

# Set to go on 'Beeches'

Zoe Lewis

A TOP hotel chain will run a historic hills estate undergoing a \$15 million revamp that has stood empty for the past decade.

Select Hotels announced it had been appointed to manage the Burnham Beeches estate in Sherbrooke, which has been closed since the mid-1990s.

And in what a shire councillor has described as the "best thing that's happened in the Dandenongs", the iconic landmark will be transformed into a complex that will boast 50 guest rooms and suites, conference facilities and a spa and wellness centre.

Burnham Beeches general manager Matthew Armytage said \$15 million refurbishments were due to begin on the building and grounds in the next few months.

"The building won't change in terms of its look and feel, but we will modernise

it," Mr Armytage said. He said management would also work with Heritage Victoria and would "refresh" the gardens around the building.

"It is a high-end, boutique hotel - but not unaffordable," Mr Armytage said.

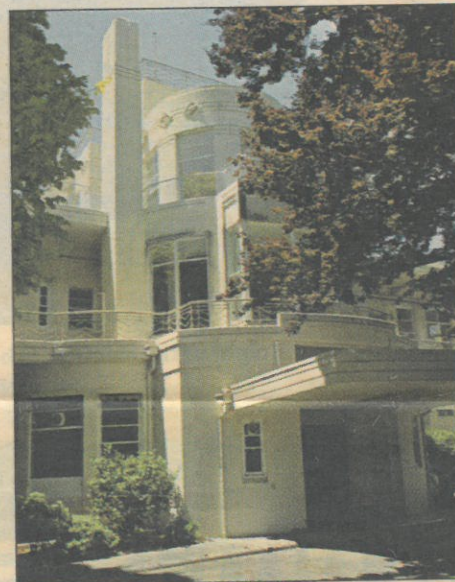
"It will bring a lot of people to the Dandenongs, and will be great for other businesses in the area as well."

Select Hotels managing director Ralph Kelly said the company would provide "first-class industry expertise" to ensure Burnham Beeches "successfully fulfils its potential as an historic and iconic property in one of Victoria's most beautiful and sought-after tourism destinations".

Shire of Yarra Ranges councillor Noel Cliff, a supporter of the development, said the progress was "fantastic" news.

"It's the best thing that's happened in the Dandenongs," he said.

Mr Armytage said he hoped that Burnham Beeches would be open by the end of 2008.



## HISTORY OF THE SITE

- Burnham Beeches was built in the 1930s by Alfred Nicholas, founder of the Nicholas Aspro empire.
- The property operated as a hotel from the early 1980s to 1992, when it was closed, and the building was stripped of its fittings for proposed renovations to convert it into a five-star hotel.
- The renovations never took place and the mansion has since fallen into disrepair.
- The property was bought in 1998 by developers Lustig and Moar, who planned to refurbish the building and set up a health club on the estate, but the plans did not eventuate.
- A four-person consortium had planned to buy the site and convert it into aged-care accommodation in 2001 but the sale did not go through.
- Another group bought the site in 2002 for aged-care accommodation, but that also fell through.
- The Shire of Yarra Ranges approved the redevelopment of the site in 2005 as a high-end hotel.

Burnham Beeches general manager Matthew Armytage in the historic mansion.

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