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## CASE STUDY



The first Bowerbird Bazaar at Queen's Theatre in Playhouse Lane, Adelaide

## Bower for art business

A new art business forum, Bowerbird Bazaar, launched late last year to create a channel where designer-makers could sell their work to the public and at the same time promote it to retail and trade buyers.

Co-organiser Jane Barwick returned to Adelaide two years ago after 11 years in London and Melbourne. A jewellery maker and partner in In-sync Design, she runs weekly jewellery workshops. Colleague, Rebekah Cichero returned to settle in Adelaide after an eight-year stint in London in visual merchandising, interior architectural design, and styling for interior design magazines. Rebekah co-runs the furniture, clothing and homewares shop One Small Room, makes a range of hand-printed textiles and products for her Sproutdesign range, and doing interior design work.

"Artists can sell at retail, which brings in cash that can be used for production or establish a mailing list, get direct feedback from buyers, test pricing, meet other designer-makers who are involved in other design markets. It is fertile ground for discussion and tips," Jane says.

Bowerbird also offers an opportunity for media profile and to establish networks and business relationships nationwide. Bowerbird maintains an active blog and catalogue.

"We also play an informative role for emerging designer-makers starting and expanding their businesses – tips on how to approach wholesaling and internet sales," Jane says. "The usual practise for many designer-makers is to sell on consignment and it's very difficult to make a living from this."

Artists responded to the opportunity.

"Applicants from interstate who were used to doing design markets were enthusiastic and prepared to take a punt on the first event. They saw Adelaide as an untapped market," Jane says. "Locals were more cautious

and we didn't get the number of local applications for the first event we hoped we would. There was trepidation; they were new to the design market concept and there were concerns it would be 'crafty'.

"In some instances, the entry fee was seen as a barrier as opposed to an opportunity to create sales and promotion that far outweigh it. Many came to 'check it out' though and based on the success have said they will apply for the next one in March."

Queen's Theatre, in Playhouse Lane, was chosen for its central location, design edge appeal and room for growth.

"We wanted a venue that inspired people and set the atmosphere and experience of attending the event," Jane says. "We had more than 3000 people through the doors and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Participants commented on the professional, curated but relaxed and friendly approach. They appreciated direct feedback on their products. Many received orders from local and interstate retailers and the vast majority were very pleased with their sales over the weekend. A lot of visitors commented that 'finally' there was a high quality design market in Adelaide. Everyone was keen to know when the next one would be!

Bowerbird Bazaar is supported by arts body, Craftsouth, which promoted its services at the event and encouraged members to apply.

The Bazaar puts artists in touch with support services and encourages them to educate themselves on the business of art.

Jane says limited space at the Queens Theatre may constrain growth, but doesn't see many barriers other than conflicts with other arts events.

There are two Bowerbird Bazaar events per year at this stage with 2010 dates set at 26-28 March and 8-10 October at Queen's Theatre.