



## Commercial heritage space going green, not mouldy

Premium heritage office space is a rare commodity in Sydney. Ecologically sustainable heritage office space is even harder to come by. However, with sustainability on the top of Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority's agenda, times are changing in The Rocks.

The Foreshore Authority has been entrusted with the care and protection of 94 heritage buildings in The Rocks, every one an important piece in the puzzle of Australia's early colonial history. With so many valuable stories embodied in the fabrics and architecture of these buildings, it is vital that they are protected for generations to come.

CEO of the Foreshore Authority, Dr Rob Lang says that in order to keep history alive, modern uses must be found for heritage buildings and they must become sustainable, otherwise they risk wasting away, becoming irrelevant and ultimately falling into decay.

'The Foreshore Authority is committed to finding adaptive re-uses for heritage buildings that capitalise on their cultural value while at the same time protecting them well into the 21st century.

'The Rocks is a living museum that moves with the times, ensuring its continued relevance and attraction to the people who live, work and visit in the precinct. In this day and age, that means becoming more environmentally sustainable whenever the opportunity arises.'

The Foreshore Authority's refurbishment of 86-88 George Street provides a perfect example. The first stage of the works will create 1,100 square metres of boutique heritage office

space with state of the art design elements and ecologically sustainable outcomes by late 2007.

The building is State heritage-listed and is made up of two interconnected warehouses. Number 88 George Street was built in 1886. Its most famous occupant was Bushells Tea who set up their headquarters in 1904. Their expanding business necessitated the construction of number 86 in 1912. In 1924 Bushells moved their headquarters to a new building in Harrington Street, The Rocks, where they operated until 1974.

Works have been conducted on 86-88 George Street throughout its lifetime, with the most recent refurbishment occurring in 1985. When the need for refurbishment again arose the Foreshore Authority had a vision to create Australia's first 5 Star Green Star certified heritage building.

Green Star, developed by the Green Building Council Australia, is a national voluntary rating system which evaluates the environmental design and achievements of buildings. The rating system is well established and aims to assist the building industry in its transition to sustainable development.

Green Star, however, does pose some challenges for heritage buildings. While new buildings are rewarded for integrating features like rainwater tanks and water treatment facilities,



heritage buildings may be disadvantaged due to restrictive development conditions that limit interior and exterior changes to the building fabric. This means that for a heritage building to score just an average rating, significant achievements must be made in energy use and indoor environmental quality.

The Foreshore Authority has committed to the challenge of making this historical building highly sustainable through a number of innovative design solutions.

A building management system will be installed, allowing the performance of the building to be monitored and maintained at an optimal level using a central computerised system. With controls for air conditioning, energy management, maintenance management, security, access and fire systems, occupants can achieve maximum comfort at minimal cost.

The Foreshore Authority is also actively pursuing opportunities for air-conditioning that uses a district water cooling system. Modelling has shown the potential to deliver significant energy efficiency improvements and greenhouse gas emission reductions.

#### Other sustainability features include:

- ✓ maximising daylight for occupants and using energy efficient lighting to reduce energy consumption
- ✓ using paint, carpet and other finishes with low volatile organic compound content, providing a healthier indoor air quality for staff

- ✓ independently metering water and energy services to encourage individual tenants to use resources wisely
- ✓ cyclist facilities
- ✓ water efficient fixtures and fittings to reduce water consumption.

The refurbishment will not only increase the environmental efficiency of this significant historical building, it will also enhance its visual character. It will be a landmark commercial office building with the potential to create positive flow on effects for other commercial space within The Rocks.

'Commercial success in The Rocks that preserves the precinct's historical and intimate sense of place will help keep the area relevant and valued for many generations to come,' says Dr Lang.

'Rather than mimicking what's on offer in the neighbouring CBD, The Rocks will continue to offer something special.

'With the demand for green office space increasing among tenants, we hope that other property developers will follow our lead and make energy and water savings a priority for every heritage building refurbishment.

'Over the next ten years, opportunities will continue to arise across the city and across NSW to redevelop older buildings, not all necessarily of heritage significance.

'Together, we must harness every chance we get to have to make infrastructure more sustainable and reduce our ecological footprint. This is the most valuable legacy that we could leave for our children.'

*Left to right: A changing place – 86-88 George Street in the 1970s, 1980s, today, and an artist's impression of the refurbishment.*