

BY OLIVIER BJÖRKSÄTER-BLEYLOCK

# NOTHING TOO FANCY FOR CAMPSIE

A mix of styles, textures, and accents defines contemporary luxury and Campsie RSL gains immediate appeal with its patchwork of accents, cool dark textures, hard-edged finishes, and soft rolling fabrics, all complemented by a clever sense of space and style. The overall look is a comfortable fusion of traditional aesthetics and the chic lines of modern.

Nestled in Sydney's south-west is a thriving Mecca that's fast revealing itself to be part of one of the most popular boroughs in the State's capital. Choose any day of the week and you'll discover for yourself that Campsie is a cosmopolitan metropolis; there's a definitive buzz that leisurely lingers while its streets are *'juxtaposingly'* busy with enthusiastic crowds. While the area is widely known to be home to a large East Asian community (Chinese and Korean), there's also substantial pockets of ethnic Europeans offering a rich cultural diversity. It's against this backdrop that an equally thriving club exists, positioned on the town's high street: Campsie RSL.

With a complete refurbishment program stretching over five core stages in place as part of the club's strategic long-term vision, thanks to the talents of →





Boden Projects and Bergstrom Architects, Campsie RSL has already achieved the first two stages of the program with very showy results. From the outset, it's obvious that a key ingredient of this project was the invocation of the local surrounds, recreating the atmosphere of Campsie's booming social life and enhancing the societal ritual of the aperitif: They set about doing this by designing open spaces that are not so highly structured, and creating areas and furnishings that leave the gaze free, just to give an idea of openness and fluidity.

The central brief was to recreate a realistic atmosphere without any concessions to facile folklore and to shift away from outdated stereotypes. In walking around the venue, it's abundantly clear this has been achieved across a variety of details. And because cuisine, taste, and design are the cornerstones of

the club industry's new contemporary style, Campsie RSL concentrated on the harmony between the container (the spaces) and the content (cuisine and entertainment options)...it's been a transformative refurbishment in many respects. Strongly neutralising the spaces, with shades of dark browns and warm beiges as opposed to light-coloured but cold surfaces, it offers a colour palette that, in my opinion, offers the best setting for club members which is also so rich in colour.

Above it all, Campsie RSL offers a diffuse structure from the moment you step inside, from the personalised service and the appetising cuisine in its newly-introduced Level One Asian restaurant through to the stylishly redesigned lounge, bar, gaming, divisible function facilities, and the thoughtfully appointed memorial room, not to mention its new and impressive outdoor areas. In fact,

the outdoor areas are a very welcoming surprise: Roomy 'rooms' that brilliantly connect the inside with the out, without compromise, filtering bursts of light across the venue. These are outdoor areas that would make any club a little envious. The outdoor areas are further accentuated via the installation of additional window treatments throughout the venue, allowing natural light to spill in from every angle at any time of day. It's a tactic that's further brought the club into closer connection with its community whilst elevating the level of sophistication and spirit. Clearly no effort has been spared to enhance the comfort, convenience, and enjoyment of members, which has come with a price tag of \$4.5 million to date.

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possession of dashing style and design. This is one club that clearly understands that the past is gone and you can't survive in a market with discerning customers. Design and style is more available and affordable, and customers now want it everywhere they go – even in their local club. In fact, they expect it more and more as the market moves away from kitsch to luxury and comfort...and the results speak volumes at Campsie RSL, with its membership spiking from around 4,000 to over 11,000 to date and growing.

It's also pleasing to see that Campsie RSL is about style and comfort, rather than style over comfort. It's about offering facilities and services members actually require and desire rather than silly things that will read well in the press or a sales pitch when signing up for membership. The goal is to have members and their guests feel instantly at home, while offering the occasional twist; some little gems every time one ventures into another part of the club or simply goes round a corner. The biggest mistake is to do what other venues in the area have done, and there's definitely no evidence of copycatting here as this club now stands in a class of its own.

But having the perfect design and fit out also needs to work with a club's choice of furnishings, and club furniture, like clubs themselves, continues to change dramatically. Gone are the days when bland and inflexible furniture did the trick. While members today demand more amenities, they also expect a higher level of sophistication. And Campsie RSL has not only worked painstakingly to meet these expectations, their choice of furnishings is comparable to what you'd

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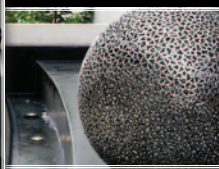
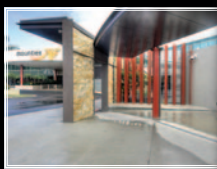
find in many high-end venues. Using a combination of single, double, and triple-seated sofas independently and as mounted features is one of the many innovative ideas they've implemented to allow for easy and intimate conversation. Intimacy follows in tandem around the entire venue, allowing patrons the ability to enjoy the privacy of their family and friends whilst equally basking in the wider social ambience without feeling disengaged, or indeed divorced from the

general buzz. Outside on the terraces (located off the gaming areas and function rooms), the same themes run through both the surrounding designs and choice of furnishings.

The question I'm most often asked by my newspaper and magazine journalist friends is what makes a great club? For me, the answer is rather simple: The people who operate and run it, because they establish the character and set the standards. But after my recent visit

to Campsie RSL, I'm discovering there's more to what makes a good club than its people; it's also about the atmosphere they establish and the ambience they bring into being (which is indeed a result of its people). Having said

that, an increasingly valuable ingredient that certainly makes for a great club is its design, as evidenced by Campsie RSL. This is the story of an intimate, stylish, and highly individual venue that's not only making a name for itself once more in the local area, but it's also making a statement through its reinvention of the 'typical' club venue, filling a necessary gap in the market. And if you don't believe me, I strongly urge you to check out Campsie RSL for yourself. ■



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