

GREEN MACHINE

Another storied suburban corner pub is given the Sand Hill Road treatment. This time with a green twist.

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Sand Hill Road pub group has done it again. And I'm not talking about the fact it's opened another kick-arse suburban pub (it has), or that the Sand Hill boys have artfully resuscitated another Victorian era rough-diamond gem (which indeed they have), or detonated another design stun grenade thanks to a longstanding partnership with Techne Architecture and Visual Builders (that's true as well). No, I'm talking about Sand Hill Road absorbing another 'local' from its collective youth into the burgeoning mini empire.

The Prahran Hotel [Issue 53] was Matt and Andy Mullins local in the mid '90s, and now The Terminus gets 'collected' as a local of three of the four Sand Hill Road partners. Struggling publicans in the Richmond/Abbotsford area of Melbourne could do worse than research any other locals the Sand Hill partners frequented 20-odd years ago.

Matt Mullins: "At the time we were planning our first pub, The Terminus was our local — we shared a house 100m down the road. We'd come here, drink and chat about whether being publicans would be right for us; whether it was sustainable; what our first pub would look like. I'm not sure if we ever sat in this pub and thought 'we'll own this one day' but it was a big inspiration for us."

That pub was owned by Alison Whyte and Fred Whitlock who took the eclectic bohemian vibe of nearby Fitzroy and designed a pub that was a happening, energetic hub for students and locals. It had the legacy tight spaces and compartmentalised small-room layout so common of suburban corner pubs, but as Matt recalls there was always a generously proportioned beer garden that would prove to be a future jewel in the crown.

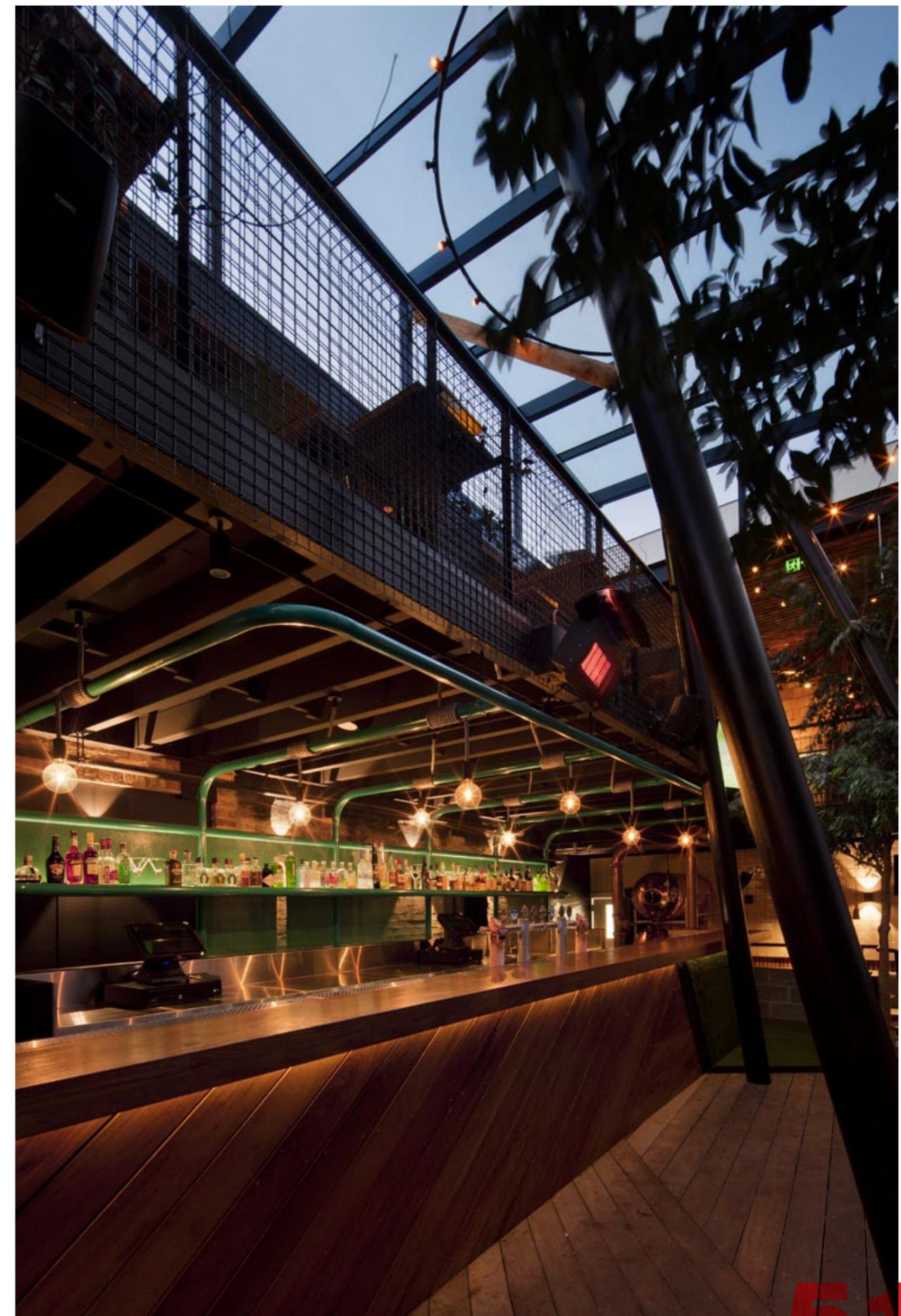
Come 2012 when Sand Hill Road took over the pub, nothing much was left of The Terminus. It was derelict and squatters had moved in. That said, Matt still carried a torch: "The bars, the kitchen, the kitsch memorabilia was gone. But it still had the same soul."

SUPER FRIENDS

Sand Hill Road enjoys one of the longest and most fruitful professional partnerships in Australia hospitality. The pub group, Techne Architects and Visual Builders have collaborated on some 13 different projects and the innate trust between the three parties has resulted in some extraordinary new venues. Visual Builders boss, Tony Lewis, puts it bluntly: "It's thanks to our relationship that we're able to build pubs that lots of people in the industry would like to have, but can't." Tony's not necessarily big-noting himself, but simply stating that when high quality design, operational know-how, and expert workmanship combines with the threesome's unique working relationship, magic happens. Matt elaborates: "We've developed a way of working, a shorthand, that's priceless."

That shorthand was immediately activated, according to Matt: "We had to move fast. With the other pub rebuilds we were able to operate them while we worked on the plans. Not here. There was no way we could run The Terminus, we would have to drop a lot of money to get it operational and it would have been money we'd never get back."

Techne Architects began to drip feed Visual Builders plans, enough for Tony and his team to begin the demolition. With each stage, Tony could give





Best Fronds Forever: "In some ways this an ode to the old Terminus. It's a space for a DJ and dancing; and it's a bit kitsch, with wallpaper on the ceiling. A loud, sculptural bar finishes off an offbeat space. It's still connected to the pub, overlooking to the public bar and the beer garden." — Justin Northrop



Made From Beer: The Terminus is the third outing for CUB's unpasteurised Carlton Draught initiative. The fresh brew takes the short trip from the Abbotsford brewery in a tanker and gets piped into The Terminus canisters. More than a nice marketing tale to tell, there are practical advantages. The Terminus carries 60 kegs' worth of the brew on site. There's considerable space saving in that, as well as the time advantage from not needing to change those 60 kegs across four or so days.



Dream Team: Justin Northrop (Director, Techne Architects), Matt Mullins (Director, Sand Hill Road) and Tony Lewis (Director, Visual Builders) enjoy a drop of something cold and unpasteurised.

“ every extra bar could add another \$50,000 - But that's the money you need to spend, to make money when the money's there to be made ”

Sand Hill Road a cost estimate. Sounds great? But unequivocally the consensus from Justin Northrop (Techne Director), Tony and Matt is 'don't try this at home'. Without 'blood brother'-style trust, costs and budgets can quickly spiral out of control.

Justin Northrop explains: "Working on an existing building has plenty of its own complexities. You understand the building better after demolition, it makes the next stage's decisions easier. So there are upsides. The main downside is budget related. If it wasn't for the unknown of how much it'll end up costing, being more flexible might even be a better way to work. But that's where the tensions arise — how much is it all going to cost?"

OPEN GARDEN

The team's approach might sound freewheeling and laissez-faire, but nothing could be further from the truth. Sand Hill Road has become a significant pub operator by combining a ballsy approach to innovation, a reverence for community pub fundamentals, a forensic refinement of op-

erations, and an instinctive appreciation of what punters enjoy. So by the time the jackhammers were unleashed, Sand Hill Road and Techne had the design down.

Justin Northrop: "The garden space was the centrepiece. We looked at integrating outdoor spaces at The Prahran Hotel and The Bridge Hotel and they all exceeded expectations."

Matt Mullins: "We've learnt over the years that Melburnians are uniquely determined to be outside whenever they can — come hail or shine. If Melbourne was always warm and dry, people would be outside all day, every day of the year. In response, we've spent a lot of energy fighting to provide outdoor spaces. We've tried to make indoor spaces, outdoor spaces, and it's been difficult. Meanwhile, the Terminus has always had a huge beer garden — no need to knock anything over or get council approval. We knew it was a great gift."

The result is a suburban oasis. A discovery not obvious from the street. Its double height contributes to the drama, while the skewed forest of col-

umns affords the area the look of a sophisticated bamboo forest. Some of the planting is synthetic indoors but the mature trees are very much real, and ensure this beer garden is verdant and inviting. But this is Melbourne and you could easily freeze your butt off much of the year, so a battery of wall-mounted Bromic gas heaters comfortably takes the edge off when required.

WHAT'S UP?

Do a lap of The Terminus (or have a look at the accompanying photos) and it's striking to observe just how much of the seating is fixed or banquette style. Justin reckons around 80%, in fact: "It shows confidence in the design. There's no hedging our bets in the way the space will be used — we've come to conclusions about the best use for each space and backed it. The spinoff is that fixed furniture is more comfortable and neater — circulation isn't messed up by chairs dragged across the room."

It's these operational shibboleths that mean the

most. Hard-worn experience winning out.

Matt: "We've learnt a lot about traffic flow over the years, especially about how to get people upstairs. Having the stairs visible from the front door is important. If you make the upper floor visible, so people can see up there — even better. For The Terminus, Techne designed a void. So you come in the front doors and within a couple of metres you can see the next level— you can't miss the fact there's a whole other floor. As a result the balconies overlooking the courtyard are well frequented — you've got to make it easy for people."

Justin: "You can't get people upstairs with a lick of paint and some new light fittings. Often you have to make major structural modifications to get a meaningful connection to the lower levels. It's not a cheap exercise, so you have to back yourself that it'll make a return."

KNOW THE FLOW

Sand Hill Road doesn't profess to be the first to

unlock the code to enticing people past the front bar, but they're one of the best.

Perhaps The Terminus Hotel's coup de grâce is the back bar. Originally conceived as a 'campsite' with its shingles and a fireplace, the team knew something special was required to avoid the back end of the pub being a no-go cul de sac. If this bar was in Chinatown you'd hide it down an alley behind a dumpster and it would instantly be a 'best kept secret' hipsters' bolthole. As it happens, it's a rewarding destination for those exploring the pub.

The fireplace didn't make the cut but the installed ropes forming cabana-style seating options did, and they're quickly proving to be a favourite.

Ensuring the amenity of the area, a big chunk of floor space has been devoted to a bar. As you'd expect, Sand Hill Road has given this aspect of the design plenty of consideration as well.

Matt: "The Terminus has really made us think about the number of bars, allocation of bars and accessibility of bars to be efficient. Most pubs

are probably only at peak capacity for about eight hours a week — Friday and Saturday night between the hours of 8pm and 12. And that's when most pubs need to make hay. There's no point having 100 people standing three deep at the bar, because that's the time when you need to make your money. It's a challenge to design a pub for eight hours a week. Ideally you want more bar space during those periods, but every extra bar could add another \$50,000 to the cost of the fitout. But that's the money you need to spend, to make money when the money's there to be made. As a result, we've really increased our linear bar meterage per patron in this pub. We have more bars and improved the accessibility. You don't need to move more than 10m or so to stand at a bar." ^{venue}

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