

Creating a community heart

A masterplan for the renewal and revitalisation of Neutral Bay is reaping surprising rewards for residents, visitors to the area and shopkeepers, as Jane Igoe discovers.

The expansion of the 'small bar and restaurant culture' in Sydney's east and inner west has now been transported to the lower North Shore. In the past five years, the changing face of Neutral Bay has acted as a staging post between the CBD, the upper North Shore and the Northern Beaches, giving diners and visitors an alternative to areas like Darlinghurst and Surry Hills.

It's a transformation that has seemed swift – but it has been more than a decade in the making, as North Sydney Council, traders and business operators looked to the future of the area and its potential as the vibrant heart of the lower North Shore.

In 1997, a steering committee was formed to look at ways the Neutral Bay shopping area could become 'friendlier and more commercially successful'.

It consisted of council officers and representatives from the Neutral Bay Chamber of Commerce and Mainstreet Co-operative. Their brief was to define the overall objectives, principles and approaches for a long-term vision for the area.

Local businessman Rick Doran, who has been involved in the Neutral Bay Chamber of Commerce for the past 17 years, says a



(L-R) Peter Goldsmith, George and Erica Gregan, Sam Nell and David Wenham at The Local Bar

group of traders got together and "kicked in \$20,000" to get architect plans drawn up and to help finance plans for specific projects.

"The first real project came about eight years ago in Barry Plaza, where we introduced new street furniture, it was retiled and we had images projected on the walls of the post office," he explains.

But it was the start of the revitalisation of Young Street and the opening of the area's first wine and tapas bar Firefly that set in motion the transformation of the suburb, he says.

"The introduction of the small-bar concept in Young Street and Grosvenor Street has really changed the area," Mr Doran maintains. "The bars are highly successful and really popular, especially with women, who like the idea of having a quiet drink with their friends but not in a pub environment."



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The new look Neutral Bay with the proposed overhead lighting



North Sydney Mayor Genia McCaffery, like her counterpart in the City of Sydney, Clover Moore, has been a strong supporter of the Mainstreet concept and is enthusiastic about the transformation.

"We are thrilled with what's happening in Neutral Bay," she tells *North Shore Living*.

"It's been fantastic to see what's been achieved when people pull together, you get incredible results. It has taken some time to achieve but now people are really flooding back into the area," she confirms.

According to traders and North Sydney Council, the

"The whole area has exploded and it's the culmination of 10 to 15 years of very hard work."
Rick Doran, Neutral Bay Chamber of Commerce.

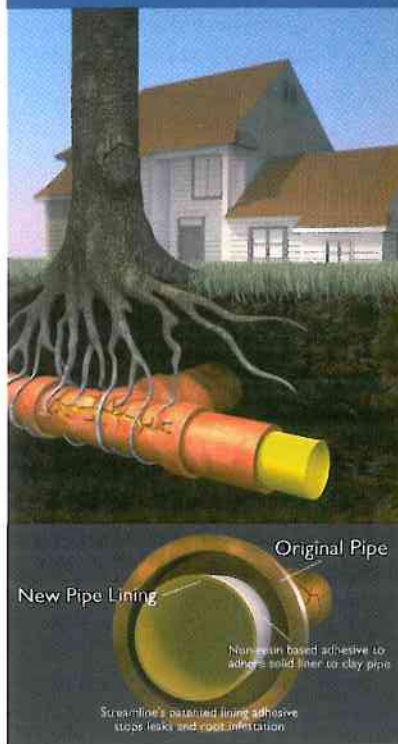
metamorphosis has been due to a number of factors that have worked together over a number of years.

These have included a very active Chamber of Commerce, smart new premises and an influx of new restaurants, bars and businesses.

The current plan is to look at European-style fairy lights to illuminate the laneways and create a novel atmosphere.

Tom Doran, Rick's son, who has also been an active member of the Mainstreet Co-operative says the North Shore has been "deprived of quality food for a long time".

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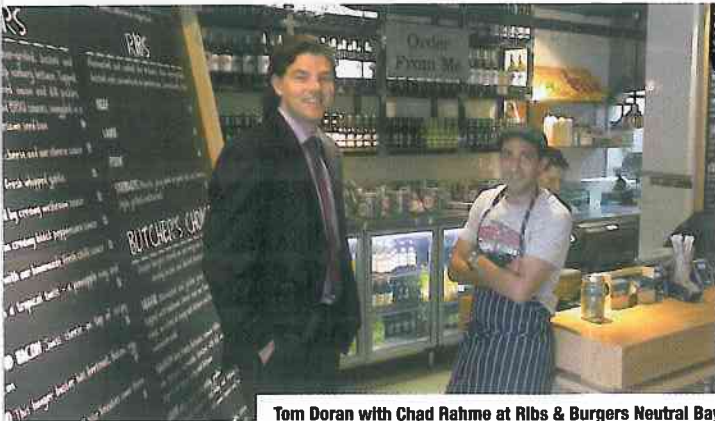
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Tom Doran with Chad Rahme at Ribbs & Burgers Neutral Bay

"Neutral Bay is such a great catchment area and now we are in a position to offer a great choice in new bars and cuisine," he confirms.

"The demographics of the area really fits these types of developments and it's really given Neutral Bay an identity."

Other major challenges facing the council and new business ventures in the area are traffic and parking conditions. With over 80,000 cars driving along Military Road through Neutral Bay each day, Cr McCaffery says the SHOROC and Northern Beaches' support for 24-hour clearways will destroy the new charm of the area.

"We are really concerned," she says. "This might be good for people travelling from the Northern Beaches but it will kill us. We will

lose a huge amount of parking and we will cop all the traffic."

Pedestrian Council of Australia Chairman Harold Scruby, who has an office located in Neutral Bay, says he supports the small bar concept but would like to see more "pedestrian shared zone" areas of 10 kilometres per hour.

"This is becoming a very high pedestrian area and the whole of Grosvenor Lane should be a shared zone with vehicles," he says. "It needs to be consistent."

Rick Doran says the Neutral Bay area has just "exploded" and it's been the culmination of 10 to 15 years of hard work.

He says there are now 250 shops, 44 restaurants, 22 cafés and six new wine bars, with more to open in the next few months.

One of these new ones is called The Local Bar – a venture between Sam Neill, David Wenham, George and Erica Gregan, Rob Sitch and Phil Waugh.

Part-owner Erica Gregan says the group looked all over Sydney for a suitable "laneway" and found just the right spot in Neutral Bay.

"I love the Melbourne laneway feel and I think we have recreated it here," she tells *North Shore Living*.

"This just felt right – we wanted to open a bar for locals where you could sit all night and talk. A place that's really friendly, unpretentious and comfortable," she says.

The Neutral Bay Masterplan has been successful in establishing these intimate places as well as public spaces and expanding opportunities for outdoor activities and community events. ■

Baby Boomers Flock To The Northern Beaches

"As baby boomers retire, they are looking for a place that will suit their new lifestyle needs and the Northern Beaches is the perfect answer," said local property developer, Simon Deathridge.

"While they make up only 25% of the population, baby boomers hold 75% of the nation's wealth. They hold a massive share of Australia's purchasing power, which makes them extremely influential in the property market," he explained.

Simon is Managing Director of property development firm, Oakstand Property Group, which is currently developing a luxury beachfront 18-apartment development, Setai, Narrabeen Beach. Strong interest in the development has seen seven of the apartments sold off the plan.

"Baby boomers are very active in comparison to previous retiring generations, which make both indoor and outdoor space and multiple storage options very important to them.

"Extra bedrooms and dual living spaces are also of high importance, as this generation likes to entertain and have their grandchildren visit. We have carefully



tailored the design of Setai to meet these needs," Mr Deathridge said.

"Baby boomers won't compromise on quality and when they find what they want, the price points are not a sensitive issue. There is no need to compromise with Setai, with its generous sized apartments, all enjoying beautiful, unobstructed views of Narrabeen Beach," Mr Deathridge continued.

Priced from \$1.95 Million, the luxury apartments offer dual East and West balconies from which to enjoy the breathtaking scenery as well as intelligently designed dual living spaces and bespoke finishes.

From the spectacular ocean views and spacious, light-filled design, to the quality of fixtures and extensive outdoor decks, Setai represents the very pinnacle of luxury apartment living. It is also pet friendly – offering the retiree market the complete package.

For more information or to register your interest in the Setai apartments please call Simon Deathridge on 0423 866 664, email simon@oakstand.com.au or visit www.setai.com.au.