

Refurbishment - from the roof down

The massive task of refurbishing the Majestic Theatre to ensure its future began after Pomona Progress Art Tourism Inc become the owner in 2006, thanks to a very generous, interest-free mortgage arrangement with previous owner Ron West.

It did require a bit of groundwork. When the theatre was built in 1921, the present Majestic Service Station and the theatre site were under the same ownership and the boundary didn't much matter. So for 85 years the theatre encroached on its neighbour and the neighbour wasn't too concerned. However that had to be fixed when Pomona Inc wanted to acquire the property, and an amicable swap of land and a boundary realignment did the trick.

The first team of SkillCentred Community Jobs Project participants moved in September 2006, and the work began in earnest.

Much of the building had previously been restumped with steel posts. This was completed and the floor levelled.

Replacing the rusted and leaking corrugated iron in the roof was a priority task. Unseasoned hardwood had been used when the structure was built, and the roof quickly adopted a sag which was a characteristic of the Majestic for most of its life. The refurbishment work included straightening the roof structure as well as straightening and bracing the walls, replacing the iron roof and refixing much of the exterior cladding. More than 700 nuts and bolts and large quantities of steel reinforcement went into the roof, and the whole operation did prove to be more extensive and expensive than originally expected.

Typically for a building of its age, the Majestic had utilised a lot of asbestos board which had to be removed and replaced with modern materials. The auditorium ceiling has been replaced, but the original style has been maintained.

Fixed seating has been removed from the auditorium and replaced with upholstered moveable chairs (made in Pomona by Page Furnishings). The layout can now be changed to accommodate cabaret-style nights and a variety of other functions.

The organ chamber has been rebuilt, weatherproofed and extended and the organ, which was "collected" from a number of sources by Ron over a quarter of a century, is being rebuilt with the aid of retired organ builder John Brooks. Many features of the organ still require more work, but the instrument, based on a 1936-vintage Compton theatre organ, is back in operation.

The original stage had been extended by Ron and Mandy West, but this area did need a lot of work to bring it up to a standard suitable for today's live performances. The substantial stage area remains unchanged, but opportunity was taken to raise the roof to the same level as the auditorium, lift the floor of the dressing room area to the same level as the stage, and install new larger sliding doors at the rear of the building.

The old "bio box", built to house the projectionist and his equipment, now is home to a new generation of projection gear as well as the control desk for the stage lights and sound system. (Why "bio box"? That came from the trade name of one of the earliest motion picture projectors, the Bioscope).

The restaurant, which had not been used for many years, has been refurbished to meet contemporary standards. The large trellis sections of the outside wall still provide natural air conditioning but can be covered by sliding acrylic panels.

The former "candy bar" area has been refitted as a full-scale commercial kitchen able to service the restaurant as well as the café and Noosa Council has approved footpath dining outside the café and the restaurant.

The auditorium floor as well as the floors of the foyer, restaurant and snack bar have been sanded back and oiled. The Crows Ash auditorium floor can again be used for its original purpose – as a dance floor with the reputation of being the best in the region.

Various measures have been taken to improve fire safety in the building.

The toilet area has been updated with new facilities including disabled access.

Exterior access has been improved with new paths and ramps, with the footpath paving incorporating an art deco moonbeam theme. Inlaid stars will record some of the many contributors to the Saving of the Majestic.

Pomona Inc was fortunate to gain \$198,000 in funding from Noosa Council to help with the cost of materials for the project. Some of this money came from the Heritage Levy paid by Noosa Shire ratepayers.

An application made through the Sunshine Coast Area Consultative Committee led to funding of \$180,000 from the Federal Government, through the Regional Partnerships Program of the Department of Transport and Regional Services, to assist the second half of the work.

And the State Government, through the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, met the wages and other costs of the Community Jobs Project workers who carried out the work under the banner of SkillCentred Queensland.

Equally important to the success of the project were the very valuable contributions of our professional consultants, the donations and “mates rates” made available by materials suppliers and the time and skills of many volunteer helpers.

It was very much a partnership between the community and the three levels of government, and Pomona Inc looks forward to guiding the Majestic in its new role as a community-owned enterprise - with a big mortgage still to be recouped!