

# Set a courthouse date and bear witness to new centre of Freo

Old Courthouse Fremantle Friday, December 24th, 2021

THE Old Courthouse in Fremantle has opened its doors to the public, after being given a new lease of life as a sleek, chic bar with casual dining.

Located on Henderson Street in the new centre of Fremantle, the venue is the focal point of a hub that includes the Fremantle Markets, Fremantle Oval and Henderson Street car park.

It's the latest venture for Karl and Janine Bullers, the husband-and-wife team behind the award-winning success of the National Hotel and its careful restoration after a 2007 fire.

The Old Courthouse was originally built in 1899 and served justice until its closure in 2001 before it was officially registered as a permanent heritage building in 2003 - but it became derelict in the years that followed.

North Fremantle's Slavin Architects is responsible for the building's re-design, building on a heritage report from the University of Notre Dame that influenced many aspects of the development.

Mr Bullers said The Old Courthouse redevelopment had taken three years, from idea to reality, with COVID providing a few challenges along the way.

"The building is integral to the fabric of Fremantle and a vital part of the port city's history, so we wanted to do our very best to restore and re-purpose this amazing location to bring it back to life," he said.

"We've included nods to people with a connection to the premises, including large portraits of past judges, criminals' stories and details of people behind the original building."

Slavin Architects Managing Director Murray Slavin said the best way to preserve heritage buildings was to find compatible uses for them.

"In this case, a great piece of Fremantle's - and the State's heritage - has been fully restored and adapted to provide a high-end hospitality venue for the entire family," he said.

"While the courthouse retains its majestic scale, the addition of a pavilion provides a more casual atmosphere and is designed to be as transparent as possible to complement the beauty of the original building."

Bill Coe, Slavin Architects' director-manager for the project, added: "It's a privilege to be involved in re-introducing this iconic Fremantle venue to the West Australian public, 20 years after it last functioned as a courthouse."

The venue has two courtrooms with 6m ceilings: one is the main bar with the original courtroom dock while the other is a multi-purpose function and event space.

"The witness stand has a neon sign behind it that says 'don't judge me', which is the perfect place to capture a photo for an Instagram feed," Mr Bullers said.

"An old holding cell has the history of a few criminals held in the room or tried in court, as well as a line-up style wall with height charts.

## Contact Profile

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“We’ve created a few fun signs to hold up, similar to when a person holds their name in a mugshot, as part of creating a playful interactive area people can really engage in.”

With any hospitality venture, food and beverage is paramount – and The Old Courthouse is serving up the best West Australian produce wherever possible.

“Our hero food item is rotisserie chickens,” Mr Bullers said. “We’re using free-range WA chooks that are first brined for 24 hours, then brushed with a house herb and garlic butter, served as a whole, half or quarter.

“We also have items such as grass-fed beef with pickled garlic, marinated Fremantle sardines and spiced chickpea fritters on our extensive menu – the philosophy is to promote the sharing of meals and good times.

“In terms of beverages, we have 99 wines, 18 gins and 18 whiskies, which is a nod to the building’s original 1899 construction date, with 20 wines are available by the glass.

“And coming in February we’ll also have our own Old Courthouse lager, ready to pour.”

The Old Courthouse caters for a range of clientele, including families with children.

“There is a stunning glass pavilion that overlooks a garden space, shaded by mature peppermint and pine trees,” Mr Bullers said.

“From there, parents can supervise their children playing on the large lawn area or in the sandpit.

“There is also a love seat in the garden area for happy couples.

“A tree that had died was going to be removed but we decided to keep it and make it part of the Blue Tree Project, a mental health charity we’ve chosen to support.”

#### CAPTIONS

oldcourt\_0009: The Old Courthouse in Fremantle has been given a new lease of life.

oldcourt\_0002: One of the courtrooms has been converted into the main bar area.

oldcourt\_0014: The Old Courthouse is in the new centre of Freo, right near the Henderson Street car park.

oldcourt\_0017: In tribute to the building’s original 1899 construction, The Old Courthouse offers 99 wines, 18 gins and 18 whiskies.

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