

Dear readers,

Few cultural projects have gripped Sydney quite like the long-running saga of the Powerhouse Museum. For nearly a decade it has been an arena of political debate, public protests and cultural soul-searching: a proposed relocation from Ultimo to Parramatta, a community outcry, multiple inquiries, and eventually a compromise that delivered not one project but three - a renovated Ultimo, an expanded Castle Hill storehouse, and an entirely new landmark on the Parramatta riverbank. The combined cost now tops \$1.3 billion.

As Powerhouse Parramatta edges towards opening next year, those debates take on new urgency. The building itself (nicknamed "the milk crate" by locals) is vast, column-free and purpose-built for spectacle: immersive environments, rotating blockbusters, a rooftop garden, a demonstration kitchen, even bunk rooms for school groups. It is, supporters say, a bold reimagining of what a museum can be for a new generation.

But ambition invites friction. Under chief executive Lisa Havilah, the Powerhouse has embraced a self-consciously contemporary model, one that privileges big ideas, big experiences and broad access. But it has also attracted criticism from curators, heritage advocates and western Sydney community

leaders, who question whether the institution is drifting from its legislated purpose, and who it truly serves.

This week's cover story, by Walkley Award-winning journalist Linda Morris, traces these tensions from the inside: the shift from collection-led displays to narrative-driven worlds; the absence of on-site storage; the political decisions that shaped the project; and the promise and pressure of creating a cultural anchor in one of Australia's fastest-growing regions.

What emerges is a portrait of an institution at a crossroads, and a reminder that the Powerhouse is more than bricks - it's a mirror of, and an argument with, the moment that built it.

We hope you enjoy learning more about the forces that have shaped this new chapter for the Powerhouse.

Have a lovely weekend!

