

SMALL CLUB BIG STYLE

Stage One of Campsie RSL's major upgrade gets thumbs up from old and new members alike.

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What you're looking at is Stage One of a \$5m overhaul of Campsie RSL, in Sydney's south west. CEO, Craig Love, and the six-member board, commenced the five-stage, 10-year refurbishment in May 2011. Following six months of construction, the makeover included a new entry and foyer, open staircase, outdoor gaming area, remembrance lounge, new amenities and a complete demolition and re-build of the first floor. This feature space now boasts a new auditorium, bistro and server, bar and lounge areas, climate controlled outdoor terrace and the state-of-the-art audiovisual systems you would expect from a club with an eye to the future.

OPENING THE UNDERUTILISED

Prior to the renovation the club's upstairs was in 'original' condition; not touched since the club opened on the current site in 1969 — 'underutilised' would be an understatement. It included a full-spec commercial kitchen that was only used on a handful of occasions. Downstairs was a very different story: "The downstairs space (now a TAB and gaming area) was choc-a-block and there was just so much potential with the existing building to open it up, create a greater variety of facilities for our members and to update the décor, all without increasing the footprint," Craig Love observed.

The club appointed building contractors, Boden Projects, to work with an architect on the design and construction of the project. Director, Bruce Bouchard, recommended Ania Bergstrom (Bergstrom Architects) to devise a five-stage plan. The firm, known largely for its hospitality architecture, had worked with Boden Projects on the outdoor gaming renovation at Dee Why RSL in 2010 and Bruce believed they could weave similar magic at Campsie.

However, he admitted that meeting the many varied and conflicting requirements of the brief was quite a challenge: "The first hurdle was the initial reconfiguration and rebuilding of the entrance and foyer," he explained.

"We had to holistically change the entry sequence which now has an automatic sliding glass airlock arrangement that complies with egress laws. In completing the new foyer section we had to remove a large load bearing column at the entry which required footing assessment, strengthening and new structural underpinning which allowed the back of the foyer to be demolished, revealing the feature open staircase to the upper level.

"Upstairs, we needed to remove some of the height in the ceiling to create a more intimate feeling and reduce that 'barn-like' feel of a large space.

"The lounge area outside the bistro can also be closed off to create a private room and we installed banquette seating along the large full height windows. The space is now far more versatile than the ageing cavern it once was."

CHILLED OUT AUDITORIUM

Ania Bergstrom said that the biggest challenges in the reconfiguring of the auditorium were in fulfilling the need for the space to be multi-functional.

"The key to our approach was to make this auditorium into something more than a large presentation space. The result is a space that appears as a sophisticated chillout area but with the technical functionality of an auditorium," she said.

As well as free evening entertainment, the space is now used for regular raffles, bingo, board meetings and casual meals.

The feature lighting, possibly more at home in an upmarket nightclub than your neighbourhood RSL, also elevates this new look club into a glamorous league of its own. Bergstrom chose three statement gold leaf Italian pendant lights to hover over the dancefloor, delicate glass shades in the dining room and large round black and gold frilled shades in the boardroom lounge. Furthermore, finishes such as glossy black tiling, gold pressed-metal, timber panels and the eye-catching timber cut-out murals at the foyer featuring jade and bamboo, are all Asian influenced with the colours symbolising luck.

The oriental theme, which Ania chose to loosely tie in with Campsie's vibrant Chinese and Korean cultures, is underpinned throughout by the bold, leafy design in the custom-designed commercial carpet.

The overall design has rejoiced in combining old with new (the remembrance lounge features two 40s-look club lounges with Scandinavian-inspired back-to-back armchairs), soft with hard, and even hard finishes that mimic soft, organic furnishings, such as the tiles in the bistro server that resemble a buttery chesterfield sofa and a porcelain wall finish that evokes a luminous windswept sand dune.

The mix of finishes, textures and colours is large and seemingly contradictory, but as a whole it works pleasingly well. Craig said throughout the process it was important to maintain the atmosphere of the club and not create something with which the regulars weren't comfortable.

"We have members of 40 and 50 years' standing, we have tradition to uphold and lots of new recruits. It's important we don't alienate anyone with the end result and I think we've managed to raise the bar and achieve something that everyone is happy with," he said. **venue**





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