

Sorry plan for iconic landmark

The old Treasury building in the city is being considered for redevelopment into another five star hotel, but TV producer **Michael Klein Ewin** thinks the very idea is appalling, and surely there are other and better alternatives.

In the midst of the biggest boom, are we lacking grand visions? What of the future of the historic old Treasury building next to St George's Cathedral and opposite the Perth City Council offices in St George's Terrace, in direct sight of the Bell Tower? Do you know it?

This brick building, a government asset, has remained empty for years for no government agency has a grand idea of what to do with it. According to an item in *The West Australian* of June 25: "The State Government has revived an eight-year old plan to convert the heritage-listed old Treasury building into a five-star hotel and called for expressions of interest from the private sector.

"Alan Carpenter said yesterday that during recent overseas visits he had received strong interest in the old Treasury site from Indian and Chinese hotel operators."

The choice is very simple, very clear in my opinion. Do West Australians want a Chinese or Indian-operated five-star boutique hotel catering to the business community which is fuelling the current boom, or would they want an internationally famous five-star indigenous museum which could honour contemporary and traditional cultures of the indigenous peoples of Australia?

Could we create a dedicated Aboriginal arts and culture museum that would draw tens of thousands of international tourists each year and perhaps even become a Perth icon like the Sydney Opera House? A place where Australian schoolchildren might see something totally different about indigenous culture to that portrayed in current affairs TV media?

The Treasury building is actually very symbolic for a treasury generally holds a treasure.

So do we treasure Chinese/Indian capitalism or do we treasure indigenous cultures as many Europeans and some North Americans do?

Surely a clear choice.

I was amazed to discover that there were 200 didgeridoo clubs in France, which explains why there are so many photos from France on

the Save Burrup Rock art site www.standupfortheburrup.com.

In essence this choice also means: Do we as Australians continue to bow down to foreign empires, or do we as contemporary inhabitants of this land, recognise what is indeed culturally unique?

So today, have we matured to become independent Australians or are we in essence still just a colony to be exploited?

That is my highly emotive perspective, which I have found to be unpopular and sometimes ridiculed when I deliberately state that we are "still just a colony."

I think that symbolically those last thoughts are inherent within my earlier question: "Is this historic WA architecture to be used by foreign business interests or to be used to recognise the unique ancient Australian cultural heritage?"

Perhaps the problem for the Carpenter Government is this: It is very easy to go to a developer and sign a deal for profit to use our State-owned resource.

To develop it as a magnificent, world famous museum requires a lot of effort and consultation with hundreds of parties and people. Yet some people must have done this with two new maritime museums in Fremantle, perfectly situated in that historic port city.

Looking into the future, I personally think that Alan Carpenter's historic reputation could be affected on this issue. I would like to think that there are visionary minded people in the western suburbs, so my question to you is this: Do *Western Suburbs Weekly* readers think a dedicated stand alone 5-star Aboriginal museum a grand idea or not?

PS: So why am I sticking my head up on this issue? I had an eccentric aunt in Adelaide. In the seventies she proposed that the fruit and produce markets in Adelaide's CBD not be demolished to make way to build a new casino. Instead, she suggested adapting the classic Victorian building that was the central railway station into a casino. Her idea was so wild it was published on the front page of the Adelaide Advertiser and later she was the first member of the public to make a submission to

the casino commission. Her vision and bold idea, which became a reality, inspired me to write to fellow West Australians via the Western Suburbs Weekly.

■ Michael Klein Ewin is a TV producer at Community Television, Wellington St, Perth.

