



# Chiswick

*Architect Chris Grinham of Humphrey + Edwards gave a once-fashionable Sydney venue a new lease of life*

“**W**hen Woollahra council put Pruniers restaurant out to tender, we were approached by Matt Moran and Peter Sullivan about pulling together a proposal. We created a strategy for the entire building covering financials, a design for the sort of restaurant it would be, and a plan of how that would work. A month

after our tender was lodged, we received the nod. There was a substantial amount of building work undertaken. On the ground-floor level, we retained three walls and about five metres of glass wall. All the floors came out, all the services were redone, the kitchen was expanded, and the base structure was completely rebuilt. At one stage we had about 180 Acrow props holding up the building.

“The concept and look of the restaurant was a consultative process. Matt and Peter had a vision for the food which included the idea of shared plates, the deformatisation of the menu and the way the place would operate. It would be very different to Aria and how it’s perceived. They talked about serving the sort of food they would cook at home and that idea pervaded some of the decor and the detailing.

“It was Pete Sullivan who came up with the idea of a kitchen garden. There were 150 square metres of space at the back of the building that we couldn’t use under the terms of the lease. The space wasn’t massive but it’s certainly big enough to grow some fresh greens and put them on the menu.

“When we knocked some holes in the old plasterboard ceiling above the bar, we found the remnants of a fantastic old ceiling structure. Then we discovered a remnant of original French doors in the main dining hall. Once again, we embraced that idea and expanded the room by adding another 100 square metres of building. It’s actually difficult for people to figure out where the old ends and the new begins.

“We designed and had built a big communal table in the bar and positioned a light above the southern end made from an old lobster pot. We also have a couple of tables

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from the old Sydney GPO at the southern end of the bar that we restored back to their former glory. All the chairs in the dining room are a mixture of three different types of Thonet bentwoods. They give the room a nice eclectic feel.

“The main dining hall can be screened off with a glass sliding wall. It can be used as a function space, or for a private room of 20 or 30 patrons. We also planned that if there was a quiet lunch day of 80 or 100 people, the wall could be slid across and everybody could be grouped together in one area. Not that they have ever had to do that – the place has gone nuts since it opened. I’ve certainly heard stories of people coming for lunch, staying right through the afternoon and end up having dinner there.” ○