

Newtown's controversial post office-restaurant conversion The Retreat now open

After a controversial conversion, The Retreat restaurant has finally opened its doors at the former Bareena Post Office site.



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Architect Jessica Clark, Cam Hamilton of the Hamilton Group and Venue Manager Melia Haugh. The Retreat is now open, after its controversial conversion of an old Newtown post office into a modern restaurant. Picture: Alan Barber

Newtown's newest restaurant has finally opened its doors at the former Bareena Post Office site, after a controversial conversion.

Hamo Hospitality's latest project, The Retreat, began trading on May 16 in the heart of leafy, suburban Newtown following a long battle between some local residents and The Hamilton Group.

Initial plans to transform the 9 Retreat Rd site into a wine bar, lodged to the City of Greater Geelong in January 2023, received more than 70 objections.

Concerns included limited parking, increased traffic, noise and road safety and that the proposed hours of the liquor licence were not in keeping with the residential area, one resident calling the plans "ridiculous".

After a revised proposal also received 57 objections and 47 letters of support, the controversial bid landed before VCAT in early 2024, where mediation saw it [passed in June 2024 with reduced trading hours and a limit of just 50 customers](#).

Hamilton Group manager director Cam Hamilton said he felt there was a lot of fear in the community when plans were initially advertised, but locals had warmed to the idea since.

"We've already had people come in saying they were concerned but now they love it," he said.

"Overwhelmingly there is a lot of support.

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He said the restaurant had a particularly warm community feel to it already.

"It's great to come in and see all the tables talking to one another because they're neighbours and they know one another," he said.



The Retreat's interior renovation at the old post office site. Picture: Alan Barber

Venue Manager Melia Haugh said they had been met with enthusiasm from locals, even before they opened their doors.

"People were walking in asking when we were opening while we were still renovating," she said.

"We haven't even done a proper launch yet and we're already busy."

She said the "impressive" wine list was matched by a spectacular French-inspired menu.

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"Wine and oysters here on a Sunday afternoon will be perfect," she said.

Ms Haugh said the venue could only hold 50 people, a condition placed on the development by VCAT, so it was important to make reservations.

General Manager of Hamo Hospitality Paul Traynor said he wasn't surprised the opening had been met by enthusiasm from locals, as he felt many had initially misunderstood their plans.

"It's a beautiful suburban restaurant," he said.

"We've only been open a week and the response from locals has been first class.

"It shows we are filling a demand for the area."

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