



Esquire

A river view was key when HASSELL architect Stephen Cameron turned a dowdy office floor into a fine-dining establishment in inner-city Brisbane

“**T**he site was originally a ground level tenancy of an office building that had been empty for five years. It was a generic space with the usual office carpet, panel ceiling and huge columns. The primary feature was the

great outlook over the river. It was the blankest of blank canvases.

“The biggest challenge was to break that one room into a series of smaller rooms that were column free and sat as interconnected spaces. A big part of the brief was to have three separate sections to the restaurant. Obviously, the columns could not be removed—they’re holding up a 15-storey tower—so we integrated them into the design. You don’t even notice them anymore.

“Now when you arrive, there’s a noisy, friendly bar that offers a separate menu. It’s a great drop-in place for lunch. Moving deeper into the restaurant, you pass a little pre-dinner drinks alcove, and then move into the fine-dining restaurant. Beyond that is a raised platform, separated by a joinery element that acts as a waiter/sommeliers station. On the other side is a semi-private fine-dining area that can be booked as a stand-alone room.

“Ryan [Squires, executive chef and co-owner with Cameron Murchison] wanted patrons engaged in the dining experience as a whole and the kitchen is a big part of that. The relationship between where you eat and where the food is made had to be

direct. From the tables, you can see the chefs working and assembling the dishes.

“There are three kitchens—one that serves the casual section, another serving the degustation and fine dining, and a third kitchen behind that. The first two are on view, and the third is the prep kitchen where back-of-house stuff happens.

“Ryan and Cameron were hands on in the design phase. Every detail was considered many times over. The furniture was no exception. We looked at hundreds of different samples before sourcing dining chairs from Organic Modernism in Brooklyn, New York. They are beautiful tactile pieces with a Scandinavian look.

“The pendant lights are a big part of setting the ambience. The ceiling is articulated to define taller and smaller spaces, helping set the mood in different parts of the restaurant.

“Esquire is a long-term venture—it’s all about natural high-quality materials creating an environment that’s a delightful place to dine. It’s won many awards but the most satisfying one for us was seeing it become the only three-hat restaurant in Brisbane. That’s a great success for our clients and for us. It’s not just about winning design awards; it’s about setting up our clients so they can do the best they can in their own endeavours.” ○

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