

A photograph of the interior of The Promethean, a live music venue. The space is dimly lit with warm, ambient lighting. A long, curved bar with a bright yellow-green illuminated edge is in the foreground. Behind the bar, a dark wall features several rectangular recessed shelves, each containing a bottle of liquor and a small, warm-toned light. The ceiling is dark with a grid of small, circular lights. A large, dark wooden pillar is visible on the right side of the frame.

The Promethean

Adelaide has a new live venue with plenty of quirk.

The Promethean is Adelaide's newest live music venue located within a beautifully renovated neo-gothic building. The venue was originally a church, and was then lured to the dark side, becoming the Liquor Trades Union meeting hall, before being turned over to the luvvies, acting as a theatre through the 1980s.

Adelaide custom furniture and interior designers, Koush, were engaged to transform the venue and their brief took into account three things: Firstly the acoustics had to be world class, making it a place that would not only attract established artists but could be somewhere budding talent could be seen in the best possible light. Two, for the patrons, the space had to be both intimate and inviting; a place that would work just as well when filled to capacity as it would with just a few groups of people looking for a quiet drink and an evening show. Lastly, and most fun for the Koush team, the clients wanted the design to have more than a touch of quirky 'ooh-I-say' elements to set the venue apart from its competitors and provide a talking point.

"As the space had such a rich history with such a unique character and prominent architecture, the aesthetic was to draw on and complement this, enhancing it as a point of difference," commented Julie Pleda, Koush's designer. "At the same time, however, the design had to be new and

different; a re-interpretation of the neo-gothic period rather than being a slavish copy. The interior needed to have a feeling of understated opulence with details that reveal themselves to you slowly, in layers of interest."


Right Ambience

"The design for the Promethean stemmed from creating an atmosphere rather than a 'look' — it was all about ambience," offered Julie.

Also pivotal to the team was Paul Beck from National Lighting who worked on the lighting design and supply, and Luke Willis, of Flightpath Architects who did the structural design and collaborated on the layout with Koush.

In order to achieve a moody space with the right ambience, it was imperative to nail the lighting which, in this case, had to work on a number of levels. For example, the fairylight display behind the stage (see overleaf) draws patrons away from the front door and into the back theatre space while also creating a backdrop for the stage when a performance is in progress. Thirdly, it creates a sense of drama in and of itself so that even when there is no performance on, the space doesn't feel empty or dead.

An existing skylight in the ceiling creates a subtle, interesting



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play of light across the pressed metal ceiling. “I wanted to replicate this effect along the whole ceiling to maximise its textural effect without illuminating the space too much,” adds Julie. “Based on Paul’s advice, we used chain-light which has the dual advantage of looking stunning and allowing us to vary the light output.”

The other lighting element was the illuminated bar and bottle display (see left). The bottle display were designed to bring out the best in the building — highlighting the wall’s cut-in details. It also links the front and back bars and adds interest to the front area, which was a fairly nondescript space. Meanwhile, the slick acid-green surface of the bar creates a counterpoint to the more prevalent dark and softer elements. The backlit bar involved lots of homework experimenting with Marblo colours and densities, as well as fluorescent lighting distances and positioning.

Send in the Troupes

The Promethean was aiming to attract everything from an acoustic guitar solo to a jiving 18-piece jazz/funk orchestra; from a theatre play to a too-cool-for-school catwalk fashion show, so flexibility was paramount in all aspects of the design, especially the furniture, layout, and lighting levels.

Most furniture needed to be mobile so the space could be filled with theatre seats if required, or could also be arranged into

casual clusters for other occasions, providing areas to sit, or be completely removed for stand-up cocktail events.

“The raked floor of the theatre space initially posed a challenge but ultimately provided opportunities for quirky design features such as the lime green wedges under the drinks tables,” said Julie.

To tackle the sound of the room Julie wanted to ensure no acoustic treatments were obvious. To do this she integrated panels into the design to reinforce and highlight the arch ‘windows’ (see overleaf), which will have images projected onto them. Carpeting the space and adding lots of upholstered elements also help soak up unwanted sonic reflections, softening the sound of the space.

Repurposing

Another issue that underpinned the design was the budget — it was important to keep a close eye on expenditure.

“We worked with what the building already had, like cutting down and re-upholstering existing theatre seating and highlighting the pressed tin ceilings with gothic quatrefoil detail,” explained Julie. “Other existing elements, such as the air-conditioning, were retained to save money. On the mezzanine, the ducts were slightly modified and hidden in the design of the banquette seating, while downstairs the air return was made to look like a bulkhead over the bar.”

Jazzing up the Audio

Osmond Electronics was responsible for designing and installing the PA system, choosing Electrovoice products. Osmonds' Kostas Psorakis and Nicholas Filsell were the men who met the challenges of designing the audio in this old church and he was determined to fill the whole venue with sound but control the rampant acoustics of the space.

"I chose the Electrovoice X-Array 1122 speakers, as they're a high performance, compact speakers which are proven performers," explained Kostas. "The size of the boxes is phenomenal considering what they can do. I've doubled them up with the EV X38 processor and EV amps. I only have one box per side but that's ample for this venue and they're positioned so they can service both the balcony and downstairs audience space."

A Midas Venice 24-channel mixing console and outboard racks housing the usual Klark Teknik front-of-house graphic equalizers were also supplied. The monitor system comprises low-profile EV ZX1 boxes, which replaced Kostas' initial monitor system of 12-inch Concert series EV boxes.

"Visiting engineers were getting too loud on the monitors," he said. "You could hear them off stage, so I replaced them with the smaller 'hot spot' monitors. They work perfectly and everyone raves about them. They project really nicely and have a great, full-bodied sound to them."

"The Prom is a really nice venue, it's a pleasure to work there and the sound you can pull is amazing. The sound projection onto the balcony is great. Visiting sound engineers are always amazed at the acoustic quality of the venue."

Prom Talk

The owners and manager are equally impressed:

"The results are fantastic, we all love Julie's design," said David O'Sullivan, one of The Promethean's owners. "Throughout the process we worried about individual things like colours and how it would all work, as we're not all visual, but by trusting in what she had chosen and waiting to see it all come together, the result has been terrific."

Richard Ortner, The Prom's Venue Manager, is ecstatic with Koush's work: "We love it and everyone who walks in is not only excited about it but enthralled by it. Initially we had our input into the design and when we took stock we felt we were diluting Julie's creativity. We then gave her free rein to design our space and she's done a fantastic job — she's brought new life to the building with an atmosphere that's unique to The Prom. Feedback from musicians has also been incredibly positive — they think the acoustics are fantastic, they can hear themselves naturally on stage as well, which isn't always a 'given' and their performances are improved as a result." <<

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» **Flightpath Architects:** (08) 8211 6355 or
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Night at the Prom: Koush's aim was to embrace the original neo-gothic look of the old church — with the choice of colours and fabrics — but also inject jaunty elements of fun. The fairylights at the back of stage are important — providing a focal point, drawing people into the venue and being a theatrical backdrop. Acoustics in a big ol' cavernous space like a church aren't conducive to amplified sound. Here we can see how acoustic treatment has been integrated into the design — in the arch 'windows'.