

## CASE STUDY (WELLFIX)



# Bends and Curves at the Old Clare Hotel

> Photography Chris Court, Text by Tim Roberts



AGGA DESIGN AWARD WINNER  
– COMMERCIAL UNDER \$50K

**The Old Clare Hotel is one of the crown jewels of the redeveloped Kensington St precinct in Chippendale, a vibrant heritage suburb in inner-urban Sydney. It combines the 1939 Art Deco pub with the Victorian-era 1915 Carlton United Brewery Headquarters in a contemporary, imaginative and respectful transformation.**

The illuminated glass-clad oval bar forms the centrepiece of the Old Clare Hotel's reincarnated original bar space, with the malty glazed colours selected to satisfy the designers' requirements of referencing the history of the former Tooth & Co. Brewery site next door. The golden tones glazed throughout the interior echo those of beers formerly brewed by Tooth & Co. – KB Lager, Kent Old Brown, and Resch's.

In the bar's beautifully warm interior, Wellfix face-glazed 112 pieces of curved and flat glass into the recesses of the bar and reception counter's industrial-style steel structure. The Wellfix winning submission was chosen for its technical complexity, as well as its satisfying resolution of a design proposal.

The expertise and use of technology to deliver a unique solution to a complex design issue is well showcased in this project, which has received extensive critical acclaim – both for the designers, and for the glass and glazing contractors.

Steven Wellfare of Wellfix Glass & Aluminium, who worked on this award-winning renovation, explains the challenges and rewards of the process of transforming this historic site for a modern audience.

Like many projects of this type, the initial stages were full of negotiations and a lot of back-and-forth. 'The architects we worked with, Tonkin Zulaikha Greer, weren't keen on the colour palette in the initial design,' Steven remembers. 'They were very particular, and there was a detailed brief and discussion process to ensure that the tones worked in tandem.'

'There were also challenges with the aesthetics along the way, because of the subtlety of the glazed colour scheme and the lighting behind it. The oranges and reds had to be identical throughout, so there was a lot of toing and froing with the architects to make sure everything worked out perfectly in the end, which it did!'

For Steven and his company, the experience of this project was dominated by positive aspects. 'Doing the Old Clare Hotel with my team was a lot of fun, highly creative, and very fulfilling,' he says. 'My leading hand, Jared, was indispensable on this job – he loved the whole process, and was even more hands-on than I was.'

Working with the complex interior of this much-loved Sydney landmark was a challenge even for such a seasoned team, but there were certain advantages. 'There was a laser-cut bar already installed in the hotel's interior, and we were able to make templates on the radius for each corner,' Steven remembers. 'Fortunately, because of the precise cutting, the dimensions of the bottom of the bar almost exactly mirrored the top. There were only very minor variations, so we were very impressed!'

Wellfix Pty Ltd worked very closely with Stephen Togher and his team at Bent & Curved Glass to ensure the project's success. 'All glazed pieces for the interior went to Bent & Curved Glass, who shaped them and inserted the interlayers,' Steven says. 'Everything had to be absolutely spot-on when it came back ... and it was. There were over 100 pieces of glass to be installed in the hotel's interior, and only a couple of panels had to be redone.'

As with all projects of this size, there were challenges to be overcome. 'There were a few bumps in the road with the delivery and storage of the glass,

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but we sorted them out,’ says Steven. ‘It looks lovely in the photos now, so it’s easy to forget that it was an intensive building site at the time of construction. The complex nature of the interior meant that precision was essential, even amid all that intensive work being conducted. Each panel was numbered, and if only a single one of them was installed in the wrong order, everything had to be thrown out and started again.’

Many aspects of the project proved satisfying to Wellfix Pty Ltd. ‘The curved glass and the interlayers were the real standouts for us,’ Steve notes. ‘There were many different colours within the glazing, along with a multitude of different-coloured lights behind it. We installed everything onto fixing tape, and silicon wet-sealed it externally.’

While the interior’s subtle colour scheme might seem to point to a difficult installation process, the reality was anything but. ‘Apart from the logistics of getting the colours and curves of the glass perfect, the installation was surprisingly straightforward,’ says Steve. ‘It was also unforgiving, though – when you work with curves, being out by a single millimetre at the bottom would have thrown the whole trajectory out. Yet it was easier than it could have been – because it was a bar rather than a staircase, we had an existing foundation to build on.’

Many remaining features at the Old Clare Hotel provide a strong link to the industrial past. ‘There was even an old brewery behind the building,’ says Steven. ‘The owners have honoured the building’s rich heritage by keeping the existing tiles on the walls, which has retained the character of the original bar alongside the modern additions to the Art Deco style.’

For Steven, working in this fascinating area of Sydney was a real joy. ‘The bar has a very interesting history, and we were very happy to be involved in it,’ he says. ‘That area was a real working-class zone back in the day; though that was some time ago now, the surrounding area still retains much of that character.’

The area has personal resonance for Steven. ‘Growing up, I spent a lot of time in this area, so it’s got a lot of meaning for me,’ he says. ‘I really feel the connection whenever I have a drink at the Old Clare Hotel, which is a really rewarding space to be.’ We couldn’t agree more, and congratulate Wellfix Pty Ltd on their much-deserved award for this beautiful heritage project. **GA**

