

SO HOT RIGHT NOW

The Steyne Hotel delivers Chinese.

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Ask any local and they will tell you: living in Manly is like living in a small town. If you travel to any country town in NSW and around Australia there will more often than not be a family-run Chinese restaurant down the road. When we were deciding which type of restaurant to put upstairs, a Chinese restaurant seemed to be the best fit." That's how Project Manager Joseph Stephen encapsulates this restaurant job.

FEATHER TOUCH

Phoenix has landed at the Steyne Hotel in Manly. The latest incarnation of the Chinese restaurant chain greets the visitor with a timber-heavy entrance, sensual hanging lanterns and wide windows gazing over the beachside 'burb. Each Phoenix property (Castle Hill, Parramatta, Rhodes, CBD and now The Steyne at Manly) has its own design identity while fitting into the elegant red-and-timber brand signature.

Publican Gerard Dore worked with Stephen and a core team on the hotel's substantial renovations, of which Phoenix is the latest star offering.

"The Steyne has had a huge facelift and is now the village of Manly's only pub, bar or café where there's something for everybody, and every generation," says Stephen. "From the early hours of the morning surfers come straight off the water into the Rope & Anchor Café [located to the side of the main pub] to get not only their caffeine hit, but also to have a yarn with the local baristas and staff."

In addition to Phoenix upstairs, The Steyne encompasses accommodation, a huge outdoor beer garden, the Moonshine live music venue and bar and an additional bar, Blacket's, that has a prohibition-era vibe.

Stephen believes The Steyne is the most community-driven pub in Manly. "Even through its mammoth renovation over the past three years it has stayed true to its village community pub culture," he says. "They still house the punters club, they still do the meat raffle and they sponsor a helluva lot of community sporting and cultural groups."



The barfront is constructed of 100-year old wharf timber.



DISHING IT UP

The Steyne has seen multiple owners and design approaches in its century of existence, not all of them particularly harmonious with the character of the building and its surrounds, Stephen adds. “The biggest challenge was turning upstairs as a whole into an area that reflected the 100-year-old heritage of the hotel and converting it into a restaurant that fitted a new market in a restored classic pub.”

The initial restaurant construction was designed by Architectural Projects with Arcon Australia as the builders.

“The work is a mix of heritage and innovation,” says Jennifer Hill of Architectural Projects. “The essential character of the art deco hotel was maintained and reinforced in the new space. The existing heritage stair was extended to Level 3 as a dynamic vertical shaft. The external glazing was transformed to an openable wall to create a restaurant, like the lower bar, that was both indoor and outdoor. The space was defined by transparent screens [see main image] that filtered light from the sunlit exterior to the internal garden courtyard.” The restaurant sports curved banquette seating (in a figure-8, an important number signifying prosperity in the Chinese tradition), while the bamboo flooring, green slate tiles, the red of the mosaic tiles and lacquered doors all reference the Sino theme.

Design firm Group GSA was then brought in to theme the restaurant (to suit the Phoenix brand) in collaboration with Next Construction; transforming the venue into a modern Chinese pub restaurant with a classic edge.

“We wanted to maintain the relaxed rustic and lived-in brand of the iconic Manly landmark in the Hotel Steyne, yet bring in elements of sophistication and detail that define the space and give the restaurant its brand identity,” says Group GSA Associate Angela O’Connor. “We try to provide a distinctive element at each site that suits that market and, as we understand it, this tangible and evolving yet distinct identity is being embraced wholeheartedly at all levels of the Phoenix Group.”

FAMILY TIME

So what is the key to integrating a distinctive restaurant within a large and diverse establishment? “Don’t try and take over the whole complex,” says Stephen. “Each space should work in collaboration with the other major spaces as well as amenities and other facilities so the whole entity works in harmony.”

Just as pub bistros and Chinese restaurants across the country appeal to multiple generations, there’s space and seating for everyone. “The range of seating caters to the diverse clientele. Families, groups, couples and individuals are all accommodated. It entices patrons to return to experience a different side of the restaurant — high bar seating, low booth seating, outdoor seating which all convey different feelings at different times of the day, as well as prolonging the experience as patrons move from area to area.

“My favourite elements would have to be the transformation of the iconic Phoenix bird emblem [pictured this page] into a 3D sculpture as well as the lighting design throughout the restaurant, starting at ground level. All in all, the timber elements and rustic finishes are the finishing touches that makes the restaurant what it is.”

FEET ON THE GROUND

Manly is a ferry ride from the city and on a sunny day attracts beachgoers from far and wide who come for its sparkling location and village atmosphere. Stephen says: “An overtly ostentatious approach does not suit a seaside environment like Manly. The patrons and clientele attracted to these venues are both locals and tourists, and a look and feel that is comfortable, lived-in and captures the beach location works for both these groups. This more accessible approach to design reflects a broader trend in hospitality design that is less about perfection and more about capturing a unique character.”

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