

# GETTING IT RIGHT



## Mittagong RSL's new food and beverage precinct

**A**beo Architects has been at the forefront of club renovation projects for many years. With reference to a recently completed project at the Mittagong RSL Club, the firm demonstrates that the devil is in the detail to ensure you get it right when it comes to any club renovation project.

The recent renovation has allowed Mittagong RSL to reinvent its entire food and beverage offering through the

creation of a new precinct that begins at the club's entry and reception area, and extends through to an exciting kids' play zone, and new indoor and outdoor dining areas.

Planning for these works commenced several years ago, with the development of a master plan for the club. This master plan process was an extension of the club's strategic planning, whereby the club had a clear vision of where it wanted to be in the future.



Inclusion of a new food and beverage precinct formed an essential component of the master plan, and was present in the initial sketches. The concept for the precinct included a front-of-house 'show kitchen' to bring the theatre of food preparation to the fore.

The master-plan process reinforced the fact that existing back-of-house areas were simply not going to be able to handle the increase in capacity that would result from the renovation (from 280 to 520 seats).

Therefore, as a precursor to the recent project, it was necessary to give the back-of-house engine room some attention. The previous building project was undertaken in 2012, and included renovation of the club's main bar and gaming lounge. A major component of this project also

involved the construction of new back-of-house areas, including a new delivery dock, cool rooms, freezer, dry storage and a new centralised wash-up area. Other works included the introduction of large general-storage areas and new staff amenities.

The completion of these works meant that pre-kitchen product supply chain was now able to deal with the projected future capacity, as well as an increase in staff numbers and the need for sufficient dishwashing facilities.

The proposed new front-of-house kitchen would demand a large proportion of the \$7.4-million construction budget for the project. Considerable effort was put into its development, as it was imperative to get the design of the kitchen right for the entire venue to perform well.

A trusted food and beverage consultant was engaged in the infancy of the design process, which was one of total hands-on collaboration with the management team at the club.

The decision was made that the best way to truly test the design of such a critical part of the project was to build a full-scale model of the kitchen, café and bar. This was done quickly and efficiently, using polystyrene foam, and included the smallest of details, such as locations of power points. This proved to be an invaluable process. The main kitchen model drove many design changes and refinements to ensure that the operation of these areas could be made as efficient as possible, and that the theatre of the kitchen could be maximised.

This process was so useful that the standalone café/bar model was made a second time with some substantial changes, including some unexpected modifications that would not have been made without the first model. Being able to virtually operate the café and bar also led to a reduction in the overall size, which provided a substantial construction cost saving.

The full-scale mock-up of the kitchen combined with detailed 3D computer modelling of the entire project provided a very clear picture for the club of what it would be getting at the end of the process. It offered a great level of certainty that the team had done all that it could to ensure that the venue would perform to the best of its ability.

'The work that went into the design of our venue was extensive, but the kitchen, in particular, was as thorough as it could have possibly been. With the full-scale model, we were able to simulate everything from cooking a wood-fired pizza, to plating up fish of the day. The process did bring about many changes to the design, but all for good reasons. We knew exactly what we were getting before any serious money was spent, which provided great



assurance in the design,' says Craig Madsen, General Manager, Mittagong RSL Club.

Front-of-house kitchens, such as the latest construction stage at the Mittagong RSL Club, require careful consideration with regards to materials and finishes. Selections need to be made keeping in mind material durability and ease of cleaning, while also softening what is a fully operating commercial kitchen.

All finishes were selected to enhance the theatre of the food preparation, yet they needed to be fit-for-purpose. The design of the kitchen was done in tandem with the design of the rest of the venue, including what the offer would be, how the menu would be displayed, and how the food would be ordered and delivered to the customer.

As the capacity of the new precinct varies throughout different times of the day, the dining areas had to be flexible, with particular attention paid to intimacy and the creation of personal spaces within a large venue. There is a mixture of decorative booths and general seating areas, which are broken up by other design elements, such as bespoke twisted-metal screens. The varied seating areas were designed in coordination with the selection of loose furniture so that they integrated seamlessly. Furniture and

fabric selection is considered to be the final piece of the puzzle to complete the design in a way that creates an identity for every area.

Signage and branding were also considered in great detail and in conjunction with the venue design, and were coordinated to be in place and ready to go once the venue was trading.

The recent project also included a new function and pre-function space. It is intended that this offer is expanded upon in the next stage of works at the club, where the function offer will be the focus. These future works were kept in mind during the recent project to minimise disruption to the rest of the club when they occur down the track, and follow on as the next stage of the master plan.

The seed to create a new destination food and beverage precinct was planted when the master planning works commenced in 2010. Since then, a very considered and patient process has taken place over a number of construction projects, which has now resulted in the new precinct being open for business.

It is a credit to the thorough work of the management and board at the club that the works to date have been very successful. This will assist in the further development of the next stage of the master plan, and the continued growth and prosperity of the Mittagong RSL Club.

'We have always enjoyed a trusting working relationship with the team at Abeo Architects. They have a good understanding of our business and future goals. The recently completed food and beverage precinct has been very well received by our members, and the impact on trade has far exceeded expectations. The hard work to get to this point has been well worth it,' says Madsen. **C&PM**

Images courtesy of Alex Donini Photography and Neil Fenlon Photography