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Urbane, Brisbane

Turning one restaurant into four distinct venues within a heritage-listed shell was the challenge facing Angela Layton of Arkhefield architecture in Brisbane

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e were working on the redevelopment of the entire building and during that process, Andrew Buchanan and Drew Patten [owners of Urbane] decided to expand their business. As well as a complete refurbishment of the existing Urbane restaurant, they took over the tenancy next door, added an extension and opened a completely separate restaurant called The Euro.

The basement was excavated to create the private dining space called Sub Urbane and a new bar was built over a loading dock at the back of the building called The Laneway. Ultimately, one restaurant was transformed into four distinct venues.

“The kitchen sits between Urbane and the Euro and services all four venues. They continued to operate for a while during the construction so we had to be careful about how we progressed. The kitchen is really considered the engine room with the restaurants radiating around it. There’s quite a lot of operational staff movement between all four venues but it remains unseen from the front of house. There’s a back entrance to Sub Urbane for wait staff and the extension into the basement meant we could locate a lot of back-of-house down there. Staff access The Laneway bar through the Euro, but apart from that, they never have to pass through one venue to get to another.

“All four venues have completely different personalities and the menus are all quite distinct. Sub Urbane very purposefully has a subterranean basement wine cellar ambience. The Euro is a more casual brasserie that’s fun and optimistic. The Laneway is a rooftop cocktail bar that serves wagyu burgers and has a relaxed atmosphere.

“Urbane already had a very strong brand and brand recognition within the Brisbane and national market. The refurbishment was about extending that recognition and celebrating the quality of the food. We always intended to recreate an atmosphere similar to what it had before, even though it now looks completely different. The plate is the centre of importance in Urbane.

“The furniture is all new and was sourced from Stylecraft (www.stylecraft.com.au). In

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Urbane, there’s the potential for very long degustation meals so it was important the seating is very comfortable. It’s very much about sitting in a beautiful room and having the food as the centre of attention.

“Likewise, the downlighting is about focusing on the table which emphasises the plate. The chef is creating some pretty spectacular things, particularly on the degustation menu, and the colours that come out on those plates needs to be seen and appreciated. We really tried to make the food be the hero rather than the architecture or the design.

“The reason people go to Urbane is to enjoy and explore the food. We intentionally screened the restaurant at the front so there are no sightlines inside. You don’t go there to be seen—you go there to eat, drink and have a nice time with the people you love.” ○

WORDS: KERRYN RAMSEY