



DETAILS

— S Y D N E Y —

space to perform

TAKING STYLISTIC CUES FROM THE GLAMOUR AND DECADENCE OF A BYGONE ERA, UPSTAIRS BERESFORD IS BRINGING THE SHOWMANSHIP BACK TO SYDNEY'S NIGHTLIFE CULTURE.

design Kerry Phelan Design Office (K.P.D.O.)
photography Sharyn Cairns
text Dana Tomic Hughes



[01]

DOWN a dark and narrow street, in the heart of Surry Hills, behind a large but discrete timber door, winding dark stairs lead to an intriguing place of decadence and entertainment that seems to hark back to a bygone era. Welcome to Upstairs Beresford, a highly anticipated live music venue designed by the Melbourne-based practice, Kerry Phelan Design Office (or simply KPDO), with support from stylist, Sibella Court.

With a capacity for 600 people, this music venue is the latest offering from Sydney's renowned hospitality group, Merivale, and is head and shoulders above its Sydney rivals. Inspired by the finest venues of New York and London, Upstairs Beresford showcases a well-designed interior with high attention to detail. Phelan and company also show us a sophisticated approach to finishes, furniture selection and some choice lighting.

"Architecturally, the Beresford is a mixture of many eras," says Kerry Phelan, founder and director of KPDO. "Perhaps the strongest influence that remains is the art deco period. The overall feel is contemporary, but the references to the 30s really did strike a chord with us."

Court says they wanted to create a live performance and music space that enticed people to frequent the venue as much for the interiors and experiential qualities as for the music and

entertainment. "This is a place to look glamorous, feel glamorous and drink cocktails," says Court.

With two separate bar areas and two outdoor verandas, the Upstairs Beresford creates a relaxing and comfortable feel, almost hypnotic at times. Effortlessly, it fuses a hybrid of sophistication, opulence and urban grit. "My colour inspiration came from writing about Australia's first interior designer, Marion Hall Best," says Court. Hall Best was one of the most influential interior designers in Australia during the 50s and 60s. She opened her studio in Sydney's Woollahra back in 1938, which comprised some of Australia's best designers at the time. Hall Best was famous for her use of big blocks of bright and vivid colours, and proudly proclaimed she could not stand the colour beige. She was also well-known for commissioning textile designs from other artists, to be used in her work.

Court took a similar approach herself for this project. "I used a local Shibori [Japanese dyeing technique] artist, Pepa Martin, for the stage curtains," says Court. "She dyed hundreds of metres in warm tones of chocolate through to orange, which sit beautifully with the mirrored tiles of the back of the bar."

Everything about the Upstairs Beresford is somehow new and exciting. And it is not just the unique design that makes this a fantastic addition

[01] The venue offers two lounge areas. This one, with a separate cocktail bar, offers a strikingly different aesthetic with clear undertones of art deco. A vivid orange pressed-tin ceiling adds a memorable touch.

[02] The charm of the underlying art deco theme is also found in more subtle references, evident in some of the lighting choices.



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— Kerry Phelan, KPDO

[03] Classic Thonet chairs give the space a sense of old-time character and charm.

[04] The islands of ‘cabaret club’ seating and tables were designed to have a contemporary feel, but with strong references to the 30s art deco period.

[05] The mirrored back bar plays host to countless bottles of alcohol, pot plants and curious objects, including this statue of a grumpy Beethoven found at a junk shop.

to Sydney’s music circuit. Considering its state-of-the-art technology and ‘immense’ sound system, this venue was clearly designed to give both the performer and patron a first class experience. “We designed a beautiful, huge, brass chandelier with 50 globes over the stage – that would have been a showstopper,” says Phelan. “Our client removed it because of concerns the artists would try to swing from it during their acts! Hopefully, it finds a place in one of Merivale’s other venues...”

There is a small dancefloor near the entry that nestles between the stage and the long front bar. A curved sweeping bulkhead surrounding the dance floor is clad in oversized herringbone timber panels in warm chocolate and caramel tones. This motif is repeated on the main bar front and low-level walls at a smaller scale, rendering this entire front space in a lovely texture. “The zigzag panelling is an inexpensive detail, but the impact is there!” says Phelan. The mirrored back bar is a feast for the eyes, with countless bottles of alcohol and curious objects – here you can find anything from pot plants, lamps and vases to statues of a young Mozart and a grumpy Beethoven.

Central to Upstairs Beresford is an island of seats and tables that dominate the room. This tiered curved ‘cabaret club’ seating group in front of the podium stage was designed to have a contemporary feel, but the reference to the 30s art deco period is quite evident. These booths allow people to easily hide from the rest of the space and provide opportunities for more intimate interactions and blocking out the ‘music’ at times. “The soft furnishings and furniture have an obvious domestic feel, despite the fact that everything is designed to perform in the tough conditions of a band room, says Phelan. “Having worked with this client before, we knew that the success of his venues is through making people feel at home.”

Surrounding walls on one side of the main space are covered with black and white posters from House of Merivale archives – in homage to owner Justin Hemmes’ heritage. Further down the back is another inviting lounge area within a separate cocktail bar. This quarter offers a strikingly different aesthetic. “While there is cohesion between the two main spaces, each has a decidedly different look,” says the designer.



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[06] Central to Upstairs Beresford is an island of tiered curved 'cabaret club' seating groups in front of the podium stage. The booths allow people to easily hide from the rest of the space.

[07] The main shelving system behind the bar is a clever device hung from the floating ceiling above. The choice of adding orange to the overall colour scheme adds just that needed touch of contrast.

[08] Oversized herringbone wall timber panels render the space with a lovely texture and warmth, while the use of lighting and signage is tactful.

[07]



[08]



“OUR MAIN CHALLENGE WAS TO MAKE THIS VENUE LOOK ‘UNDESIGNED’. IT’S ALMOST AS IF EACH ROOM WAS CONCEIVED BY A DIFFERENT PERSON AT A DIFFERENT TIME.”

— Kerry Phelan, KPDD



[09]

ACCORDING TO COURT, OVER 100 POTTED PLANTS AND TREES WERE USED IN THIS SPACE.



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“Our main challenge was to make this venue look ‘undesigned’. It’s almost as if each room was conceived by a different person at a different time. We wanted the spaces to appear as if they’d evolved over a number of years.” The cocktail bar is furnished with beautiful Ikat chairs, Shibori-dyed indigo linen curtains, stunning art deco lamps, a leather DJ box and soft hues of velvet. Linen sofas and a wall of joinery are faced with glittering brass mesh, also housing countless objects of curiosity. A vivid orange pressed-tin ceiling provides a memorable finishing touch, and lends this area a beautiful warm glow.

When asked about some of their biggest challenges during this project, Phelan recalls working hard to pare back the detail, in order to bring the budget under control. “We found other ways to achieve the same results with standard products used in a different way,” she says. “For example, skirtings running vertically on the bar front, instead of our original custom solid timber detail.” The two outdoor verandas are perfect for whiling away balmy summer evenings, says Court. Tiled

with clean charcoal and chocolate-coloured tiles, the look is beautifully balanced with slightly rustic, garden-like furniture. Lanterns add a warm feel, and plants and foliage accentuate the outside setting. According to Court, over 100 potted plants and trees were used in this space.

The Beresford Hotel is considered Merivale’s ‘bargain’ pub, purchased by Justin Hemmes back in April of 2010. He bought the property from the cardboard magnate, Ashod Nassibian, for \$14.6 million. The purchase price was allegedly well below its original asking price of \$25 million, and far less than the \$37 million the previous owner is reported to have spent buying and renovating the hotel. Think what you will about Justin Hemmes, but the man certainly knows how to spot glaring opportunities in Sydney’s nightlife scene. *(inside)*

> kerryphelan.com.au

[09] The two outdoor terraces are perfect for whiling away balmy evenings.

[10] Outdoor furniture is slightly rustic, but well balanced with a few modern classics.

[11] Charcoal and chocolate tiles balance beautifully with the foliage.



[11]