

Hotel Illawarra

A new demographic of cashed-up Gongites are descending on the CBD. And they've worked up a thirst.

Text: Cat Strom



After being closed for 12 months to receive a \$4m makeover, Wollongong's new-look Illawarra Hotel has finally revealed itself. The hotel has been a fixture of the city's pub scene since the 1930s. It's an Art Deco building with elaborate patterned brickwork. The strength and integrity of the building was an inspiration to Indyk Architects, who felt that any work done to the interior would need to mirror these attributes.


Behind the heritage-listed façade — which has been restored and tastefully lit — the venue is spacious, airy and modern. The concept was to gut the interior of the hotel, eliminating large masonry columns and bulky beams as well as other assorted pokey rooms. This has created a strong steel framework of columns that allow the interior to be open and free spanning with smaller areas within for seating, lounging, eating and socialising.

All up you have a hotel that is far more inviting and open — completely different to its former 'haunted house' incarnation.

"The understanding of the changing life within the hotel, from the day to the night crowd was critical to get right," explained Shelley Indyk. "The interiors needed to be delightful in daylight yet mysterious at night. Colour and texture is a strong design element along with the use of indirect lighting."

Point of View was responsible for the lighting design and the big emphasis was on integrating the lighting into the architecture... sometimes deep into the architecture, within nooks and crevices, thereby minimising the impact of light sources.

There was also considerable emphasis on achieving a sense of intrigue through high contrast and low ambient light levels. A number of unique light fittings were created specifically for this project, including a contemporary take on the traditional snooker table light (See above), and some exterior LED pendants.



Amber Bar

The Illawarra packs two bars. Although there are some shared design elements they offer two very different experiences. The front bar, known as the Amber Bar (left), is a sports bar where the use of woods and orange hues is the focus. In fact, the use of timber in various hues and veneers has added to the new-found warmth of the hotel. The Amber Bar features Australian hardwoods: blackbutt for the bar face along with stained spotted gum for the bar top. The veneers used in the job are from NAVeneer, a company that distributes veneers made in Italy from poplar tree plantations. The wood looks exotic but is totally 'plantation' growth and ecologically responsible.

Orange and red lenses on the lights reflect a warm glow rather than white light. The use of tiles on some of the walls establishes patterns that work their way through the hotel — from the tiled hallway and tiled fireplace, to the acoustic panelled blocks of colour and texture. It's not something you see everyday and, I presume, harks back to Art Deco's love of the odd tile.

Zenya Bar

To the rear is the Zenya Bar, created out of sparkling black granite/red tiles and red acoustic panels. With a mix of high energy lighting and cool grooves, the Zenya Bar has become the new hot-spot for party-goers in this region.

"Our key objective is to provide an array of entertainment throughout the week that caters to all party enthusiasts," Marketing and Events Manager Penny Bell said.

Point of View's scheme also comprises lighting and audio for DJs and dance events. A truckload of acoustic treatment was introduced into the room. This created extra demands on installing the lighting — holes in the ceiling potentially let sound through them like water rushing through holes in a bucket, so other techniques needed to be introduced.

Dancefloor Atmospherics

The dancefloor is furnished with ottomans and tub chairs in rich red, chocolate and orange colours. The subtle hues of the furnishings are animated by lots of colour and movement, courtesy of an impressive array of nightclub lighting fixtures. Illawarra Production Services (IPS) designed and installed the entertainment lighting as well as the audio system. IPS's resident lighting guru Tobi Pinazza designed the system for the venue.

Four Studio Due Shark 250 moving head profiles work hard on the dancefloor projecting colour and gobo patterns onto the masses.

"They're a good design and build with smooth operating," commented Michael Schafe, Managing Director of IPS. "We also installed two Martin Ego 5X effect lights over the dancefloor from where they produce a great kaleidoscope effect whilst two Ego 6X fixtures provide a more flower-type effect onto the walls."

A Martin DC1 is used to project a decorative water effect onto the northern wall while washing liquid light through the crowd while a DC2 projects contrasting images of flickering flames. A Martin EFX800 provides a quicker, sharper disco effect to the room while two more are situated in the courtyard to illuminate the water-feature whilst also adding movement, texture and pattern.

Atmospherics is provided by a Look Solutions Unique 2 hazer while control is via a Martin LightJockey.

IPS installed four Nexo PS10 and two LS500 sub speakers (marshalled by a Nexo TD controller) into Zenya while the rest of the venue is serviced by Bose Model 32 ceiling speakers. Control and drive consists of Electrovoice Precision Series for the dancefloor, QSC PLX2 Series for the ceiling speakers and subs, QSC ISA Series for 100V line speakers and an Australian Monitor 100V line amp for the gaming lounge. Playback included two Pioneer CDJ-1000 MkIII CD players, two Technics SL1200 turntables and an Allen & Heath Xone:62 mixer.

Smoke Signals

The refurbishment was, in part, due to the new smoking laws, and therefore the upgrade introduced a new internal courtyard, which has become the focal point of the new design. It features a long wall-mounted water-feature as well as red lanterns and custom-made scalloped teak seating (by UTJ Interiors) that surround a large tree. The courtyard brings light and life into the interior and remains a stunning feature come nightfall. The courtyard can unite or separate the two bars space depending on whether the sliding and bifold doors are completely open or closed. <<

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» **Dynalite (lighting control):** 1300 554 178 or www.dynalite-online.com

The Manager's Perspective

Illawarra Hotel is owned by Garry Kam and Fred Bart, while Paul Anzani, Manager of Hotel Operations, is the welcoming face of the venue.

"This part of Wollongong, in the CBD, has undergone quite a transformation with the rise of city living and there is also a large retail development underway nearby, so we wanted to take advantage of these changes. It's a changing landscape of inner-city living in Wollongong and the hotel was due for a refurbishment as it was six years since the last one.

"The hotel market in Wollongong is very competitive within the CBD — one hotel group in particular dominates the scene with eight properties comprising nightclubs and hotels.

"We needed to come up with a renovation that was fresh and innovative for Wollongong. We wanted to achieve a metro look while at the same time retaining a 'Wollongong comfort zone' as well as taking on board changes to gaming and smoking legislation. The cornerstone to a lot of the structural work was the creation of an atrium inside the hotel. We also had to build a venue that had longevity — it needed to withstand a lot of wear and tear because of the diverse demographic of the Wollongong market.

"Considering we opened in the middle of winter, business has been very good. The hotel has had to reposition itself — its brand and position in the market place — so it's taken a few weeks for the 60 years of history associated with the hotel to start to shift and for us to now go in the strategic direction associated with city living and corporate office demographic. We're now moving into the warmer weather and people can enjoy our courtyard, plus there is generally more foot-traffic in the evenings so we're very happy with business."

» Product Focus

Nexo PS Series

IPS chose to install a Nexo PS-based audio rig for the dancefloor. Nexo's PS10 and LS500 sub are extremely light and compact, and pack a wallop. Nexo's Active Fullrange Processing enables a two-way passive 8 Ohm design to deliver bi-amped performance using just one amp channel adding up to less money, space and complexity. In this case IPS has teamed the speakers up with a Nexo TD digital system controller. Nexo, is French, clever and by no means the cheapest brand around, but the gear sounds superb.

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