The Glasshouse — is set to become a major cultural landmark for New South Wales when it officially opens in August 2008.

by MARGRET MEAGHER



Like all large scale projects that are visionary and complex, the Glasshouse has had its fair share of controversy and debate, but there can be no doubt about its benchmark status in the regional arts in Australia.

For the first time, NSW will have a custom-built regional arts and cultural centre that encompasses the visual arts, the performing arts and museum heritage under the one roof. The flexibility and versatility of the Glasshouse will cater to professional artists and arts companies as well as being an accessible hub for community arts activities such as the eisteddfods, school presentations, local company performances and a broad variety of other community events.

The 600 square metre Port Macquarie Regional Gallery will be sited over three levels, enabling the gallery to offer major touring shows from national and state collections such as the Australian War Memorial and the Art Gallery of NSW as well as alternative spaces for small scale works and exhibitions of local art. The rigging, lighting and temperature controls are of international standard. Sharni Lloyd, the Director of the Port Macquarie Gallery, will continue her focus on local skills development with educational initiatives and extending the existing 'After Hours Programs'.

The 620 seat theatre/concert hall/auditorium will have enviable high level acoustics and advanced technical facilities, with unimpeded sightlines, extensive backstage facilities, full fly tower and specially designed facilities for all abilities access. The Australian Chamber Orchestra, Australian Ballet, Bangarra Dance Theatre, Circus Oz,

Sydney Symphony, Opera Australia and Bell Shakespeare are amongst the major performing arts companies which will grace the Glasshouse programs in 2008/2009.

The multi-purpose studio, with fully sprung timber floor, acoustically designed wall panelling and flexible seating for up to 160, will provide an ideal space for rehearsals, music and dance performances, installations, intimate spoken word presentations and fringe theatre.

Robyn Birrell, the Director, Performing Arts, comes to the Glasshouse following 15 years at Geelong Performing Arts Centre where for twelve years she undertook the role of Executive Officer of the Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres.

"This is one of the most exciting new arts venue construction projects that is being undertaken in Australia at the moment. The Glasshouse offers superbly designed spaces and state of the art technical support that will be able to host the finest professional touring arts programs Australia can deliver."

Various meeting rooms, dressing rooms, café, bar, industrial kitchen, outdoor forecourt and large foyer areas complete the range of venues and facilities that will enable the Glasshouse to also host conferences, large scale events, product launches and trade shows.

Alongside the visual and the performing arts, heritage is the third key component of the Glasshouse. The NSW Heritage Office has praised Port Macquarie-Hastings Council for the considerable measures undertaken to preserve the historic artefacts found on the site of the Glasshouse. In mid 2006, ten professional archaeologists and fifteen

September

8 September

Sydney Symphony 75th Birthday Concert. A classical concert performed by the full orchestra to celebrate the SSO's 75th birthday. **TAMWORTH** Regional Entertainment Centre Tel 02 6767 5300

8 — 9 September

Dugong Arts Society Annual Arts Exhibition Awards for open category; local artist; Lesley Skinner traditional landscape; Youth Award. Doug Walters Pavillion, **DUGONG** Tel 02 4992 2229

8 September — 11 November

Eye to Eye. Work by contemporary artists who are exploring our complex relations with animals. Western Plains Cultural Centre **DUBBO** Tel 02 6801 4444 www.wpccdubbo.org.au

11 September

David Williamson's *The Club* A tale of egotism, commitment, power, jealousy, and greed. The transition of Australian sport into Australian business. **GRIFFITH** Regional Theatre Tel 02 6962 8100

local volunteers were involved in the painstaking manual excavation of the site, which involved cleaning, photographing, planning and recording each layer of excavation.

The remains of penal settlement cottages, the original Town Hall footings, the School of the Arts foundations and a convict era drain, which runs diagonally through the site, were all unearthed.

The Glasshouse will incorporate a number of interactive displays, interpretive panels and glass wall and floor inlays to ensure that the site's heritage is accessible to the public. Parts of the convict drain will be visible from outside the building at any time of the day or night. The building has energy efficient climate control and recycled timbers and other materials are being utilized for the fittings and furniture. The use of river water cooling, grey water systems and natural convection will constrain energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions.

“ This is one of the most exciting new arts venue construction projects in Australia.”

Designed by architectural firm Tonkin, Zuhlaika and Greer, the Glasshouse is set to become a landmark in terms of its technical excellence and the convergence of varying arts activities.

According to Penny Miles, General Manager of Arts on Tour NSW, “Port Macquarie Hastings Council has received the best industry practice advice on all facets of planning for this centre ... staging, seating capacity, technical elements and location ... the Port Macquarie plans are flawless. The consultation and process should be heralded as the benchmark on how other local governments should undertake capital investment.” ■

**For more information about the Glasshouse
Tel 02 6581 8111 Website www.glasshouse.org.au**

Margret Meagher is the Business Development and Marketing Manager for Port Macquarie-Hastings Council.



Architectural drawings of the new centre

September – October

12 – 16 September

 **Yaamma Festival** A week-long celebration of sharing Aboriginal culture. Street parades, cultural workshops, kids activities, corroboree, talent quest & poetry comp. **BOURKE**. Tel 02 6872 1331 www.yaammafestival.org

13 – 16 September

 **Catapult Festival** Showcasing the skills of young circus and physical theatre performers. **BATHURST** Memorial Entertainment Centre Tel 02 6333 6161 Website www.catapultfestival.com.au (see story page 4).

15 September – 21 October

 **Meg Buchanan: the last 5 years.** Canberra-based artist uses a range of medium to explore defined space and elements that dwell within it. **COWRA** Regional Art Gallery Tel 02 6340 2190

15 September – 21 October

 **Language of glass: selections from the Wagga Wagga National Glass Collection.** Brian Hurst, Colin Heaney, Edols and Elliot, Blanche Tilden and Deb Cocks **COWRA** Regional Art Gallery Tel 02 6340 2190