

Think local Stepping Out



By Aoife Moynihan

The Northern Beaches Readers' Festival is back

Avalon will host the return of the Northern Beaches Readers' Festival on 25 to 27 September. It's the only literary festival in Australia with a 100% focus on both fiction and Australian authors, and the biennial event provides support for new and emerging authors. The 2026 festival will have nine debut authors and a bumper program with something for everyone.

The not-for-profit festival was established in 2022 by a group of local authors to provide a platform for genres that are often overlooked at other literary festivals, such as crime, historical fiction, and romance. The festival's main focus is reading for pleasure, and the event allows authors to connect with readers.

This year there will be 52 authors participating, including Michael Robotham (who is a local resident and patron of the festival), Ali Lowe, Matt Nable, and local author Petronella McGovern.

Petronella cherishes the local writing

community and how authors support each other and celebrate one another's achievements. "It is absolutely wonderful," she says. "You're sitting at home in front of your laptop and because we're not going to an office, we're not talking to each other about our daily struggles. It is just so lovely to have a Northern Beaches writing community where we get together and talk about things."

Petronella recently released her fifth novel, *Every Time She Wakes*, a time-bending thriller about family, identity, and fate.

The story is about university careers counsellor Suze. She and her family are evacuated from their home during a bushfire. When the van crashes, she thinks it's the end, but then she wakes up two weeks back in time. No-one else remembers what came before. Is it all in her mind? Then it happens again and again. Suze has to work out why.

Petronella's inspiration for the story was the 'what if?' questions that she'd always thought about, such as what if

Festival patron Michael Robotham and director Sandie Docker

you had taken a different path, would your life be different?

"You have no idea that your life will change from a series of small decisions," she says. Petronella says the Northern Beaches is very inspirational. *Every Time She Wakes* is set on the Beaches - local readers will recognise many of the places.

Petronella will be in discussion with Emma Grey and Jennifer Ross at the festival about shaping stories and playing with structure on 26 September.

Weekend festival discussions will include topics such as how setting can be crucial to a story, other worldly romance, sibling rivalry, the power of transformation, romance, family bonds, and so much more.

Michael Robotham will be discussing crime along with Emma Babbington, and Kate Horan and Chris Hammer will talk about his latest book. Monica McInerney will chat with Sandie Docker about her new novel and Jane Caro, Matt Nable and Glenn Orgias will discuss the gritty underbelly of crime.

Visitors can enjoy workshops such as how to make your readers care with Pamela Cook, and how to take your crime novel to the next level with Hayley Scrivenor.

There will also Festival Fiver Sessions, one of which will be a book club discussion about *Big Little Truths*, Liane Moriarty's sequel to *Big Little Lies*. At these sessions, which cost \$5 each, attendees will have a chance to ask authors questions about their life as a writer and more.

You won't want to miss the Festival Great Debate, a free session which closes this year's event. Six fearless authors will go head to head and discuss 'The villain is more interesting than the hero.'

Check out the program and book your tickets before they sell out. 

NORTHERN BEACHES READERS' FESTIVAL

25 to 27 September

Avalon Recreation Centre

59 Old Barrenjoey Road, Avalon

Tickets \$5+ | nbrf.com.au