

16 June, 2009 9:33AM ACDT

# New owners take possession of iconic Palace Hotel

By Emma Sleath and Andrew Schmidt (Cross-Media Reporter / Presenter)

**After two years in coventry, the ever intriguing Palace Hotel has finally been sold.**

After two years in coventry, the ever intriguing Palace Hotel has finally been sold.

A consortium of Broken Hill locals have the great lady of Argent Street in their mitts and they are quick to reassure interested parties that yes, the murals *will* be staying.

It was the murals (described as 'Italian Renaissance meets Outback') that almost upstaged Terence Stamp et al in the hugely successful *Priscilla - Queen of the Desert*.

Several scenes from the 1994 feature film featured these hallowed walls, turning a local gem into something of a national celebrity.

But way before the sequins and tequila, Mario's Palace was a coffee house. A sober establishment for the well to do, no doubt championed by members of the local temperance society as an alternative to the many pubs mushrooming around Broken Hill.

Then along came Mario.

One of three brothers who migrated from Italy in 1949, Mario Celotto (pictured) purchased the building in the early seventies and set about turning it into a self styled 'oasis'.

It was Mario who painted the enormous tribute to Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus' on the roof, and I'm guessing he may also be responsible for a handfull of other naked ladies who stare serenely at you from the main bar.

But the unsung hero of this strange wonderland is Gordon Waye, an Aboriginal artist who was responsible for the vast majority of murals that cover virtually every wall.

Frescos of waterfalls abound, as do lush pastoral scenes, Aboriginal tribesmen, and the obligatory naked lady.

How long must it have taken Gordon Waye to create these stories on the many walls and ceilings of this truly titanic building? How was he paid for his efforts? Sadly, we may never find out.

After a few phone calls I find out that Gordon Waye passed away in Whyalla just four months ago.

Mario Celotto is also deceased, but his presence is far from diminished.

The walls of Mario's old office offer up a somewhat grisly mixture of stuffed eagles, mounted crustaceans, an assortment of Papa New Guinean artefacts and one

large Mexican sombrero. Above the doorway is a tiny framed image of some Sturt Desert Peas.

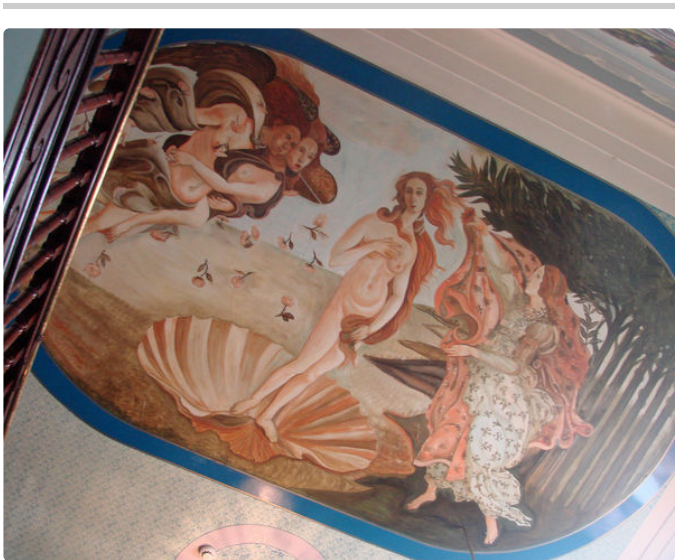
Melting pot, indeed.

The theme continues as I climb the stairs for the first time, and out of nowhere, the smell of Vietnamese cooking suddenly wafts down.

Workers from the local goat abbatoir are permanent guests at the hotel, and as I stare down the impossibly long hallway, a young Vietnamese girl walks by with a tray of food. These workers may be amongst the last to occupy Mario's Palace as it once was and it's hard not to be a little sad.

It will be interesting to see how much of Mario's strange vision will be retained once renovations have been completed, and how much of Gordon Waye's story will be told.

With the owners focussing on the accommodation aspect of this three story giant, Mario's days as a bawdy pub are well and truly over, but if you close your eyes, and listen very closely, trust me...the walls in the Palace Hotel are practically screaming.



Mario's interpretation of Botticelli's famous painting, "The Birth of Venus" ( Emma Sleath - ABC Local)

# More from ABC Broken Hill

<a href="#">Home</a>	<a href="#">Programs</a>
<a href="#">News</a>	<a href="#">Weather</a>
<a href="#">Emergencies</a>	<a href="#">Photos and Videos</a>
<a href="#">Recipes</a>	