



# Raising a Glass to the Heineken Bar

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Even for a seasoned glazier like Steven Wellfare of Wellfix Glass & Aluminium, the Heineken Bar at Sydney International Airport posed a unique series of challenges.

The idea for this ambitious project arrived courtesy of Dreamtime Australia Design, who came up with the concept of the curved bar. 'We contacted Bent & Curved Glass in Sydney after securing the project around 1½ years ago; MPA was the leading contractor,' Steven says.

Preparation turned out to be the easiest part, as building inside an airport made construction uniquely challenging. "This was the first job we'd ever done in an airport environment, which came with attendant difficulties caused by time restrictions and ready access," Steven reveals. 'It took us around one-and-a-half hours just to walk onsite, with only five hours of build time available per day.'

'To get things done at a reasonable pace, we had to coordinate construction with the airport terminal schedule, which we clearly didn't realise when we took on the job. However, we managed to achieve a great outcome by working closely with the staff at MPA and Bent & Curved Glass throughout.'

Despite the restrictions, the entire project was completed within a very tight timeframe. 'We were onsite for four weeks, including all the preparation work, and when the glass was being curved,' Steven says. 'We received midnight glass deliveries, which we wheeled through the airport when there was nobody there; we coordinated the night shifts as well.'

The Heineken Bar's myriad fine details demanded close attention and lateral thinking. 'The original design featured a folded copper band in each vertical corner, which was intended to cover the glass,' Steven explains. 'As the project progressed, it became apparent that this wouldn't work, because the copper would kink whenever the installers attempted to curve it.'

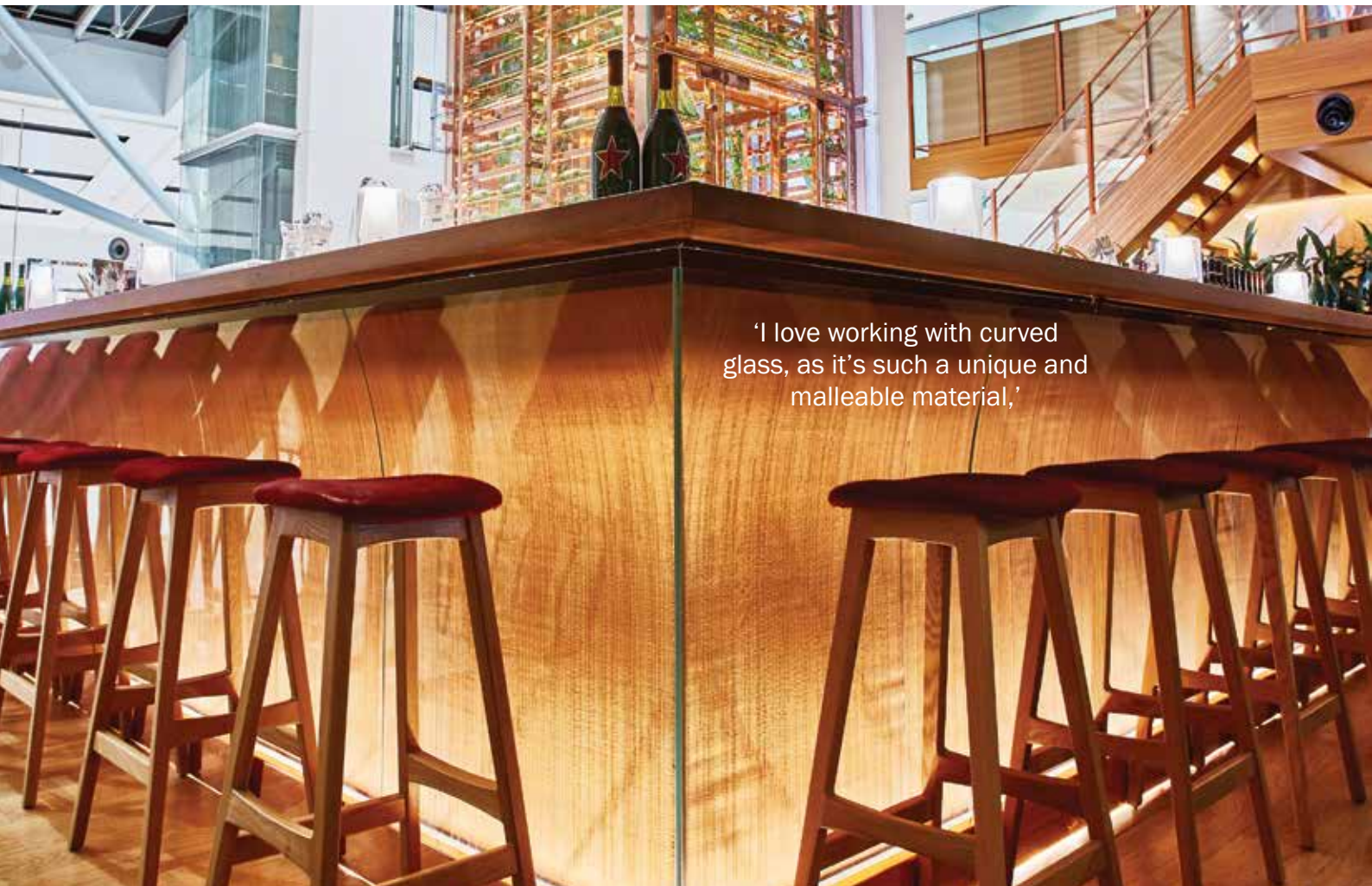
Luckily, Wellfix Glass, along with Bent & Curved Glass, devised a solution. 'We convinced the builders that we could bend the glass itself to obtain a better result than would have been achievable with copper,' says Steven. 'As the glass was frameless, it was critical to get the joins exactly right. These had to be made on a 45-degree angle in line with the radius of the curve, so that they would meet precisely in the top and bottom corners.'

Back at Wellfix, extensive preparation was done to achieve precision with each of these angles. 'We measured and fabricated precise vertical and horizontal templates of the glass for each corner out of timber,' he says. 'After these precise measurements were taken, we relayed this information to Bent & Curved Glass. Although the curved corners and templating presented us with the biggest challenges throughout the project, we were able to get the joins exactly right.'

The bar's complex design represents a triumph of aesthetic organisation. 'The bar's interior is covered in obscure glass, which allows some of the light to shine through,' Steven says. 'This was then covered with a translucent copper film imported from Italy, which is almost as thin as paper.'

The bar's interior glazing was built up gradually, layer by exquisite layer. 'We did the first layer, then applied the film, then another layer was added,' Steven recalls. 'In between each 10mm toughened layer are obscured floor panels, with light fuses underneath. These push light through the white glass, which shades up through the copper on the internal panel.'

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(Heineken Bar continued)

The bar is intricately glazed throughout. 'There are 16 internal panels in the bar, then a different run of 16 on the external wall (with low-iron glass for maximum transparency),' notes Steven. 'When we were glazing the bar, however, we couldn't fit the external glass until the top had been affixed. We were running ahead of schedule when that constraint held us up, but were fortunately able to bring everything back up to speed.'

Even throughout this complex construction process, the compact bar space teemed with activity. 'We were working with 15 different trades crammed within a small area – electricians, plumbers, glaziers ... you name it,' Steven says. 'As the Heineken Bar is very close to another restaurant that was also under construction, several jobs were being carried out simultaneously with deadlines within three weeks of each other.'

It's the challenge of working with high-end and unconventional materials that clearly inspires Steven. 'I love working with curved glass, as it's such a unique and malleable material,' he says. 'We've formed a strong personal and business partnership with Bent & Curved Glass over the past few years, as we work so productively together.'

Wellfix Glass has been extensively recognised for their sterling work over the last two years. 'We do many high-end residential and commercial jobs, but this is the one we're proudest of this year. Winning the NSW and Australian Awards back to back for the Heineken Bar was an amazing honour, especially after last year's recognition for our renovation of the Old Clare Hotel.'

The recognition Wellfix Glass is receiving for this demanding project comes at an interesting time in the company's history. 'This year happens to be the 20th anniversary of Wellfix Glass, which I founded in 1997,' Steven says. 'It's great to achieve recognition in the industry, now that the years seem to be getting faster as I get older!'

Wellfix Glass deserve our warmest congratulations in receiving this prestigious pair of awards. What better way to celebrate than a drink at the Heineken Bar? **GA**