

Story by Claire Simmonds, Clairity Public Relations



CRACKLING with energy, the funky and eclectic decor of the new element bar on the Jetty strip promises an occasion to remember.



element.
BAR ON THE JETTY STRIP



What may surprise many is the superb quality of the food on offer in Coffs Harbour's latest entertainment venue, housed in the original Cooper's Surf shop on Harbour Drive.

Defining element bar is not easy. The well-travelled may recognise an upmarket urban brasserie, flavoured with the casual friendliness of coastal living, but the exquisite food lifts the venue to another level.

"The food is just mind-blowing – taste, presentation and served with your choice of more than 100 labels of the best wines – many not seen before on the Coffs Coast," said co-owner Tony Haslam.

"There's certainly a large gap in the local market for social dining and a social bar, without being in a

pub, where you have pokies and races or in a registered club with raffles and bingo," Tony said.

"At element bar, there's no white tablecloths on tables tucked into corners where you never see anyone you know – here it's social dining with a funky and sophisticated music mix," he said.

No stranger to the area, Tony first brought his extensive international hospitality skills to Coffs Harbour to revive the Greenhouse Tavern, after the venue fell on hard times in 1996. Building the business into the popular family and entertainment venue it is today included attracting acts such as Grinspoon, Super Jesus and the Screaming Jets, before Tony and his family sold in 2006.

After buying the building and taking on this project in late 2012, Tony, his co-owner David Stachan, a developer and business investor, with project manager Andy Hall, worked to re-design original plans, including two more floors fully approved for later construction.

In their hands-on owners' work in demolition and reconstruction, they found a pitched ceiling made from banana packing crate panels, bricks from Sawtell brickworks and

an original timber floor dating back to the Depression era construction in 1937.

Tony and his partner, Alicia Vines, were inspired to "mix all the elements" to create new contrasts in the decor.

"We've got the earth of the original bricks, the metal of the steel beams, the fire red highlights and the water rippled feature wall opposite the bar. There's also the contrast of timber and steel, old and the new, industrial and refined."

"In the first four days since opening element bar we've attracted a thousand followers on Facebook, which shows the massive local demand for a properly licensed, upmarket bar, like you'd find in any city around the world," Andy Meek said.

"Our team of infectiously friendly people are going to have a lot of fun at element bar and so are our customers," Tony said.

Open 7 days from 11am until late, element bar stays up extra late on Friday and Saturday nights, until 2am. For serious fans of their fantastic coffee, cakes, meals and entertainment, element bar is offering membership applications on their website:

www.elementbar.com.au

dining.

RETURNING to Coffs Coast to run the element bar kitchen is Chef Chris Rea, best known to locals for his work at the gourmet Bentley's on Elizabeth and executive chef role at Opal Cove Resort.

Since leaving the area, Chris has run all the catering at the University of Wollongong, co-ordinating 1,100 functions a year at the university's eight food outlets and 15 function rooms.

"At element bar, I'm bringing in the flavours of Sydney right now with all the modern food trends, paired with classical French techniques, such as sous vide," Chris said.

"We make everything here from scratch. This means it takes three days to make our beef sauces and we cure our own salmon," he said.

Dried prosciutto shards and sweet potato strips garnish dishes of extraordinary flavour such as their as the strawberry and snowpea tendril chicken salad and roast kumera salad.

"Customer feedback about the dishes had been amazing.

Some of my favourites are the Guangdong soft

shell crab, seared scallops on pea puree with wasabi mayo and the Angus OP rib on colcannon mash with Paris butter and blood plumb jus," said Tony.

bar.

THE creator of the inspired cocktail menu and curator of a vast collection of premium spirits is Hayden Meyers, who comes to element bar from managing a local hotel.

"Everyone is loving the top shelf premium spirits and quality wines," Hayden said.

"I want to see people sitting back after work, enjoying the best cocktails in Coffs Harbour," he said.

Already proving popular are such delights as the traditional Peruvian starter, Pisco Sour and the Pornstar Martini of vanilla vodka, passionfruit liqueur, passionfruit pulp and champagne.

"We've had rum aficionados in here telling us it's the best rum selection they've ever seen," said co-owner David Strachan.

The vast wine selection is on display behind a locked wrought iron cellar door rack, created by local sculptor Jeramie Carter.

"Rather than a variety of wine regions in our wine list, we've gone for quality from specific regions, known for quality varietals – such as Sauvignon Blancs from New Zealand or Adelaide Hills. We've got reds from the Hunter and Clare valleys, Margaret River, plus a selection from France, Italy including Champagne, Prosecco and some light red styles," Tony Haslam said.

"We have some wines in the premium category but have mostly focused on well-priced wines offering quality and value – by far the best wine selection at any Coffs Harbour bar," Tony said.

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