



ST KILDA · HOSPITALITY · LIVE MUSIC

HOTEL ESPLANADE.

A landmark made from many rooms, many moods and more than a century of Melbourne memory.

The venue in context.

Hotel Esplanade occupies a rare position in Melbourne hospitality. It is simultaneously a neighbourhood pub, a live-music institution, a destination building and a piece of St Kilda's social memory. Opened in 1878 as a grand seaside hotel, it has lived through changing ideas of leisure, entertainment and the city around it.

The venue's cultural importance is inseparable from performance. Its Gershwin Room became nationally familiar as the home of SBS music quiz RockWiz, where the intimacy and energy of a live room were carried into Australian homes. That screen history matters because it shows the venue as more than an interior: it is a stage, a meeting place and a recognisable part of Melbourne identity.

When the renewed Espy opened in 2018, the transformation brought previously inaccessible areas back into public use. Builder Hutchinson Builders records a 47-week, \$12 million redevelopment with 12 bars, two commercial kitchens and three performance stages. The scale creates an unusual furniture challenge: every room needs its own atmosphere, but the venue cannot feel like a collection of unrelated fit-outs.

A short history of a long-lived place.

1878

The grand seaside hotel opens in St Kilda.

1990

The Espy is listed by the National Trust.

2018

A major renewal reopens the venue across all five levels.

12 + 3

Twelve bars and three performance stages shape the revived venue.



A building reopened as a collection of experiences.

The renewed venue works through discovery. Guests move from bars and dining rooms to intimate lounges, a beer garden, performance spaces and the restored Gershwin Room. Some rooms are theatrical; others feel domestic and collected. The interior strategy led by Techn[■] and Sand Hill Road respected the Victorian building while allowing contemporary hospitality to operate at scale.

Furniture is one of the clearest ways those changes in mood are communicated. A bar stool signals a quick, social pause. A curved banquette invites a group to settle. Lounge furniture slows the pace and creates a more private experience. Dining chairs must remain comfortable while allowing staff to reset tables and keep service moving.

Across a venue this large, repetition alone would flatten the experience. Total variation would create visual noise and operational complexity. The stronger response is a family of settings: different in character, connected through proportion, tone, material and commercial discipline.



The Yellow Design furniture response.



Across Hotel Esplanade, Yellow Design supplied a diverse commercial-furniture collection for bar, dining, lounge and performance-adjacent settings. Bentwood and upholstered seating, stools, banquettes, occasional pieces and tables were coordinated to suit the atmosphere and pace of each room.

Rather than applying one furniture formula throughout the building, the response changes with the way each space is used. Seating density shifts by zone, circulation remains clear around bars and performance areas, and softer pieces bring greater comfort to rooms designed for longer stays.

The result is a connected family of hospitality settings: each room has its own identity, while practical proportions, durable finishes and a consistent commercial approach help the venue operate as one complete experience. Architecture and interior design by Techni with the wider Hotel Esplanade project team.

The collection, seen throughout the venue.



Five principles visible in the project.

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|----|----------------------------------|---|
| 01 | IDENTITY BY ROOM | Furniture reinforces the purpose and personality of each room instead of applying one formula across the building. |
| 02 | CHOICE FOR GUESTS | Dining chairs, stools, lounges and banquettes create different ways to arrive, gather, watch, eat and stay. |
| 03 | PACE OF SERVICE | Clear access, sensible table spacing and movable pieces help staff operate a large and changing venue. |
| 04 | HERITAGE WITHOUT PASTICHE | Warm materials and familiar forms sit comfortably with the historic setting without pretending to be original fabric. |
| 05 | COMMERCIAL ENDURANCE | High-use furniture must remain stable, cleanable, repairable and visually convincing after repeated service. |



HOW THE FURNITURE SHAPES EXPERIENCE

Furniture is a form of wayfinding.

The Espy succeeds as a sequence rather than a single reveal. Furniture helps tune that sequence. In the bars, compact tables and stools hold the energy close to service points. In dining settings, chairs and banquettes provide a more settled rhythm. In lounge rooms, softer pieces and lower tables create a residential sense of comfort within a commercial venue.

This variety supports different audiences and different times of day. A guest arriving for a meal, a live show, a drink overlooking the bay or a late-night performance can find a setting that feels intentional. The commercial value is significant: more usable room types give people more reasons to visit, stay and return.

The images also demonstrate the importance of negative space. The furniture does not occupy every possible metre. Clear paths protect movement, allow staff to service tables and help large groups navigate a complex building without the venue feeling congested.

What an operator and specifier must resolve.

01

DURABILITY

Chairs, tables and stools must tolerate frequent movement and a demanding daily service cycle.

02

CLEANING

Edges, upholstery choices and access around furniture affect the speed and quality of venue resets.

03

FLEXIBILITY

A mix of fixed and movable settings allows rooms to support trading, events and performance peaks.

04

CIRCULATION

The most memorable furniture still fails if it interrupts queues, staff routes, exits or sightlines.

Why the venue matters beyond its walls.

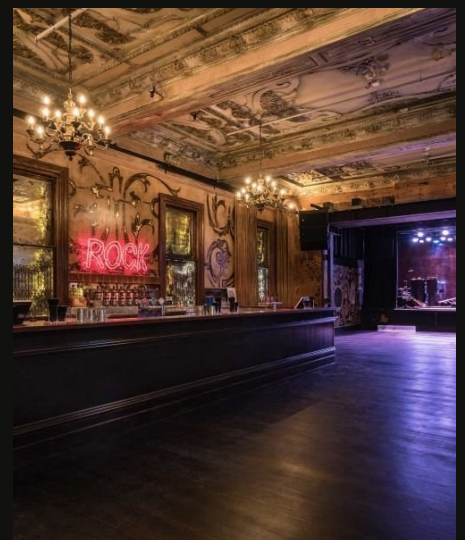
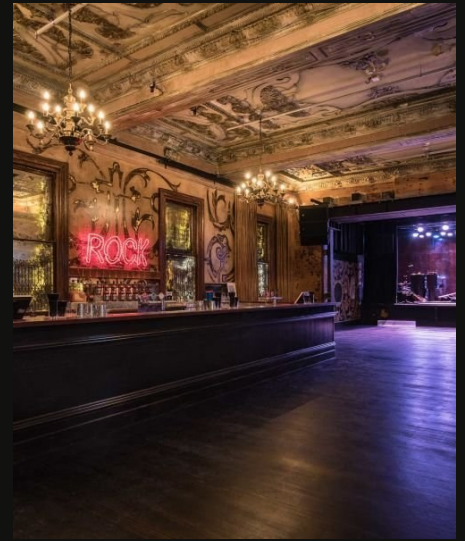
The Gershwin Room's relationship with RockWiz gives the Espy a distinct national screen presence. SBS described the program as bringing the Gershwin Room to life, and the room became visually inseparable from the show's mix of music knowledge, live performance and audience participation.

That visibility changes how a venue is remembered. People who may never have stood inside the room still recognise its atmosphere. For furniture and interior decisions, this reinforces a useful principle: the completed setting must read at several scales—in person, in photography and, sometimes, on screen.

The venue's wider media coverage has concentrated on the return of a St Kilda institution, the reopening of long-closed rooms and the balance between heritage and contemporary hospitality. The furniture layer contributes to that story by making each recovered space usable, legible and inviting.



Scale, setting and atmosphere.



Five lessons for the next commercial brief.

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| 01 | Start with the operating map | Document how every room trades, who uses it, how long they stay and how staff move before selecting individual pieces. |
| 02 | Build a family, not a catalogue | Use controlled variation so each zone has identity while materials, proportions and tones connect the venue. |
| 03 | Design for the busiest hour | Test density, chair pull-back, queues and service paths against peak operation—not an empty presentation image. |
| 04 | Treat upholstery as infrastructure | Specify comfort, abrasion resistance, cleaning, repair pathways and replacement availability together. |
| 05 | Photograph the whole system | Capture wide rooms, furniture groupings and details so the commercial thinking remains visible after handover. |



COMMERCIAL FURNITURE SHOULD DO MORE THAN COMPLETE THE ROOM.

It should help the whole venue perform.

Yellow Design brings furniture planning, sourcing, custom solutions and project coordination together. The goal is a finished environment that feels true to the design, works for guests and staff, and remains commercially dependable well beyond opening day.

A project shaped by many hands.

Great commercial spaces are collaborative. Yellow Design is proud to have contributed the furniture layer within this project, working alongside the venue, architects, interior designers, builders, consultants, makers and suppliers who brought the wider experience to life. Venue history and project context referenced in this story include:

- Hutchinson Builders, Hotel Esplanade case study
- SBS corporate feature describing RockWiz and the Gershwin Room
- The Design Files, Legendary St Kilda Venue The Espy, Revitalised
- City of Port Phillip heritage material for Hotel Esplanade

Planning a multi-room hospitality venue?

Talk to Yellow Design early. We can help develop the furniture brief, review an architect or interior-design schedule, source and customise suitable pieces, coordinate finishes and guide the furniture package through to delivery.