



Be Bowled Over!

With the St Johns Park Bowling Club's major renovations progressing well while on time and on budget, *Club Life* stopped by to check out the first two recently completed stages.

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When lawn bowls came to New South Wales in the early 1870s, it was a sport only for the "very, very well-off," but these days it's a weekend crowd of younger "barefoot bowlers" that many clubs rely on to stay afloat. Bowls is one of the top-ten sports in Australia with about 900,000 participants nationally, mostly introduced through the relatively recent phenomenon of barefoot social bowling. Young people are discovering what retirees have long-known about; a sport which actively combines

refreshments and socialising with an added bonus of drinks at low prices.

With bowling clubs our most common form of registered club still found today across New South Wales, while it's still the 50-to-80 age group most likely to be found on the greens on weekdays, the Australian national team is younger than the national cricket team, and clubs are always encouraging new members, even running speed dating bowls as an interesting variant to bring in the crowds.

If that's not enough, lawn bowl's hottest new format of competition, the \$100,000 *Australian Premier League*, has certainly breathed new life into the traditional sport of bowls. Featuring an array of innovative concepts aimed at turning the conventional sport on its



head, including super-sub, power-play double scoring ends, and shot clocks to speed up play, the ground-breaking T20 version of bowls is producing an electrifying atmosphere in front of capacity crowds eager to adopt the highly anticipated premise.

Back in March, 2009 Bowls Australia also released their strategic plan for 2009-2012 entitled *A New Game Plan*. No longer considered an old person's pastime, the sport now has a whole-of-community approach. Other sporting bodies have taken Bowls Australia's lead and done the same, an example of this flow-on effect is Swimming Victoria, now ensuring everyone, at every level has an opportunity to participate. It's a great initiative that saw a number of bowling

clubs thrive, not least the St Johns Park Bowling Club. Running against the bowling green gambit so-to-speak, the St Johns Park Bowling Club has evolved into a remarkable community asset complete with a stunning new renovation recently unveiled.

Having proudly supported the greater local community for over 60 years, during this time the club's evolution has seemingly remained in-tune with its membership. No doubt in part thanks to the club having a masterplan firmly in place, which includes this latest five-

year \$28 million redevelopment. And so, what's the club's membership looking for in their local club experience? An oasis escape where they can relax and unwind is the order of the day. It's no longer about the portrayal of exciting lives moving effortlessly between exotic holidays, new gadgets, restaurants, and the latest fashions and I totally get it – after all, I'm sitting in the back of a taxi en route home after a long day of meetings and activities, checking emails



and phone messages on my 'crackberry' while trying to finish this article to deadline. Like millions of others, I'm running full pelt desperately trying to keep up with the multiple demands that technological advances and globalised economic development have brought. Now, it may be an age thing, but I too am increasingly seeking as oasis escape myself. Perhaps it's on trend.

And so, with the guiding design principle to create a garden oasis escape for patrons in the hot beating sun of Sydney's west, the club partnered up with the crackerjack design team over at CI Partnership which is certainly making waves in the industry already along with builders Rohrig. With the initial two stages, valued at \$9.5 million, now complete the range of works included construction of an extension over an existing car park, complete internal renovation to the existing gaming and lounge area, foyer entry and building façade, and installation of a new

services lift. But before any of that could take place, a precursor stage to the main project existed and required replacement of the club's aging air-cooled chiller with a trigeneration capable plant and building to vastly reduce the club's operational costs. This was completed in January, 2012 and allowed the main stages of the refurbishment program to commence.

Providing members with an ultra comfortable environment, the refurbishments today comprise premium gaming areas, indoor and alfresco, and a noodle bar while the internal refurbishment includes an upgrade to the existing gaming and services bar, new lounge bar, refurbished indoor and alfresco gaming areas, and new lounge area. With beautiful verdant bowling greens surrounding the club (but set within a stark concrete environment), that lush coolness has certainly been cleverly captured through a number of subtle expressions, not least the vibrant floral installation around the main reception desk

– what an entrance indeed! Other accents include the columns through the foyer to the main bar which represent trees with a green circular motif on the ceiling representing the canopies of a lush rainforest. Then there's the rather prominently placed massive greenwall which further provides the club with a cool lushness and deceptively feels like natural light in the middle of the club. The greenwall also gave the club ESD credentials and has the very real effect of cleansing the air, thus creating a fresh crisp feel in the middle of the venue – and incidentally one of the largest and healthiest that Greenwall Australia has done!

Elsewhere within the club and the Balinese-inspired ornamentations continue with lily pads on the waterwall taking their influences from Asian lily pad motifs, with the koi fish in the gaming room and bathrooms an interplayed with the club's logo. Meanwhile, the outdoor gaming area is today set in lush garden surrounds with black bamboo running through the centre. But back in the gaming room and one feature you don't see very often at all is a player's pod – that area within your gaming floor that creates a point-of-difference and new experience for players. The gold gaming pod truly shines too via a unique sparkling gold finish while the remainder of the gaming floor serves as a simplified and restrained dark backdrop to allow the pod to float and the lights of the machines to come to the fore uninterrupted.

Another point of interest is the club's new main bar – being the focal point forming the main backdrop on the arrival axis from the foyer, it's a unique centrepiece that's purposefully positioned to be able to serve the bowling/sports lounge, bowling greens, TAB, and main dining lounge all from one key service point (thus reducing the club's operational costs). Impressively, the main bar features full-height glass refrigeration and a sculptural steel front wrapping off from concrete with revealing sensuous cut-outs all vibrantly lit (the curved steel inspiration was influenced by the idea of a feminine fabric draped over the concrete).

The next stage of the St Johns Park Bowling Club's refurbishment program is its bistro and dining areas which have been designed, documented, and tendered but yet to commence...so stay tuned! In the meantime, check out the club's achievements to date – you'll be bowled over! ♣

