

BEGUILING ARGYLE

The Argyle:
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STORY: JOANNA LOWRY

Venue entrepreneur John Szangolies and interior designer Rachel Luchetti of Luchetti Krelle have enjoyed a fruitful relationship. They've rolled out a number of successful Bavarian Bier Cafés and the recently 'hatted' Sake restaurant and bar. It makes sense, then, that when it came to renovating The Argyle — Szangolies' biggest and busiest venue — Luchetti was poised to take the helm. Luchetti's overhaul treads a fine, cobblestone line between the old and new. "She helped us accent the historic aspects that make The Argyle so special by incorporating modern elements," Szangolies says. Intact still are the sandstone walls and exposed timber awnings of what is a heritage building in The Rocks, but gone are the bulky booths and banquettes — and the brown-on-brown colour scheme.

First on the agenda was Bazar, a Spanish tapas restaurant. "The vision for Argyle Bazar was to have a more casual dining option in the precinct, allowing guests to move seamlessly from a light dinner to a night out," Szangolies says. Luchetti set out to make the industrial, caramel-coloured space fun and relaxed. "We wanted to inject colour and give it a contemporary feel," she says. "It was also fairly masculine and we wanted to make it a bit more feminine." The photo print pendant lights — which depict topiary mazes, hydrangeas, leaves, chandeliers and jewels — certainly add a girly touch. "We were inspired by the idea of the absurd," Rachel explains. "We were doing the refurbishment at the time that Tim Burton's remake of *Alice in Wonderland* came out. The printed lampshades are a little bit quirky and unexpected."

Then there's the furniture — a mishmash of patchwork seats, leopard print bar stools and Louis armchairs, all featuring velvet upholstery. "A lot of people think that you can't have softness in a venue like this, but you can; you just have to maintain it," Luchetti says. "All of the seat cushions are made of a Crypton fabric, which makes them durable and resistant to liquid." Bar and dining tables are painted white to lighten up the dim space, while a smattering of blue and red side tables add visual interest.

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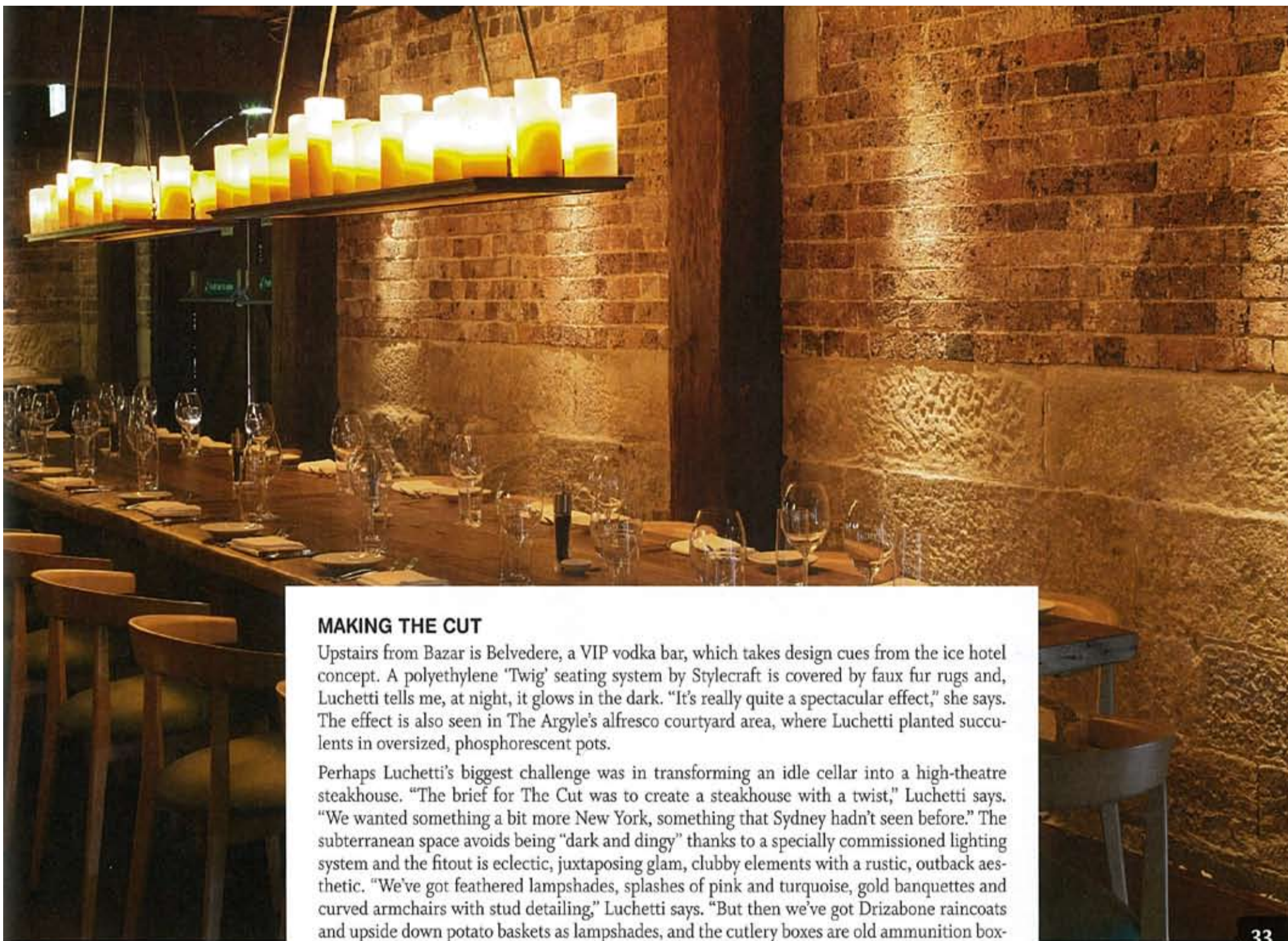
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Edit (Custom Photo Print Pendants):
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Interstudio (Tables):
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Stylecraft (Twig Seating System):
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Bellstone (Bathroom Tiles):
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MAKING THE CUT

Upstairs from Bazar is Belvedere, a VIP vodka bar, which takes design cues from the ice hotel concept. A polyethylene “Twig” seating system by Stylecraft is covered by faux fur rugs and, Luchetti tells me, at night, it glows in the dark. “It’s really quite a spectacular effect,” she says. The effect is also seen in The Argyle’s alfresco courtyard area, where Luchetti planted succulents in oversized, phosphorescent pots.

Perhaps Luchetti’s biggest challenge was in transforming an idle cellar into a high-theatre steakhouse. “The brief for The Cut was to create a steakhouse with a twist,” Luchetti says. “We wanted something a bit more New York, something that Sydney hadn’t seen before.” The subterranean space avoids being “dark and dingy” thanks to a specially commissioned lighting system and the fitout is eclectic, juxtaposing glam, clubby elements with a rustic, outback aesthetic. “We’ve got feathered lampshades, splashes of pink and turquoise, gold banquettes and curved armchairs with stud detailing,” Luchetti says. “But then we’ve got Drizabone raincoats and upside down potato baskets as lampshades, and the cutlery boxes are old ammunition boxes.” There’s also a large-scale black and white wall graphic by Zoe Sadokierski, which depicts a bookshelf full of old English texts, a nod to the colonial history of The Argyle building. As for the steakhouse theme, it was more than subtly referenced— butchers’ blocks are used as dining tables and meat cleavers have been welded into toilet cubicle doors — killer!

The attention to detail wasn’t without its costs. “If the ideas are there, John will find the money to make it happen,” Luchetti says. “It’s nice to have a client who respects the design.” Szangolies said he’s “really pleased” with the refurbishment. “After five years, The Argyle was ready for a new look,” he said. “We’ve really brightened and refreshed the venue.” venue

