

# Craftiness a winner in court restoration



**Restoration:** Norman Ioannopoulos did the Supreme Court architecture justice. PICTURE: MEGAN POWELL

THE ceiling was literally in danger of falling in on WA's legal system when Norman Ioannopoulos was summoned.

Being a building conservationist, Mr Ioannopoulos served as foreman, not on the jury, but on the \$55,000 restoration of the Supreme Court.

The foundation stone of the Perth courthouse was laid in 1903 and time had taken its toll on the three leadlight domes, each 3.5m in diameter. The lead frames were cracking and the glass blowing out.

The ceilings were also a challenge. Many a West Australian's life had hung in the balance as they had passed underneath that ceiling. Now, it was just as dangerous for an innocent person.

The ceilings were made from plaster of paris, reinforced with hessian. For extra stiffness, narrow oregon timber laths were embedded before the ceiling was nailed on to an oregon timber batten sub-frame.

Mr Ioannopoulos, director of Osborne Park-based Hoskins Ioannopoulos & Sons, said the usual lifespan was between 25 to 35 years, but there was no evidence of work on the ceiling.

"It is a true testament to the manufacturing system of the old world craftsmen that these ornate dome ceilings have lasted for so long without any previous repair works performed on them," he said.

The labour-intensive process required the 125sq m ceiling to be vacuumed for dust and rubble, hard brushed to remove plaster glaze and sanded for water stains.

Then the regrouting could start and decorative mouldings and cornices repaired. No sooner had work begun than a major crack was discovered in a supporting beam.

Only an all-night shift to secure the ceiling maintained public access to the nine courtrooms which had heavy daily schedules.

Additional structural supports were later added to handle the extra weight of 1000kg of plaster and 350kg of fibreglass used in the regrouting process.

The restoration team of six had only after-hours access, so a scaffold was arranged that allowed workers access to the ceiling at night.

Many of the dome glass panels were removed to be cleaned. The leadlight frames were regouted, lead joints resoldered and pieces of broken glass matched with old recycled glass stock. Sorensens Stained Glass Services assisted with this.

Jason Prout Painting Services finished the restoration by repainting the ceiling with paints matched to traditional colours.

With links to AE Hoskins & Sons, begun in 1911, Hoskins Ioannopoulos & Sons began in 1998 to provide building conservation and specialist remedial works.

Mr Ioannopoulos said the company, which now employs eight full-time trades people, uses specialist techniques and equipment.

Its work on the WA Supreme Court building is one of four entries in the category for the best restoration or renovation of an historic building in the Master Builders' Association Awards.

The other entries are the Fini Group's Rialto Terrace in Northbridge, the Applecross Heathcote redevelopment by Sizer Builders and the renovation of St Louis Estate by Entact Clough.

The awards, now in their 12th year, allow WA companies to enter ventures in one or more of nine categories.

An independent panel from the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (WA), the Institution of Engineers Australia and the Master Builders' Association of WA selects winners.

The Best Regional Commercial-Industrial Project and the Overall Winner of Excellence in Construction are judged from all nine divisions.

**MASTER BUILDERS**  
EXCELLENCE IN  
CONSTRUCTION AWARDS

This is the first in a five-part series by YONNENE PEARCE on the entrants in this year's Master Builders' Excellence in Construction Awards which will be announced on July 1.