

HD **Reel change ahead for picture theatre**

WC 690 words

PD 11 October 2014

SN Tweed Daily News Weekend Edition

SC APNDNQ

ED Main

PG 34

LA English

CY Copyright 2014 APN Newspapers Pty Ltd. All Rights Reserved

LP

The future looks grand for our historic Regent cinema. Fran Rabbitts reports

SHE'S Italian, volatile and passionate about cinema.

TD

He's Australian, calm and strong, her Rock of Gibraltar.

Together the married couple Ken Rippin and Mia Barbieri run Murwillumbah's Regent Cinema, which was built in 1947 and is one of the last remaining independently owned movie theatres in Australia.

The pair have a new vision for the historic art deco theatre, drawing on Mia's extensive movie-making and film promotion career.

But running a cinema was not actually part of their life plan.

They had moved originally from Shanghai, **Hong Kong** to Uki to enjoy the quiet life, then a chance meeting in downtown Murwillumbah turned their plans upside down.

Ken explained: "We're movie buffs and regular Regent Cinema patrons.

"We got to know the owner and stopped in the street to have a chat with her and she told us she was on her way to list the theatre with the real **estate** agent for **sale**.

"Our eyes met and in the silent communication that soulmates share, we both realised that this was not an accidental meeting and we asked her to wait until the next day.

"That night we did our sums and decided to **buy** the cinema the next day."

Former owners, the Flannery family, trained them in every aspect of operating a cinema and they took over in July 2012.

They plan to expand the Regent's role beyond that of just a cinema and also situate it as a live music venue and a community meeting place where friends and special interest groups can gather.

International virtuoso of the ancient Egyptian "Oudi", the forerunner to the guitar, Joseph Tawadros, christened the new performance stage recently and will be returning.

Ken and Mia met when they were both living in Shanghai in the 1980s.

Ken, originally from Adelaide, had an engineering business.

Mia was studying for a degree in **Chinese** language and later graduated with a Masters in film studies at **Hong Kong** University.

Mia worked as a corporate executive with the Italian and **Chinese** Banking Corporation in **Hong Kong**.

However her passion has always been filmmaking, and whenever possible she worked in film production as co-producer for Italian Public Broadcasting and many other feature films, documentaries and videos in various capacities.

She is programming consultant for the world's biggest film festival for **commercial** Asian movies, Undine Far East Film Festival, and consultant for the Venice International Film Festival.

She is also marketing advisor to the Italia Film Promotion Agency in **China** and many others.

Their years of Shanghai/**Hong Kong** lifestyle were exhilarating and intense but they needed a retreat for their future and retirement.

After holidaying in the area they bought acreage at Uki 12 years ago.

They became part of the community, joining a Landcare **group** and, when not commuting to Asia, began regenerating the rainforest.

After taking on the Regent, retirement is now very much in the past.

"In this region our audiences have become more selective as the area is gradually changing from a rural country town into one of a lifestyle choice," Ken said. "This is attracting many sea-changers and there's a great diversity among our patrons.

"They appreciate the ambience of the art deco origins of the Regent and our programming will adapt to this.

"The best compliment we've had is 'it is like coming into a friendly home when coming to see a film here'."

In a breakthrough for small cinemas, the theatre is part of the My Cinema promotions.

It sees independent owners working with major film distributors to not only access major films, but also big promotions with lucrative prizes like family trips to Disneyland.

Ken said: "We will show a wide range of films from the Hollywood blockbusters through to art films; those that make one think, are entertaining, sometimes provocative and create an atmosphere that makes going to the movies special as it once was."

IN i97105 : Film/Video Exhibition | i97101 : Cinema Film Production | i971 : Motion Pictures/Sound Recording | ilea : Leisure/Arts/Hospitality | imed : Media/Entertainment | imopic : Motion Pictures Recording/Publishing

NS gmovie : Movies | gcat : Political/General News | gent : Arts/Entertainment

RE china : China | queensl : Queensland | apacz : Asia Pacific | asiaz : Asia | ausnz : Australia/Oceania | austr : Australia | bric : BRICS Countries | chinaz : Greater China | devgcoz : Emerging Market Countries | dvpcoz : Developing Economies | easiaz : Eastern Asia

PUB APN Newspapers Pty Ltd

AN Document APNDNQ0020141010eaab00001