



St Katherine's

Craig Gorman of Mills Gorman Architects transformed an old bank and hair salon into a light and airy eatery in Melbourne's suburb of Kew

“**O**ver the past seven years, we have been involved with quite a few of the Made Establishment restaurants such as Maha, Hellenic Republic and PM24. Through this longstanding relationship, George [Calombaris] and Shane [Delia] engaged us to work on St Katherine's in 2011. The site was very challenging because even though it appeared as one building, it was actually a couple of buildings. Two-thirds of the space was a bank which is always fun as their safes and strong rooms are difficult and expensive to convert. The other side of the building was a hairdressing salon.

“As is often the case, there's a lot of money invested in what you don't see. We had to jig the base building into shape so it complied with DDA [Disability Discrimination Act] rules. The site also falls from the front to the back. There were challenges accommodating all the town planning requirements for cars and for making all the floor levels line up.

“St Katherine's is spread over two levels. Upstairs we put services, offices and toilets, which meant the addition of a lift due to disability access requirements. There's also a function room and a presentation kitchen where they hold cooking classes. The function room has an operable wall that converts the space into two smaller soundproof rooms. The upstairs rooms were designed as quite a neutral space so they can be a backdrop to all sorts of events. The ground-floor level is entered through an air lock and you're greeted with a bar that turns into a kitchen.

A big part of this brief was to get the feeling of food out into the public area so it's a very open kitchen. There was also a last-minute request to put in a five-metre-long open fire char-grill.

“As this was a late inclusion, it created considerable challenges. The restaurant interfaces with a residential zone and the authority requirements for smoke exhaust are quite stringent. There were a lot of boxes that needed ticking but ultimately, they ended up with what they wanted. The char-grill has become quite a centrepiece to the experience.

“There is a Maltese/Middle Eastern feel to St Katherine's. We used textures and materials that relate without overdoing it. There are big communal tables made of butcher's blocks and we added a painted breeze block wall. The lighting is simple and understated with plenty of uprights and downlights. We also found some lovely globes with a stenciled pattern that work really well in the space. Above all that are acoustic panels that successfully muffle the noise without taking the soul out of it.

“The balance of this restaurant is very good, particularly with the table layout. We discussed everything down to the last detail with George and Shane during innumerable workshops where we shared our ideas. The result has been truly outstanding. Balance is everything, and good restaurants like St Katherine's get that just right.” ○

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