



PERTH

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

The Rechabite is a hedonistic playground of art, food, and booze - with a sprinkle of wicked fun. **Rosamund Brennan** gets a taste of Perth's newest watering hole where anything goes, and everything is possible



he words “Repent. Repent. Repent.” stare up at me from a beer coaster, next to an illustration of a wee dancing devil. I dare say few bars in the world serve hard liquor on a centuries-old religious mantra imposing sobriety. But then, The Rechabite is anything but your run-of-the-mill venue.

Named after a movement that is dedicated to fighting the evil influence of alcohol, four-storey The Rechabite oscillates wildly between a Pan-Asian eatery, a cocktail bar, a basement club, and a soaring music hall. It is a Pan’s Labyrinth of surprise and delight that feels a little rough around the edges; a little offbeat, but altogether intoxicating.

“Much of The Rechabite is about creating a world of fantasy and escapism,” says owner and creative director Marcus Canning. “Every time people come to the building, there’s something new going on.”

PHOTOGRAPHY @PLACEORPOINT



Canning is the creative brains behind the refurbished heritage venue in Northbridge, Perth, and likens the Western Australian capital's go-to nightlife precinct to the land at the top of the eponymous evergreen from the children's book *The Magic Faraway Tree*: enchanting and uninhibited.

This artistic approach is not all that surprising when you consider Canning's line of work – the prominent arts guru launched Perth's Fringe World Festival in 2011, and has supervised its rapid growth to become the third-largest Fringe Festival in the world.

"So many hospitality offerings are cookie cutter, and feel like a faded and sanitised facsimile of ideas from somewhere else," he presses. "At The Rechabite, I spent a lot of time considering how we could create a

venue that would feel like a constantly evolving festival all year round."

Opened in November 2019, Canning joined forces with property developer Adrian Fini and the Litis Family to develop the instantly iconic venue – with an extensive AUD 7 million refurbishment to boot. But the building's history is just as intriguing as its new incarnation.

Canning also shares that a lot of visitors to the entertainment-cum-dining venue have said they do not feel like they are in Perth – or even Australia – when they are there. Known for its vibrant small bar scene, sprawling coastal pubs, and global fusion cuisine, Perth's nightlife certainly has a lot to offer – but it has never seen anything quite like The Rechabite.

ABOVE:
The Rechabite Hall is a hotbed for international and local DJs.

ABOVE LEFT:
Soak up Perth sunshine and fantastic views from The Rechabite's rooftop bar.



LEFT:
Award-winning cabaret group Briefs Factory performs in The Rechabite Hall during the Fringe World Festival.

BOTTOM:
The glassware at Double Rainbow Eating House features quirky illustrations by Berlin-based artist Larissa Hoff.



PHOTOGRAPHY DANICA ZUKS, ERIK ROSALES

“OCCUPY THE RUINS”

The Rechabite takes its name from the Independent Order of Rechabites (IOR), a global temperance movement dedicated to fighting “the evils of spirituous liquors”. Founded in England in 1835, it promoted total abstinence from alcoholic beverages. In the 1920s, the IOR’s Perth outpost built the so-called Rechabite’s Hall in Northbridge, its time-worn walls harbouring more than a century of mishaps and absurdities – a legacy which Canning and his team strived to uphold throughout the building’s restoration.

“The Rechabite has led a very colourful and chequered life over the last century,” Canning gushes, captivated with the layer-cake of history that has in many ways become his muse. “Since we opened, someone wanders in and tells us a new story every day.”

BAR HOP, ANYONE?

Popular spots to visit while in Perth's go-to nightlife precinct.



Mechanics Institute

A laid back rooftop bar blending craft beer, sun, live music, and full-frontal views of Perth's central business district.

mechanicsinstitutebar.com.au

The Standard

A hip, two-level bar offering delicious cocktails, plus a shady green beer garden that is perfect for hot summer nights.

thestandardperth.com.au

Jack Rabbit Slims

A retro live music venue featuring old-school arcade games, alcoholic milkshakes, and 1950s paraphernalia.

jackrabbitslims.net



Through its many former lives, The Rechabite has witnessed badminton championships and cat parades. It was used as artist studios, a bank, photographers' shop, bike shop, barber, gallery, and an independent theatre. There was even a 90s squat when it birthed Western Australia's biggest cult-grunge band, Beaverloop.

As these histories accumulated, so did Canning's desire to weave them into The Rechabite's retelling – from the minimalist restoration which kept the building's character in-tact to the original IOR symbols that embellish the company's logo and staff uniforms.

“Occupy the ruins’ was a phrase that we frequently used during development,” he explains. “We purposely left a lot of the building exactly

ABOVE:
Colourful circus performances wow revellers during Perth's arts festivals at The Rechabite.

as we found it, including much of what some might consider the ugly staining of age that would usually get wiped clean [in most restoration projects].”

Canning tells me that this type of restoration can be the fastest way to strip a heritage building of the life that has accumulated in its fabric over time. “We wanted the patina of multiple lives and dereliction to remain because they tell the story of the building,” he says.

SUBLIME SOUNDS, OUTLANDISH ART

It was Mexican poet Cesar A. Cruz who said that “art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable”. If that is the cultural yardstick, then The Rechabite’s artistic program is right on song.

Its state-of-the-art theatre is slated to become one of the most famous live performance venues in Western Australia, and has more recently been appointed as a key venue for large-scale fetes including Fringe World and the Perth Festival. From Australian burlesque mavericks Briefs to Swedish techno-clowns Sirqus Alfon, The Rechabite’s stage has showcased a grand scale of virtuosity in the arts.

The stage itself is a work of art. It features a substantial raw steel structure

inserted into the hall that allows the space to expand across three levels.

“Its magnificent barrel vault ceiling and ingenious suspension bridge tiers ensure there isn’t a bad seat in any of the halls’ three levels,” Canning says of the theatre. “It’s made the hall instantly one of the most iconic and interesting live performance spaces in Australia.”

The venue also welcomes several art installations and temporary exhibitions across its four levels, all contrasting with its heritage structure. Perhaps most striking of all is the twinkling LED light installation by Sydney-based artist Michaela Gleave. Suspended above the grand heritage staircase, the illuminated body of work reads “We Are Made of Stardust” in bright neon lettering.

BOTTOM LEFT:
Double Rainbow
Eating House’s menu
offers eccentric
dishes such as pig’s
ear and ox tongue.

BELOW:
“We Are Made of
Stardust” is one of
the commissioned
light installations in
the venue.



FROM NOSE TO TAIL

At Double Rainbow Eating House on the ground-floor, Pan-Asian concoctions and forgotten proteins are on offer. Eccentric cuisines like pig’s ear, ox tongue, and chicken hearts alongside lip-smacking cocktails are served by sassy wait staff who are clever and quick on their feet. It is a “fast and sometimes furious” affair, according to Canning.

The menu is born from Executive Chef Jesse Blake’s experiences in the bustling streets and back-alleys of Greater Asia. His dishes possess influential Southern Chinese, Thai, and Korean themes with moments of inspiration from Istanbul and Kyoto.

ROLL UP, ROLL UP

Mark your diaries because these art festivals are well-worth a sojourn to the City of Lights.



Perth Festival

Usually held in late February to early March, Australia's longest-running cultural festival lights up every corner of the city with dance, music, theatre, art, literature, and ideas.

📄 perthfestival.com.au

Fringe World Festival

Round up the gang and head to the third-largest festival of its kind in the world, which brings a frenzy of life and colour to the city each year over January and February.

📄 fringeworld.com.au

Revelation Film Festival

Be awestruck at this motion-picture festival which showcases a stunning range of feature flicks, documentaries, short films, and experimental work. The festival will run from 2 - 12 July 2020.

📄 revelationfilmfest.org



“Traditional Asian cooking is very waste-minimal and makes the most of every nose-to-tail component of the plated protein,” Canning expounds. “Jesse has included a range of dishes that highlight some of these often-overlooked ingredients in new and astounding ways.”

And the restaurant's name? It comes from the viral video of a man in Yosemite National Park and his ecstatic reaction to a double rainbow. In the video, Paul “Bear” Vasquez – more famously known as the Double Rainbow Guy – erupts into childlike joy at this natural phenomenon. The video has accumulated more than 46 million views on YouTube.

But in truth, the euphoria that consumed Vasquez at Yosemite is not a far cry from the joy experienced from visiting The Rechabite. “We really want people to weep with pleasure after a night out with us,” Canning says of his newly minted labour of love.

ABOVE:

Patrons at the Double Rainbow Eating House can enjoy watching the chefs at work via its open-concept kitchen.

And while the IOR may not approve of the building's latest inhabitant, the stream of happy punters ambling along its hallways tells me that The Rechabite will be remembered as a golden era in this grand relic's history. therechabite.com.au



Scoot flies to Perth daily. Book your flights at flyscoot.com