

WHAT TO EXPECT

and consider when your club or pub gets a makeover

CI Partnership has designed and managed construction projects for large pubs and clubs – as big as the Easts Group and St Johns Park Bowling Club.

How does the planning and design approach change when working with smaller regional pubs or clubs, such as Kiama Golf Club?

Working with smaller clubs or pubs is quite different to projects for big clubs. A lot of the issues are around the budget; for a smaller or regional venue, the cost of a construction project can make up a significant portion of their balance sheet, so a construction project is not to be undertaken lightly, and we have to be very careful with how that money is spent. Owners and managers have to be confident that the design is right, and that it is going to deliver good outcomes in terms of improving their bottom line. The best way to ensure this is to be sure that the person or firm designing and constructing the project has credible runs on the board and the experience to deliver a good outcome.

Tell us a little about the new work at Kiama Golf Club and what it has planned for the future.

Kiama Golf Club approached us initially to look at covering a large alfresco terrace to make it more useable. At the same time, the manager realised that he had a problem with the gaming lounge and outdoor gaming, but just couldn't see any way that this could be solved within the budget that they had. Kiama Golf Club has had declining revenues over the past few years, with bar sales, food and gaming revenues down, so they realised that they had to do something, but didn't know exactly what.

We reviewed the club and realised that there were operational problems with the venue, and that it was looking quite tired. We prepared a concept plan for the club – this plan threw out the possibility of two stages of construction. First and foremost, it was imperative to get their core operations right and revenues heading back in the right direction – this first stage included a great improvement to their gaming area; their current arrangement had five machines on an outdoor terrace. We designed a solution for a 'Generation II' outdoor gaming area, with 20 machines outside in a pleasant courtyard garden-type environment, and, at the same time, greatly improved indoor gaming. As well as the gaming area, a significant element of the project

was the replacement of a very tired and inefficient bar, and an outdated TAB and sports lounge.

What has changed with the design of sports lounges and TABs in recent times?

There has been quite a bit of change in recent times – most noticeable is the move to electronic wall sheets. Older TABs had all the forms and sheets put up everywhere each day, requiring a lot of staff labour to put them up and also for cleaning up afterwards.

So, electronic forms and LCDs in the new format have allowed us to create much more slick designs built into cabinetry, which fit in well with the venue surrounds and, at the same time, operate much more efficiently.

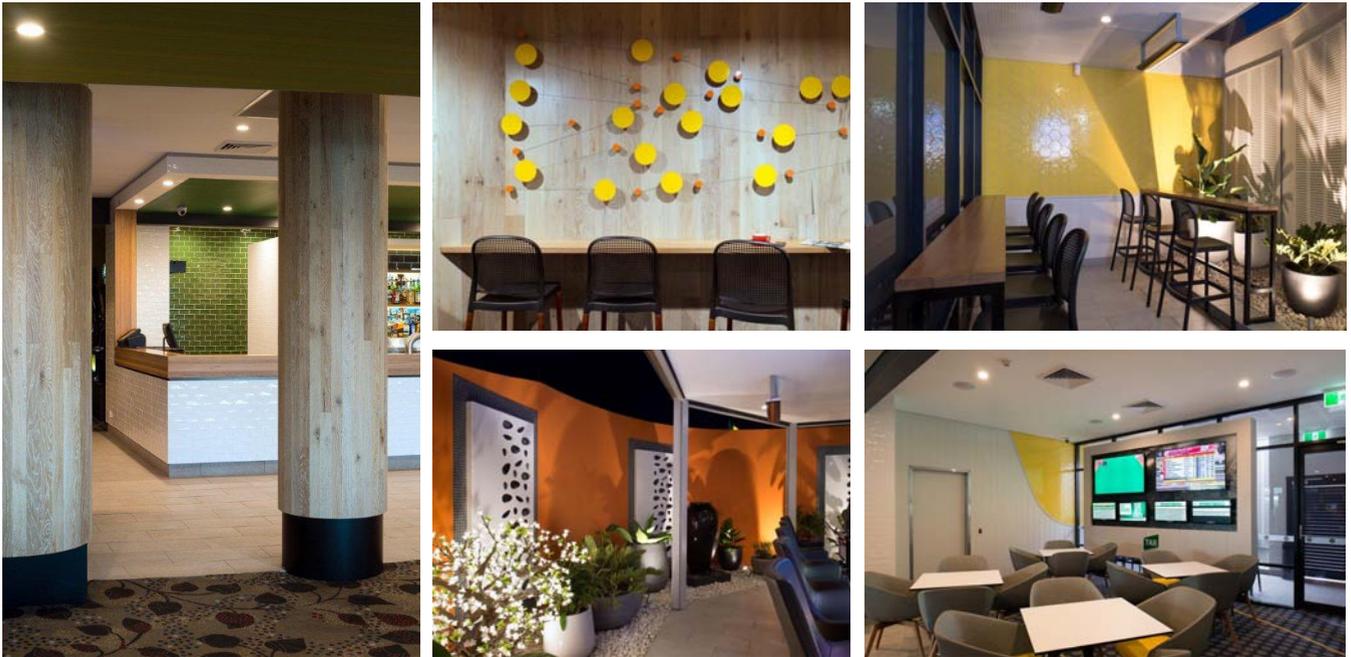
Sports theatres are becoming a big part as well, with fully integrated large LCD TVs in cabinetry walls that can create very pleasant, stylish and practical lounge areas.

A big part of Kiama Golf Club's makeover appears to be about securing the future of the club. What are the changes in the hospitality industry that you have witnessed over the past five years, and how do you see venues securing their economic future?

It's clear that the many economic challenges faced by hospitality venues are now affecting the way these businesses approach renewal. In the past, some building projects tended to be undertaken on a wing and a prayer, so to speak – you might have thrown a couple of million dollars at a project, and hoped that it worked and that people would come. These days, we need to take a much more considered approach to a project's goals and outcomes, do it properly, do it with the right people and make sure that it's the right product that you are offering.

How do you assess an existing venue and determine improvements to its operation?

We find that it's really important to understand a venue fully before we start any design work. We spend a lot of time at a venue analysing it and drawing up existing plans; we tag every space in that building, and we find out how much is going towards revenue raising, and how much is back-of-house and support. What that allows us to do is create analysis diagrams of the existing facility – quite often, we will find that some venues are up to 70 per cent or more back-of-house/support functions and only 30 per cent of the



Recent works at Kiama Golf Club. Photographed by Richard Glover

whole venue is revenue generating. That's a very inefficient situation – it should be the other way round: 70 per cent to revenue generation and 30 per cent to back-of-house/support functions.

So, a lot of clubs and pubs in the past have just built and added, and we are finding that a lot of venues are simply too big – they really need to get more efficient, not bigger! Once we have analysed a venue, we can graphically demonstrate to management how efficient or inefficient their venue is now, and how we are going to improve its efficiency. So, we don't go into any project on a wing and a prayer – we demonstrate exactly how we are going about improving things.

Operational efficiency is important, but it's also clear that venues need to stay up to date with the latest trends. What are you seeing out there, and what is important for clubs and pubs to consider?

The front-of-house presentation and offers in a venue are incredibly important, as this is how you attract the revenue in the first place.

We are seeing change; in the early 2000s, we saw a big change to richer, brown timbers, natural materials such as stone, and reds, oranges and darker colours. That décor is starting to have its time now, as it has been around for a while and been replicated a lot. There has also been a push to very minimal, distressed-type fit-outs – with old paint scraped back, ceilings ripped out to expose services, packing cases or palettes to form screens and banquette seating, et cetera. Again, this is now being heavily replicated, and will undoubtedly become a little tired and dated very soon.

So, we have been moving our projects towards a more timeless approach, which will give any refurbishment a bit

more longevity. We are creating much crisper, clean spaces, with bright colours, and lots of alfresco areas, with garden themes and natural materials.

If a venue is aware that it really needs to update to arrest sliding profits, what would your advice be to them in terms of the first steps to take?

You need to address the problem head on; you can't just sit back and leave things, because you will get to a position where you won't be able to address it. If you have declining profits, you have to do something; leave it too long and you won't have the funds to achieve change.

The first thing is to get someone who has experience in that area of design to come in and assist you, as often it's a case of familiarity leading to blindness! When you are living and breathing a venue, you become so familiar with it that you sometimes can't really see a way out; you get caught up with the minutiae. Coming in with fresh eyes and looking from a global perspective and down on the plan view really helps, and we find that we can really surprise owners and managers with what we come up with, which they would never have envisioned.

After an initial concept master plan is prepared, what generally are the next steps in the process to procuring the project and completing construction?

A master plan can throw out great ideas but also, sometimes, too much cost. Often, you have to work back from there to something that's more manageable. We will try to hold onto the great ideas and incorporate them in a staged or smaller project. Once you know the scope and staging that is to be tackled, you can embark on the detailed design and documentation for development application and tender, et cetera. **C&PM**