

Outback pub's city makeover



History is ingrained at the heritage-listed Miners Arms.

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Don Townshend unearths a Broken Hill gem.

Once a rowdy miners' pub, then a private hospital, art gallery and residence, the heritage-listed Miners Arms has experienced the highs and lows of Broken Hill almost since the city's first days.

Built in 1888 during the frenetic mining boom, the recently renovated pub reopened in March last year as a quality bed and breakfast.

Located just a few minutes' walk from the railway station and with a clear view of the city's emblematic mullock heap, the residence is surrounded by a low, shady roof which gives little hint of the homely charm within.

Immediately when you enter, you realise someone with flair for decoration has worked hard to transform this former watering hole into a refined B&B.

When I ask who, co-proprietor Michael Raetz unhesitatingly motions to his wife. "Marjorie's the decorator," he confesses. "I was just the guy with the hammer."

When the couple decided to abandon their Melbourne home for a new lifestyle, they went against the popular coastal trend and instead sought red earth and big sky country.

Now, following long renovations, the Miners Arms has become an intimate travellers' refuge with honey-hued Baltic pine floors studded with rugs, beautiful original stained-glass features and unpretentious furnishings. Four roomy units are fitted with ensuites, air-conditioning, desks, high-definition television and internet. Two of the suites have adjoining sitting rooms and one is wheelchair accessible.

Guests have use of the recently planted native garden and barbecue area where, if you're attuned to cats, you can converse with a large fluffy puss.

For breakfast - and I mean a substantial cooked brekky prepared by a very conversational cook - you simply saunter into the long dining room that has windows opening onto the street.

Opposite, in what was once the historic miners' bar, there's a cosy lounge with an open fire, piano, bookcase, television/video system, a mini-bar and tea and coffee making facilities. This is a really cool nook to hang out after a day of sightseeing. If you wish, you can flick on the DVD player and watch some of the well-known movies shot in the vicinity of Broken Hill.

Guests range across the board and include mining execs, health workers, diplomats, railway travellers and grey nomads looking for a little home comfort after a string of camping grounds.

Before buying the premises, the Raetzes quizzed the local tourist information centre about the type of accommodation likely to be popular. "The consensus was quality private accommodation so we based our renovation plans along those lines," says Michael, a former BHP geologist who spent many years working in and around Broken Hill.

Visitors with an interest in Broken Hill's mining history should feel at home at the Miners Arms. For instance, the fascinating Geo Centre - an

excellent hands-on museum with mining artefacts for all the family - is only one block away.

And if you can catch Michael during a free moment, you'll find him passionately recounting Broken Hill's geological glory.

Although the Miners Arms doesn't do dinner, it's an easy stroll to the popular Musicians Club just past the Geo Centre.

One night, signing in, I asked the doorman if the club still attracted musicians. He shook his head and declared: "You're talking history now mate. Never seen a muso but I can dig up a miner if you like."

See theminersarms.com.au.

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