



TEAMWORK: Adam Flaska and Luke Fraser at Howard Smith Wharves (Smith).
Picture: Annette Dow



Popular city precinct celebrates success

AS ONE of Brisbane's most popular precincts celebrates its first birthday, the two men behind its success have vowed they're in it for the long haul.

Howard Smith Wharves, which has a brewery, fine dining and event spaces, has been attracting up to 10,000 patrons on a busy day.

It's a far cry from its former life as an abandoned wharf located beneath the Story Bridge, and a feat founder and director Adam Flaska and chief executive Luke Fraser said was achieved by retaining the site's heritage.

"Right from the beginning the philosophy was a less-is-more approach. Down here on the river, it always had a special aura about it," Mr Flaska said.

Referring to the opening of its last restaurant, Yoko, on Thursday, he said: "It's a special moment now to see the whole precinct completed."

Howard Smith Wharves will employ 3000 people by Christmas, according to Mr Flaska and Mr Fraser, an economic benefit which might never have happened.

"There were a lot of people along the way who didn't immediately see what it was. There was a lot of 'noes' and a lot of discussions," Mr Fraser said. "We just kept working

Howard Smith Wharves under the Story Bridge is betting on tourists to inject billions of dollars into Brisbane's economy, writes **Thomas Morgan**

really hard and believing in what we were looking to achieve, and here we are today."

Both Mr Fraser and Mr Flaska will attend a special event tonight at Felix's celebrating the one-year anniversary of the precinct's rebirth.

But both men aren't too focused on looking back, instead saying they're laser focused on the future.

Next year will see construction of a new ferry terminal, as well as investigations for a marina along the Brisbane River.

"Our aspiration is to be the front door to the Brisbane

River and Moreton Bay," Mr Fraser said.

"We've been pursuing and activating our 50km of river's edge, the ferry terminal being the start of that."

The strategy is to capitalise on the expected 1.4 million

extra visitors in Brisbane generated by the nearby Queen's Wharf "integrated precinct", betting that tourists will elect to stay an extra day in Brisbane and inject billions of dollars into local tourism.

"My view is that there's no



Our aspiration is to be the front door to the Brisbane River

Howard Smith Wharves CEO Luke Fraser

point of a whole lot of products or infrastructure opening up (just) before Queen's Wharf," Mr Fraser said.

"You really have to get in ahead of it and create that early, so that when those visitors are coming, they know what they can do when they're in the city," he said.

"That whole thing of staying an extra night - we all understand the benefits of that economically for the region."

With Queen's Wharf due for completion in 2022, both men say Howard Smith Wharves will be pressing forward with ambitious goals for adding more to the precinct. "We're not a standstill business, we like to get on with things and make them happen as fast as we can," Mr Fraser said.

The pair still envision more cultural attractions such as market stalls at Howard Smith Wharves.

"Since the start, the redevelopment had been viewed as a long-term project

with 'something for everyone'. I've travelled around the world to get inspiration," Mr Flaska said. "There was really not a precinct (like Howard Smith Wharves) that had all the things in one."

"If you can create that right, you can have a really engaged precinct," he said.

And both men said they wanted to remain attached to Howard Smith Wharves for years to come.

"This is a lifetime asset for us," Mr Flaska said. "We didn't cut any corners."

Mr Flaska pointed to how Howard Smith Wharves had created and owned the brands Mr Perivale, Felix's Brewery and Arc Dining, three of the popular venues on the site.

"If this was just a property development and we were just doing a development, building the buildings and renting out the spaces, it would've probably been about 10 times easier," he said.

Mr Fraser agreed, saying the development had already cemented itself in Brisbane's cultural fabric within a year and hopefully would continue to do so. "The surprising thing is how quickly it has become a part of what you must do in Brisbane," he said.

"A lot of people said it feels like Howard Smith Wharves has sort of been here forever," Mr Flaska said.



BY THOMAS MORGAN