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BERRI UNVEILS \$7M RIVERSIDE RETREAT

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Berri Hotel

RIVERVIEW APARTMENTS



The addition of 30 villas at the **Berri Hotel** ➔ is the latest chapter in a long and successful story for the community-owned Riverland hotel.

The \$7.4 million short-stay apartments offer stunning Murray River views and a large resort-style swimming pool, setting a new standard in the Riverland.

The energy-efficient rooms are rated 4 stars to 4.5 stars. They feature contemporary designs with luxury bedrooms, beautifully appointed living areas, kitchen facilities and versatile entertaining spaces.

Built in 1918, Berri Hotel has been community-owned since May 1937. Locals have served on the board, acting as custodians and continuing to invest in their pub as they steered it through challenges such as the Great Depression, World War II and a global pandemic.

Seven years ago, 1834 Hotels was brought in to manage the Berri Hotel Group, which comprises the Berri Hotel and Big River Golf & Country Club.

"We have a very supportive board of directors that is engaged in driving more interstate and intrastate visitors into the Berri region," said 1834 CEO, Andrew Bullock.

"We're promoting Berri as the hub of the Riverland from which you can visit Renmark, Loxton, Waikerie, Barmera etc.

"With this development, we now have more rooms in Berri than any other town in the Riverland."

BACKSTORY

A large parcel of land adjacent to the hotel had lain dormant for many years. A prime riverfront property,



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it was the former site of the town's croquet and bowling club, and owned by the Berri Barmera Council.

The Berri Hotel purchased part of the land, as did the town's community-owned caravan park.

"The Berri Hotel Group saw the opportunity to build villas that offered the next level up in quality accommodation," said Andrew.

As the architect and interior designer, Studio Nine Architects undertook market research and developed a masterplan for the development that included landscaped areas and a new lifestyle swimming pool to provide a resort feel.

The development was supported through the Commonwealth Government's Murray Darling Basin Grant Scheme (\$500,000) and the SA Government's Regional Growth Fund (\$1.5 million). Riverland company, HandBuilt, was appointed as the builder.

"It is a development built by locals, operated by locals, to benefit locals, that we feel will really boost Berri's appeal as a destination for tourism, business travel and special events," said Paul Stewart, Chair of Berri Hotel Group.

"By adding this extra accommodation capacity we will be able to attract even more people and larger events, further supporting the prosperity of our community."



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NEW CLIENTELE

The quality and size of the new apartments opens up new markets for the hotel.

"Berri is a couple of degrees warmer than Adelaide, so we think there's a huge market for families to visit Berri, enjoy the resort-style swimming pool and use it as a base to explore the Riverland," said Andrew.

"We also have many reps, doctor and professionals coming into the Riverland for three to five nights, and they might be coming once a month.

"They gravitate to quality accommodation that is self-service if they want that - but they also have the hotel right next door."

BUILDING DURING COVID-19

Like most projects during this period, COVID-19 restrictions led to an extended finishing date as the builder grappled with restrictions and supply chain issues.

"The quality of the builder is excellent but it's taken longer than we initially anticipated," said Andrew.

"The board has been really supportive and understands that the challenges in a pandemic were beyond the control of the builder. For example, you just couldn't get tilers for a period of time.

(L-R) Gary Schultz – Building Manager/Director, Handbuilt Builders, Jeremy Sweet - Manager, Berri Hotel, Peter Hunt – Mayor, Berri Barmera Council and Paul Stewart - Chair, Berri Hotel Group.



"But we've used local builders, mostly local trades, which is terrific.

"You see that flow into the local economies. Those tradies tend to be patrons as well. They're back in the bar, utilising the facility which is great. It's a good mix of money going around."

An advertisement for Rivergraphics. On the left, two inset photos show interior wall prints: the top one depicts a river scene with boats and buildings, and the bottom one shows a modern interior with a dining table and chairs. On the right, a large graphic of colorful flames contains the text "Do you need a Large Wall Print?". Below the flames, the text "Riverland's Oldest Sign Company" is followed by the "Rivergraphics" logo, which includes "EST. 1979" and "DESIGN | PRINTING | SIGNAGE". At the bottom, the website "rivergraphics.com.au" and phone number "Ph. 8595 1000" are listed. A caption at the bottom left of the inset photos reads "Two of 22 new feature wall prints at the Berri Hotel".



ONGOING DEVELOPMENT

In recent years, the original hotel has been “flipped” on the ground floor. The sports bar has been moved to the back of the venue and the large dining area moved to the front. It now flows into an outdoor area so that patrons can enjoy the river views.

Other facilities include the town’s only drive-through bottle shop and 40 gaming machines.

All of the original hotel accommodation has been retained and improved. The rooms include:

- pub rooms with common bathrooms
- standard hotel rooms with ensuites situated above the pub

- standard motel rooms
- deluxe motel rooms that have been substantially renovated.

“With the new villas, we are offering everything from two stars through to four, four-and-a-half across 100 rooms,” said Andrew.

“This ongoing evolution is the result of a really good, solid, consistent board.

“Tim O’Brien was the chairman of the Hotel Group for 43 years. Paul Stewart was deputy chair for 18 years and has now been the chairman for the last four years.

“There’s consistency in the board’s management and the way that they operate, which is a real advantage.”





STAFFING

Staffing is always challenging, especially during a national skills shortage for hospitality – but Andrew says the Berri Hotel is “very fortunate”.

“A huge benefit of being community owned is we also have a very solid, loyal following,” he said.

“Even through COVID-19, where staff hours were cut, we had an enormously loyal group of staff members.

“Some of the staff have been here for 30 and 40 years. It gives us a core stability, which is probably over and above a number of other private operators.

“If you were to ask any of one of our staff, they are very aware that it's community owned and that their work benefits the community.

“There's an additional level of job satisfaction. You know that the outcome of your work might be that your local hockey club gets more money to be able to put down a new pitch, or your footy club is able to put up a new set of goals.

“You're not only working for yourself, you're working for the betterment of your local community.”

While understandably a champion of the Berri Hotel, Andrew was also full of praise for hotels throughout the Riverland.

“There are some amazing products,” he said.

“Just as one example, the Loxton Hotel renovation and its food and beverage facility is just off the charts.

“So you can make Berri your hub and enjoy all the fruits of the area.”

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COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Does 1834 Hotels run a community hotel any differently to a fully commercial enterprise?

"Your objectives for community stakeholders are different, so sometimes you change the way that you do certain things," said Andrew.

"For example, the objective may be to increase community employment and community engagement revenues.

"I might be able to save \$1 on buying a chicken schnitzel that comes from Sydney but if we spend the extra dollar locally, the extra dollar we pay goes straight back into the local community.

"That goes around and the total local economy lifts, which in turn actually drives the local hotel.

"Is it less profitable? In the long term, I don't think it is.

"If you're creating employment, creating more work, that in turn then creates more income, because there's more money in that local economy, and more people go out to drink.

"The same goes for privately owned pubs in country towns, particularly where they are the main focus of that township. They can make or break a local economy."



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