

DESIGN AWARDS

# Raising the bar

Stephen Todd takes a perch at the venues voted best in class.

I don't want a seat at the table this summer, I want a high stool at the bar.

A bar like the one at Dolly, in the hip Adelaide suburb of Unley, where local designer Ryan Genesin has crafted a sensuous interior from humble materials – concrete, brick and timber – offset by rich ochre drapery.

The bar itself is formed from concrete poured in-situ, so the fascia bears the sculptural creases of bagging; the top, while polished to a silky sheen, features crumpled indentations that no sitter can resist caressing. The effect was so pleasing, the designer decided to add another, free-standing bar module in the dining room: a private island for four.

At Beau restaurant, in Sydney's Surry Hills, the bar is a monolith hewn from black granite. It's here that I sit for a catch-up with architect William Smart, whose Smart Design Studio devised the interior fit-out.

He points out the way the bar anchors the space, the way it sits in conversation with a buttery caramel leather banquette that runs



through the room, linking it to the street-fronting bakery called Dough. (Both spaces, known collectively as Beau & Dough, are owned and operated by the crew from Nomad and, like those much-loved eateries, are rooted in Middle Eastern cuisine.)

"It's fun to sit at the bar," says Smart, who made the booking. "You get an elevated perspective on the room."

He's right: from stool-height you can fully appreciate the way the honey-hued lighting makes the granite floor shimmer while also noting the undulations of the metal mesh panels that drape from the concrete ceiling.

From up here the view through the giant plate-glass wall onto the skinny laneway reads as an abstract composition of various layers of heritage bricks. And the floor plan, essentially a pared-back modernist box typical of Smart's work, appears elegant in its simplicity despite the brouhaha of dinner

Beau restaurant, in Sydney's Surry Hills, was named joint winner in the restaurant category in the 2023 Eat, Drink Design Awards. PHOTO: PABLO VEIGA

service. He calls it "a beautiful diagram that's highly functional".

Dolly by Genesin Studio was named Best Bar in last month's Eat, Drink Design Awards; Beau took the top gong in the Restaurant category, sharing the accolade with the Fiona Lynch-designed Kiln restaurant atop Sydney's Ace Hotel.

At Kiln, the bar is formed from slabs of streaky green and rose marble offset by panels of polished brass. The custom-made stools are composed of what look like leather saddlebags slung over high, cantilevered frames. A DJ booth sits off to one side, and low-lying timber seats in the bar area are easily slid aside to create an impromptu dance floor.

"Hospitality today has to have space for all levels of dining and drinking and partying," says Brent Savage of The Bentley Restaurant Group, who sat on the jury for

this year's Eat, Drink Design Awards.

"With interest rates, the cost of living and so forth, people are more conscious of how they're spending their money. So, when they go out, they want to combine the thrills into one experience."

This week, The Bentley Group will add a new Asian fusion restaurant called King Clarence to a portfolio that already boasts Monopole, Yellow, Cirrus and Brasserie 1930 at the Capella Hotel.

Savage intends the Sydney CBD venue to have a lively bar vibe. And yes, there's a DJ booth. "If we can get those three things – great food, buzzy bar, brilliant music – happening, hopefully people will want to stay."

Rachel Luchetti of renowned hospitality design studio Luchetti Krelle (Jane in Surry Hills, Sydney, Ovolo in South Yarra, Melbourne, Mount Pleasant Wines at Pokolbin, NSW) convinced the owners of Hurricane's Grill in Sydney's Cronulla that a bar should be a main feature of the fit-out.

"The space is big, and we didn't want a sea of tables and chairs," says Luchetti, who has won multiple Eat, Drink, Design awards since founding her Sydney studio with Stuart Krelle in 2008.

"So we pushed the idea of making the bar a major feature of the room. Rather than put it in the middle, we positioned it off to one side so that it creates a kind of visual massing."

At the new Morris Hotel in Sydney's Haymarket precinct, the bar, in cloudy pink marble, is open throughout the day. "Guests access the space 24/7 so it had to make sense whether you're ordering coffee or a late-night tippie," says Carla Matias, design manager of Tom Mark Henry.

For the street-level room with no windows, the design studio created a layered interior of glossy lacquer and glimmering ceramic tiles illuminated by crystal-bead chandeliers. It feels fabulously louche, no matter what time you visit. **L&L**

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