

club life:

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**BOWLING
INTO THE
FUTURE**
MAITLAND CITY BOWLS CLUB

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THE DESIGN SCHEME

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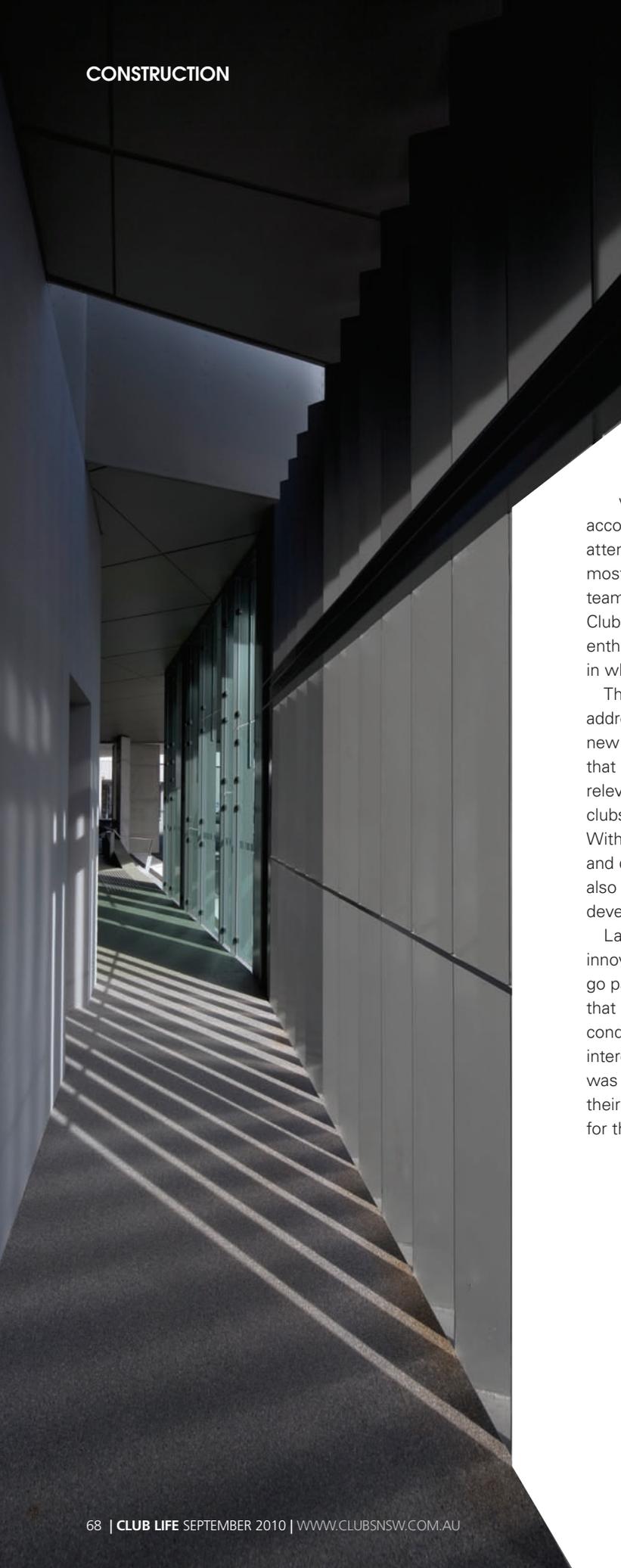


Like many businesses, the club industry is aggressively attempting to recover from the effects of the global economic crisis. For clubs, in particular, the economic ramifications have been far-reaching: Not only have families cut their budgets for dining out and entertainment, but corporations have placed tight restrictions on business functions; conferences are still being approved grudgingly, if at all.

With the reduction in trade, some clubs have plummeted, resulting in a substantial loss of operating capital. Although the industry has made great strides in overcoming the lost business, the situation has created new competitive

challenges for club management. More than ever, older clubs are being forced to renovate in order to stay alive. Yet how can a club renovate when, due to poor operating performance, it is left with minimal funds? Well, that hasn't swayed an innovative board of directors off course, having established a long-term plan to renovate their regional bowling club many years ago. In fact, the rebranding of the club and the desire to open it to new markets led to a strong masterplan that could be implemented over a 5-10 year period. And as construction continues across this multi-staged refurbishment, what's slowly been unveiled is a bowling club unlike anything ever seen before.





I am of course talking about the Maitland City Bowls, Sports & Recreation Club. Possibly an unlikely tender for trend-setting and cutting-edge design, this club has defied both current economic circumstances and industry innovation, making way for a clubhouse that's firmly grasped the future of building design.

While anyone with reasonably good taste can put together an attractive space, it's wise to remember that club design differs greatly from residential design. It's not a project to be undertaken by club management. Rather, it requires the expertise of a well-established designer who is committed to working in accordance with clear-cut written objectives, paying particular attention to state and local codes, operational feasibility and, most importantly, budget and scheduling requirements. The team behind the Maitland City Bowls, Sports & Recreation Club have not only achieved this balance perfectly, but they've enthusiastically embraced those objectives, which has resulted in what stands today.

The club was in search of a significant transformation to address energy and occupation issues while providing an iconic new form that signalled a new identity. The club understood that a long-term vision was required to ensure their maintained relevance and market position and avoid the fate of many similar clubs, as portrayed in the Australian cinema classic *Crackerjack*. With this in mind, the club approached Big Switch Projects and defined a brief to reposition the club at a cultural level and also with an increased emphasis on ecologically sustainable development measures.

Launching an architectural competition that could attract innovative concepts that echoed the brief, the club couldn't go past Terroir, an architecture practice that firmly believes that architecture cannot rely on a fixed and singular cultural condition but instead needs to engage with complex interconnected and overlapping systems. Their submission was driven by a market-led approach used in many of their tourism projects, and the results simply speak for themselves.



The design solution evolved in an economical yet substantive manner, and one that enabled a complete 'stage one' of works while enabling further improvements over time after the initial alternations. Three key elements emerged as essential to the initial phase of work as they could achieve this transformation in a clear and direct manner: A new roof, new servicing, and a new facade to the bowling greens.

The high visibility of the site, the opportunity to respond to the greater landscape context, the need to manage changing servicing requirements, and the need to open up the building to more light and space, led to the conclusion that a major new roof element was necessary. The prominence of the roof is such that it forms a major part of rebranding the club for the future. Functionally, this roof acts a new 'backpack' of sorts, enabling and containing new and more efficient building services, while also acting as a giant rain harvester and a solar parasol protecting the building from the harsh Maitland sun. Its contours possess physiogeographic characteristics of the surrounding land, chiefly the topography of the nearby Sugar Loaf Mountains.

The most intriguing part of the the Maitland City Bowls, Sports & Recreation Club's reinvention into the 21st century is that it makes innovative use of steel to engage with the existing building, with a steel substructure carefully knitted onto the club's existing roof. But the steel story doesn't end there, for inside the motif continues with flat steel in pale eucalypt used to line the entire lobby and numerous skylights. With cleverly angled walls and ceilings meeting at various intricate points, the overall atmosphere created by the size of the space, its layout, the lighting, the furniture, the use of materials, and the use of colour and texture work together in harmony. Visually raising the lobby ceiling has also pumped up the volume of space, enabling it to hold those bold monolithic forms comprised of steel with elegance. It certainly stands out from a design perspective: It's grand, minimalist, comfortable, and inviting and lends itself well for what's still to come in later stages.

The need to address the history and culture of the club, to transform the quality of the interior spaces and to address ecologically sustainable development issues also suggested that a new facade would be a critical accompaniment to the new roof. This provided the club with a unique opportunity to establish a new identity for the club through a cutting edge, glass-driven aesthetic. As a result, a massive glass facade that runs the entire length of the building (105 metres) reorients the club onto the bowling greens while the glass specification further improves the shading and internal energy loading of the building, whilst completing the exterior aesthetic.

The idea of a cutting edge aesthetic seemingly became the essence of the design brief and the club's motivational tagline. And it's not often in a club that a designer has the opportunity to create a dynamic, contemporary space that's bold yet acts as a backdrop for an ever-changing exterior. Abandoning what can sometimes be the regimented interior planning of a club, today the club is made up of exposed concrete, brushed metals, and a floor design reflective of being on the bowling greens. This connective-ness to the sport is also found through subtle design features throughout such as the shape and positioning of air-conditioning vents. Meanwhile, a neutral colour scheme provides a necessarily quiet framework for the furnishings, fixtures, and fittings.

With its bold new-world design, the Maitland City Bowls, Sports & Recreation Club is progressively achieving its ambitious objectives, and demonstrates how the power of a strong design solution – and one based in a rigorous understanding of the market profile for the commercial success of the project – can unite key stakeholders, galvanise a group around a long-term vision, and reposition a club that will have a successful future while others have been forced into closure.

With the second of four stages now complete, the club's masterplan is set for total completion in 2015. Until then, the Maitland City Bowls, Sports & Recreation Club has unveiled a venue that few, if any, other bowling clubs could ever hope to surpass. ■

