



The Makings of a Legend

Easts Bondi, an institution in Sydney's eastern suburbs and home of the 2013 triumphant Sydney Roosters, showcases their proud history in a freshly minted, unique modern bar and lounge.

by Olivier Björksäter-Bleylock Editor, Club Life Magazine





The description of any new bar tends to come prefixed with the word “trendy” which is interesting, for the word itself is hardly, well, “trendy” nowadays. Semantics aside, the phrase has practically become a term suggesting a shallow makeover and a short shelf life. Are they right? On closer investigation, in the mid-1990s most of us could be found in cosy Irish-theme pubs while towards the late 90s some canny brewery executive struck gold when they identified horse brasses, red velvet benches, and sticky carpet liberally marinated in a dense, beery, smoky atmosphere surely wasn’t the way to draw in the lucrative female crowd. On the contrary, big open venues and layers of cool blond wood, a smattering of timber furnishings, and a menu featuring foreign salads and gourmet hot paninis was the way to woo women and turn a venue into an all-day money-spinner. Where the canny brewery exec led, it seems most of us followed, and before we knew it there was a ‘gastropub’ on almost every corner.

As the late-1990s turned into the ‘noughties,’ the economic good times were matched by a return to sartorial elegance and the desire of designer labels. However, there was nowhere to go to feel glamorous and sip decadent cocktails for, as everyone knows, blond wood and killer heels aren’t exactly a

match made in heaven! So here we are today, surrounded by smaller, sophisticated bars, all tastefully designed with varying control and restraint, keeping on trend via the use of limestone or slate flooring, pale walls, feature walls, textured walls, lots of chocolate leather, dark woods, and textured suedes. Alternatively, there’s the louche, 1980s cocktail bar/lounge look with lots of black and colourful, kinetic lighting effects. If a club can be effected in either, then so much the better – for individual and exclusive is the new democracy when it comes to today’s bars. And if you want proof of both the ‘individual’ and the ‘exclusive,’ look no further than Easts Bondi’s newly unveiled *Legends Bar*.

Comprised of five clubs including Easts Bondi (Eastern Suburbs Leagues Club), Easts Berkeley (Berkeley Sports Club), Easts Kingswood (Kingswood Sports Club), Easts Waverley (Waverley Bowling Club), and Easts Woy Woy (Woy Woy Leagues Club), all under the Easts Group banner, it was in late 2011 that Easts Group CEO Scott Bennetts recognised that their Bondi club lacked any real connection to the club’s roots and its primary reason for existence – their proud ownership and association with the Sydney Roosters. At the same time, the club had been struggling to make a key area on the ground floor perform. In a previous life, the area was utilised

as a gaming floor with a real tram carriage featured as a show-stopping centrepiece. It wasn’t long before the *Smoke-Free Environment Act* became law in New South Wales, and so gaming moved out and so too did the tram – it was donated to the Sydney Tram Museum in Loftus.

Ultimately what was left was simply an empty and unwelcoming space...so where to from here? Bennetts knew what he was after – innovative thinking combined with cutting-edge design, original creativity, and strong project management experience all to achieve a high-end result. And, he identified these qualities via the professional services of C I Partnership to solve the operational issues within the space while at the same time creating a fresh new look for the club. The brief was simple yet specific: Create a space that demonstrates the true spirit of a foundation football club spanning 105 years and which pays homage to the club’s rich history while at the same time offers a warm and welcoming place where people feel comfortable to gather, relax, and socialise.

Partners Richard Cullinan and Vladimir





Ivanov have extensive experience in design and development across a wide range of project types and scales. In fact, Cullinan is a recognised industry expert bringing key experience in master-planning, design, and the delivery of large construction projects while Ivanov gained a unique grounding in the studios of iconic architect Harry Seidler working on residential through to large commercial projects. For Easts Bondi, their goal was to introduce natural light, create good connections to other areas of the club, and develop a unique way to incorporate the two different uses requested by the club – that is, a comfortable bar/lounge and the Sydney Roosters' *Rugby League Club Hall of Fame*. To say it was challenging is somewhat of an understatement; that is, the area possessed no natural light, was surrounded by a series of circulation corridors, escalators, and a lounge bridging two separate tower buildings, and operationally, a separate café/bar in the gaming area along with the existing bar in the lounge were to be combined into a single service point to reduce operational costs.

Today the space boasts three defined zones – the lounge to the north-east offers large comfortable couches and generous armchairs; the dry bar area in front of the bar has more traditional seating and is visually connected to both the *Hall of Fame* and memorabilia displays; and, to the south is low-lit and cosy banquette seating which creates a more lounging vibe. These banquettes are set amongst the memorabilia displays and are separated by the shapes created by the columns. Overall, this zoning allows

different functions run by the club to happen simultaneously.

At concept design stage, C I Partnership engaged a quantity surveyor, collaborating closely with them to modify and improve the design to bring the project in on budget. The project was competitively tendered and Boden Projects successfully delivered the construction (which came in at a total project cost of \$1.6 million). The result is a space that's sinuously wrapped by a striking pixellated graphic wall which starts at the entry and snakes itself around the room, drawing patrons into the space. The entire wall is made up of iconic photographs of the players inducted into the *Hall of Fame* (the images are actually formed by the letters of each player's name and every so often a player's name is picked out in red lettering for those with keen eyes!) while portholes in the graphic wall display audio visual information about the players as well as highlights from classic games.

Having worked closely with artisan metalworkers, joiners, and concreters, the central focus of the new space is a uniquely-shaped and very striking concrete and bronze bar sculpturally finished in white off-form concrete. Up-lit from the floor, the brilliant effect is cleverly offset by the curved and carved plywood bench-top and floating bulkhead above. The back of the bar is fitted out with a monolithic black joinery unit with two niches in intense orange, the only splashes of colour in the space which provide a unique effect to focus your attention. Around the bar you will also find further distinctive sculptural and organic shapes in

both horizontal and vertical planes including textured curved glass-fronted memorabilia displays which also cleverly conceal building columns. The carpet, in collaboration with Korda Bros Design, is yet another bespoke feature...using environmental cues such as warped contours and land forms to create abstract references to the playing field, these were punctuated with more obvious references via field markings to create a very seductive but exciting carpet design scheme.

Interestingly, the ceiling is used as a directional element to help guide people through the space and to the escalators. Its plane is dissected north-south by a group of extruded channels and pin lights which lead towards escalators to the north. It's a subtle mechanism to give patrons directional hints without the usual cues such as a change in floor finish or wall-mounted signage. In addition, with the assistance of specialist hospitality lighting designers Malaya Blonde, the ceiling treatment also features several unique light fittings to enhance the space – most notably the pipe-like bronze spot fittings peppered throughout the feature ceiling element.

Turning this previously dark, non-descript lounge into a bright and modern multi-functional space which cleverly showcases the club's proud history and operates as a true modern bar and lounge is an outstanding achievement for the Easts Group. And with members and guests overwhelmingly impressed by the new look and feel when they first walk in, isn't it time you also paid Easts Bondi a visit? ♣



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