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BAROOGA

Golf Club Resort's new look

The Barooga Golf Club Resort recently underwent a major revamp. *Clubs and Pubs Manager* magazine caught up with Dan Wilsdon, Abeo Architects, and Mick Brady, Meridian Construction, who both worked on the major project.

Clubs and Pubs Manager (C&PM): Can you tell us a bit about your recent work on the Barooga Golf Club Resort?

Dan Wilsdon (DW): We have been working with the Barooga Golf Club Resort for many years, including on a series of feasibility studies, which was followed by a detailed site master plan. This current stage represents the first and most prevalent stage of the master plan, which not only reinvigorates the existing offer, but also provides a whole new revenue stream in the form of on-site accommodation.

Mick Brady (MB): Meridian Construction is a company specialising in club and pub building work throughout the state. We have worked on several projects with Abeo Architects, and we were invited to price the Barooga Golf Club Resort in the competitive select tender that the club had chosen for the project delivery.

We were subsequently engaged as the successful head contractor, and we were able to implement the project with a mixture of local subcontractors and suppliers, together with the input of some specialist subcontractors from Sydney, where required.

It has been a well-organised and executed delivery through several stages to suit the club's operational requirements. It has also been a pleasure to work with Abeo and the Cobram Barooga Sports Club Group to produce a product that is a credit to all concerned.



C&PM: What were some of the main changes made to the club throughout this project?

DW: The club has had several expansions since its inception, and to some degree, it was just too big. There were several redundant areas that were simply not earning their keep in a commercial sense.

The most prominent component of the project is the accommodation. This goes hand in hand with the golfing holiday market, functions and also casual travellers. This new accommodation primarily occupies a previously under-utilised function room and expansive second-storey deck.

There are 18 new motel rooms that have a real resort feel, with private views across the golf course. The remainder of the project has seen renovation of the bulk of the front-of-house areas of the club building, including the entry, reception, function room and main lounge. A new terrace was constructed off of the function room to take advantage of the magnificent views across the golf course.

MB: The project consisted of two parts undertaken concurrently:

- staged refurbishment of the golf club, inclusive of entry, reception, function room, kitchen, lounge and external terraces
- construction of a new five-star, 18-room motel overlooking the golf course.



C&PM: How did you first approach this renovation? Were there any specific requirements or design briefs provided, and did you have an overall project philosophy?

DW: Detailed design on this project commenced following on from the master planning process. The design brief was developed in close collaboration with the club, and was very considered to reflect the nature of the existing building structure and location.

It was always the club's vision to create a unique and distinctive venue that would be appealing to its current patronage, and also to new market sectors. For this to be achieved, the accommodation had to be of an outstanding level, and the club had to take total advantage of its golf course setting.

Working with existing buildings of this nature is always a tricky business. Detailed site inspections were required, including the x-raying of the existing slab, as it was built of a system known as post-tensioning. This meant that penetrations for services such as plumbing could not simply be put anywhere; and there were plenty of those.

We did not make this any easier when the decision was made to cut a large portion of the existing building out to create a void to the lower level of the accommodation, but the result was well worth it.

MB: Our selection to join the tender process was based on a strong history in quality hospitality project delivery. We are firm believers in the old adage that your reputation is as good as your last project, and that is the philosophy that we take with us to every project we undertake.

Working with Abeo has always been conducive to producing a quality outcome. We have a collaborative approach – their design and our commitment to a quality construction is always going to leave a very satisfied client.

C&PM: Why did the club decide to renovate?

DW: The Barooga Golf Club Resort is part of the Barooga Sports Club Group. The Barooga Sports Club is less than one kilometre away from the golf club, and it undertook an extensive refurbishment in early 2013. This current project extends the high level of patron experience from the Barooga Sports Club to the Barooga Golf Club Resort. The Barooga Sports Club Group has always striven to provide a high level of patron experience across all of its venues, and the renovation of the golf club is its latest step in the journey.

MB: Barooga Sports Club Group is a leader in the region for providing quality facilities to its membership. It has been proactive in this role and is certainly seeing the benefit of patronage to the new golf club.



It is early days for the new motel complex, but the quality of the venue has every hallmark of success; there is nothing else like it in the region.

If striving to be the stand-out success is what drives a renovation program, then the Barooga Sports Club's new golf club has vindicated the board's decision.

C&PM: What has been the response to the renovation, of both the club's manager and its patrons?

DW: When you are undertaking major renovations in the middle of a trading club, inconveniences are to be expected. Careful planning had to be undertaken to manage this process so that the disruption to the club was minimised. The works in the club were staged so that the club could remain in operation throughout, and were completed prior to the accommodation, as the works were not as extensive.

The unveiling of each stage has been received extremely favourably. In any project, it is not until all works are complete and the facility can function as a whole that the real results can be expected. We are very pleased that the final product has been so well received, and has resulted in a venue that members, management and the club board are all proud of. The most pleasing factor is that function bookings are encouraging, and the accommodation bookings have been strong.

MB: The club's Chief Executive Officer, Greg Ryan, has had high expectations for the golf club project from the outset. Having worked with Abeo on previous projects, Greg was confident that the design outcome would be very successful. He and the club members can now be

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greatly satisfied with the quality of the work undertaken by Meridian Construction.

C&PM: The Barooga Golf Club Resort renovation also saw the introduction of accommodation. How did you approach this, and how does the accommodation design tie in with the rest of the club?

DW: The new accommodation ties in with the club from an operational perspective, as it complements the existing golfing and function operations. Having the most highly regarded golf courses on the Murray River, the club is an iconic golfing holiday destination; therefore, providing on-site accommodation is a good fit. The same scenario exists for the function business, whereby high-level accommodation is now provided in the same facility.

There is a strong connection between the new accommodation and the renovated club via design and use of materials. The club and accommodation both have heavy stone clad blade walls, which provide a strong connection between the venues. Other material selections are intended to make a more subtle connection.

The decision was made very early on by the club that the accommodation had to be special, and had to take advantage of its location. The rooms have a real point of difference with the addition of the entry vestibule, which allows the ensuites to be large and well appointed. Each room also has a balcony or deck, so that the views across the golf course can be enjoyed.

The club and accommodation are very much part of the same venue and patron experience.

C&PM: Why do you believe that it is important for clubs and pubs to continue to update themselves?

DW: We live in a world of information, which is increasing in intensity at an astonishing rate. With today's media and internet, everything is available at a moment's notice. No matter our age, we are all more exposed to what the world has to offer, which, in turn, informs what we want to experience. Therefore, any hospitality venue needs to change in parallel to ensure that it remains relevant to the people that choose to enter it. This relevance and market position is directly linked to market share, and, of course, to financial performance.

MB: The success of a club or pub is all about patronage. That comes primarily from three sources: keeping your existing clientele, tapping into a new market or attracting patrons from your competition. The 'best' venue will always go a long way to achieving that success; and the 'best' will be a combination of staff, product and environment.

Just as a club or pub should continually train its staff to provide best service and product, so, too, should it invest in its environment. 'Build it and they will come.' **C&PM**

All images courtesy of Alex Donnini,
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