

# CLUBS & PUBS manager

Winter 2013





# BAROOGA

## Sports Club renovates for SUCCESS

The Barooga Sports Club is the latest in a long list of clubs embarking on a significant renovation or redesign to freshen up appearances and encourage new membership.

**C**lubs and Pubs Manager (C&PM) spoke to Dan Wilsden, Director of Abeo Architects, about the renovation, why design is important for venues, and the new trend towards in-club accommodation.

**C&PM:** Can you tell us a bit about your recent work renovating the Barooga Sports Club?



**Mr Wilsden:** We have been working with the Barooga Sports Club for many years on a variety of projects, including some smaller projects at the Club. This recent project represents the first major stage of the master plan, with more stages to follow that are currently on the drawing board. The recently completed stage included a complete rejuvenation of the food court, which is the geographical heart of the Club. This is complemented by an integrated family dining and internal/external kids' play areas. The relocated children's area has freed up some prime real estate adjacent the entry/foyer to the Club to introduce the distinctive and moody Tubby's Lounge. This area is available for general lounge use and also for private functions, and includes its own outdoor terrace. Other works included a full renovation of the entrance, foyer, reception and smaller lounge areas.







**C&PM:** Why did the Club decide to renovate?

**Mr Wilsden:** Like any club, remaining relevant to their patronage is of utmost importance. The Club has a solid trading history, but this has been accompanied by continual improvements along the way. The world is changing at a rapid pace and so too must hospitality venues. The Club wanted to provide a more 'aspirational' venue. People are always looking for a better experience: the best experience. The Club has gone down this path to provide a better patron experience that is more relevant to what people are expecting when they choose where to go for entertainment.

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**C&PM:** Can you describe your relationship with club managers throughout a renovation process?

**Mr Wilsden:** After numerous years working together, we have developed a very collaborative and trusting relationship with Club management and the board. This relationship is key to understanding the strategic direction and implementation of the master plan and project works to fulfil their expectations, and, ultimately, their financial goals.

**C&PM:** Can you describe the vision that Barooga Sports Club had for their new-look venue and how you achieved the desired outcome?

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**Mr Wilsden:** The Club was not looking to re-position itself as such, as many of our other clients are doing, but wanted to consolidate its current solid trading position. They wanted to have a unique and distinctive venue that would provide a memorable hospitality experience, appealing to their current patronage and also to new market sectors. Taking this brief on board, our inspiration came from the context of the site itself, with geometries, forms, textures and colours reflective of the Murray River setting of the site.

**C&PM:** What has been the response so far from patrons and the Club?

**Mr Wilsden:** As with any project where you are undertaking major renovations in the middle of a trading club, inconveniences are to be expected. Careful planning is required to minimise business interruption. It is only when the hoardings are down and the final product can be experienced and enjoyed that patron response can be judged. The old saying goes, ‘you can’t please all of the people all of the time’, which is always the case with club projects because the patron cross-section and make-up can be very broad. We are very pleased that the final product has been extremely well received and resulted in a venue that members, management and the board are all proud of.



**C&PM:** What’s it like working on a multi-million-dollar project in the small town of Barooga? How do you transition from working on large-scale projects (such as the Crown Casino renovation you were involved with) to smaller-scale club renovations?

**Mr Wilsden:** Firstly, as far as comparing a regional club project to that of the likes of Crown Casino, our approach is fundamentally the same. We adopt the same key design principles for all projects, and you can see the same concepts in both small and large projects, subtle as they may be. The key is to specifically tailor the design solution to the target markets, both existing and new, whilst keeping the club’s strategic plans for the future in context.

I will admit that the approval processes are often a lot less arduous within a town like Barooga, as the clubs are often extremely important to every aspect of life in a small town. This is definitely the case with Barooga.

As far as the construction process is concerned, most of the tradespeople were either from within the Shire or from



nearby, with only highly specialised trades coming from further afield.

**C&PM:** Why do you believe it is important to renovate and refurbish clubs and pubs?

**Mr Wilsden:** The world that we live in is changing, and with exponential gusto. We see more of what the world has to offer, whether it be at Crown Casino or our local club – and we want a slice of it. Therefore, any hospitality venue needs to change in parallel to ensure that they remain relevant to the people that choose to enter the venue. This relevance and market positioning is directly linked to market share, and, of course, to financial performance.

**C&PM:** What is your philosophy when approaching your projects and works with clubs and pubs?

**Mr Wilsden:** The first thing is to look at the existing facility with a critical eye in order to identify any shortfalls from a functional and operational perspective. The second step is to develop a clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses, and, finally and most importantly, to understand the strategic direction planned for the venue: where do they want to be in two, five, 10 years and beyond? Once this framework is in place, we can undertake the design process with clear direction and understanding of the desired outcomes.

**C&PM:** Your company, Abeo Architects, has an extensive portfolio in club works throughout Australia. Do you wish to expand on these in the future? How so?

**Mr Wilsden:** With many years of involvement in the hospitality gaming industry, we have developed a solid understanding of clubs – in particular, how they live and breathe. We understand the enormous changes that the hospitality/gaming industry has experienced in recent years and the increasing challenges faced by clubs to remain relevant and prosper in the current economic climate. Our goal is to build upon our current knowledge and keep working within the industry to provide venues that are distinctive and that truly perform.

**C&PM:** You are currently working on club accommodation, something that is not common in club venues. How do you approach a project like this?

**Mr Wilsden:** The most important thing is understanding what the accommodation is intended to achieve, and how it will interrelate with the other revenue streams: that is, the strategy behind implementing it in the first place. At Barooga, we are about to start construction of new accommodation within the Cobram Barooga Golf Club, which is part of the Barooga Sports Club Group. At less than a kilometre away from the main Sports Club, it has been important to understand the business model in its totality and how the venues will function together. In this case, the target market is the golfing experience holidaymaker. This project is of significance as it is transforming some low-yield areas of the existing expansive Club into a solid new revenue stream that will, in turn, have flow-on effects to the other facilities and revenue streams within the Barooga Sports Club Group.

**C&PM:** How does this accommodation design tie in with the rest of the venue?

**Mr Wilsden:** Whilst we have undertaken a few minor projects at the Club in recent years, the current project has involved a major overhaul of the entire venue. The Club itself will get a substantial redesign and upgrade in order to deliver an experience equal to the high level of accommodation and quality of golf on offer at the Club. The Club and accommodation is very much part of the same venue and patron experience.

**C&PM:** Is club accommodation something that we will be seeing pop up across Australia?

**Mr Wilsden:** Industry reliance on gaming has reduced a great deal in recent years and will no doubt continue to do so at an even more rapid pace in the future; therefore, many clubs are exploring alternative revenue streams. Providing an on-site accommodation offer can and has been very successful for some clubs, provided it is done in a complementary manner to the club's existing facilities. **C&PM**

Images courtesy of Alex Donnini Photography.

