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The Stag's New Life

The dramatic overhaul of the iconic East End pub will comprise a kitschy sports bar, an old-school poolroom and a restaurant headed by an ex-Orana, Noma and Attica chef.



Published on 03 August 2018

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Whatever preconceptions you have about The Stag, forget them. The historic pub on the corner of Rundle Street and East Terrace has existed in some form since 1849. It's been through a few guises since then – not all of them successful.

Its new custodian Oliver Brown admits he hadn't stepped through its doors for some time – despite running NOLA right next door. But he knows its potential.

“As far as I can remember it was always that modern take on a pub, that was a bit more nightclub-y,” he tells *Broadsheet*.

“Whereas I really like a good old fashioned pub, where you can sit at the bar, have a beer, eat a schnitzel and watch the footy.”



That vision will come to pass in just two weeks. Brown and co-owner Joshua Talbot (who also owns NOLA) are in the midst of a dramatic overhaul of the pub, which will continue under the name The Stag Public House. When *Broadsheet* visits, the build is a couple weeks behind schedule. We squeeze past builders in hi-vis as they go about bringing designer Sans-Arc Studio's vision to life.

The brief from Brown was a timeless, warm and homey Aussie pub. The result will be a mix of old and new. Kitsch nostalgia will rub up against clean and contemporary design. Similarly, the menu will combine the classics with modern sensibilities. Branding by Peculiar Familia's Carlo Jensen will signal the new era.

We enter from East Terrace and walk past a small room, which will soon become a "kitschy" sports bar. We move further into the once-cavernous front bar, which is now separated by timber partitions to "break up the space a little bit," says Brown.

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It'll be a spot to kick back with a beer and a meal in new booth seating or perched at the bar. Head a few steps west to the pool room, where guests can play billiards for \$1 a game. All the money pocketed will go directly to local sports teams and charities, says Brown.

Nola's head chef Justin Penman will come over to cook. Expect classic pub fare, gussied up. Snack on cob loaf (to share) or prosciutto-wrapped brie baked in brioche. Mains will include your customary schnitty, steak sandwich and fish and chips (courtesy of Fair Fish) as well as fattoush salad, pearl barley with heirloom carrots and winter veggies, ricotta gnudi, and an SA icon: a pie floater with stout-braised beef.

Adjoining restaurant Charlick's (a nod to William Charlick, who established the Adelaide Fruit and Produce Exchange on the same block in 1904) will sit under the same roof, but Brown is quick to emphasise the difference. Ex-Orana sous chef Blake Drinkwater will head the kitchen. He has good pedigree; he's also worked the pans at two restaurants at the apogee of contemporary dining: Noma and Attica.

Charlick's won't open until September. As such, the menu is still being fine-tuned, but Brown promises "it's going to be delicious

and not bound by a cuisine”. “Charick’s is like having dinner at your best friend’s, except your best mate just happened to work as a chef at some of the world’s top restaurants,” he says.

“We haven’t done a style of service like this before, so I’m really looking forward to doing something different ... and getting back into the wines as well. That’s my background – I originally did winemaking.” Since then his focus (at NOLA) has been craft beer and whisky. The wine list will feature “approachable local brands” including a selection of natural drops.

Brown and Talbot brought designer Claire Kneebone in to revamp the dining room and ensure a visual distinction between the two venues. “The idea is to have a completely different fit-out [to the pub],” says Brown.

The chintzy wallpaper will be peeled away and the walls painted a dusty burgundy. It’s a bold choice. “It’s going to be intense,” says Brown, with a smile. “Claire was like, ‘Let’s make the whole thing red’. [We were like], ‘Alright, let’s do it’. I like to think it’s got to do with red wine. And the Australian earth.”

A three-metre curved dry bar in the centre will promote communal dining. Matte subway tiles will be added to the existing booths. Porcelain tiles will be underfoot. Homey dining tables are from Gumtree. “The idea is to have a family table with nostalgic food that’s shared,” says Brown. “It doesn’t matter if you spill red wine on yourself but the cutlery is still real fancy – that’s the feel we’re going for.”

Entry to Charlick’s will be on Vardon Avenue, which will also include al fresco seating, festoon lighting and, eventually, a vine canopy.

The Stag Public House will open on August 15. Charlick’s will open in September.

PLACES MENTIONED



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