

The Convent Gallery

History Sheet

The Convent's origins date back to the 1860's gold rush. Built as a private residence for the Gold Commissioner, it was then known as "Blarney Castle". The Catholic Church purchased the building in the 1880s for its presbytery, but after ten years it was recommended that the priest, "being denied many things that were conducive to comfort", should at least have a good house to dwell in and a new presbytery was built.

In 1891 Archbishop Carr of Melbourne envisioned a "source of light and edification" for the Central Victorian community of Daylesford. This vision was realized in 1892 when the building was deemed appropriate for nuns and boarders and the Holy Cross Convent and boarding school for girls was opened. It was the first Victorian establishment outside of Melbourne by the Presentation Sisters. Extensions to the building were erected at a cost of 4,300 pounds. In 1904 the new chapel was completed and in 1927 the parlour, dormitory and music rooms were added.

The old convent, magnificent though it was, lacked adequate heating and required a tremendous amount of upkeep, inside and out. In the 1970's it was decided that more suitable accommodation should be found for the nuns. The building and gardens had declined into dereliction when Tina Banitska, a well-known local artist and ceramicist, found the courage and foresight to buy the property in 1988. Now in its 15th year of business, The Convent has undergone several stages of renovation to the building and grounds, far exceeding its original grandeur.

Following the closure of the boarding school in 1973, the Catholic Church asked that the building be used as a community centre where locals could share time and talents and acquire the knowledge and skills needed for complete well-being. Tina has reinforced these values by providing a place of enlightenment for all and an inspirational space for artists of all styles and calibre to express themselves.

The building itself is a superb piece of art, retaining many of its Victorian architectural features. The imposing structure, located on the slope of Wombat Hill overlooks the picturesque and salubrious Central Highlands twin towns of Daylesford and Hepburn Springs, which have long been known for their plentiful supply of natural spring mineral waters.

Today, the building houses seven individual galleries, a large retail area, a café, a lounge bar, a penthouse and two function rooms. Kept as a reminder of the rich history of the building are four tiny cells, which were the nuns' bedrooms. Many boarders have returned to "the Convent", and with trepidation, approached the old nuns' quarters, which had always been forbidden ground.

The building reeks of history. It seems to seep through the walls and up through the original Baltic pine floors. In one cell, you can see the burnt patch where a candle had fallen, and in the courtyard, at the rear of the building, a smoke room was erected in the wall, to cap a 175 ft deep ventilation shaft down to one of Daylesford's biggest mines.

The long, narrow, third and top floor has been left in its original derelict state - an eerie reminder of years past. It is here, between the flaking plaster walls, that the air is thick and almost tangible with history. This room "closest to God" had been used for the nuns' infirmary. Adjoining this room is the old Bell Tower and from here one can admire a glorious, panoramic view of the town and beyond.

Today, over 100 years since its establishment as The Holy Cross Convent, the beautiful building continues to edify as 'The Convent' – an historical icon known for its celebration of art, history and culture.

The Convent, Daylesford

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Majestic Galleries

Boasting eight individual galleries, The Convent has been described as the “most beautiful gallery in Australia”. As one room merges with another you will encounter displays of traditional and contemporary paintings, prints, glassware, pottery, sculpture, jewellery, furniture, ceramics and textiles. The ongoing exhibition program is dedicated to promoting the work of renowned local, interstate and international artisans.

Retail Heaven

The shopping experience at The Convent is heavenly. Winner of five national retail awards and represented in the hall of fame for tourism retailing, the decadent retail areas are laden with unique pieces of jewellery, exclusive gifts, individually crafted items and much more.

Divine Tastes

Situated under a high, glass-encased atrium, surrounded by pleasant aromas and the anticipation of the stunning galleries, you will find the Bad Habits Cafe. Serving breakfast, lunch and afternoon tea the Café gives visitors a break from their wanderings with an exceptional meal.

Daylesford's first world-class Lounge Bar

Stylish and contemporary, ‘The Altar’ bar and lounge serves a wide selection of light refreshments, cakes, cocktails and local Central Victorian wines. Whether you’re after an intimate rendezvous or a vibrant get together, the Altar Bar provides a seductive backdrop for any occasion.

Original Chapel

Offering an exquisite private chapel, spectacular views of Daylesford and the Central Highlands, The Convent is the perfect place to experience a truly distinctive wedding. With access to our beautiful gallery, you and your guests will be treated to a unique wedding celebration.

A Venue with a Difference

The Convent now has two stunning glass fronted function areas providing the perfect backdrop for any event or photo shoot. Featuring state of the art facilities The Convent is ideal for hosting small and large functions, conferences and parties.

New York Style Penthouse

Experience our luxurious loft-style penthouse apartment, featuring a boudoir style bed, hydrotherapy spa, living area, private balconies, and impressive 360-degree views of The Convent gardens, Daylesford and beyond.

Heavenly Scents

No visit to The Convent is complete without a stroll through the six acres of picturesque and fragrant gardens and Sculpture Park, compared as “equal to the gardens of Versailles in France”.