

Date  
20 September 2013

Publication  
AFR Life & Leisure

Circulation  
66,220

RACING MARQUEES



# Fleeting fantasies

Designers are having a field day taking the corporate hospitality experience to a new level, writes **Anna McCooe**

The Birdcage marquees of the Spring Racing Carnival don't do subtle. Jaw-dropping, mind-blowing and trendsetting are more their style. After all, what's the point of no-expenses-spared experiential marketing if it doesn't leave an impression?

The style stakes are high, says Bruce Keebaugh, director of The Big Group. "The days of expressing your brand with a big corporate banner are over," he says.

Keebaugh is overseeing the Lexus Design Pavilion at the Melbourne Cup carnival this year. And it promises to be a no holds barred hospitality experience scaling three levels.

The pavilion is going to be big but it can't be brash. "Each touch point has to recognise the car and the integrity with which the car is designed," he says. "It's about people living inside your brand - a bit of corporate activation."

Design firm Hecker Guthrie is collaborating with The Big Group on the Lexus Design Pavilion. Their vision distorts and repeats the imagery of The Great Wave of Kanagawa in a happy marriage of design credibility and a vibrant atmosphere.

Marquees are temporary structures - here for a good time, not a long time. The best are part design installation, part stage.

Designer Hamish Guthrie believes there are opportunities in all that ephemera. "There's more creative licence in terms of materials. You can't take it too seriously," he says. Every element should be heightened. An entry should be an amazing entry, and a table should be the best table you can create with the biggest flower arrangement on top.

Clearly, spring racing is no time for restraint.

Perhaps, the unofficial queen of marquees is designer Amanda Henderson of Gloss Creative.

This spring she is once again collaborating with Myer on an extravagant marquee in the front row of the Birdcage at Flemington. Her task is to reconcile

glamour with visual communication.

"Branding is more than a logo on a media wall. It's everything from the feeling you get walking into the marquee to the last mouth of food you eat," says Henderson. "Great marquee design will elevate a brand and express its personality in its purest form."

When asked to decode the art of creating the place to be, Henderson lists a curated guest list, inspiring design, wonderful food, great cocktails and hosts who really care about their guests.

She believes design should be sustainable, reusing and repurposing as many elements as possible, and the floor plan should provide networking opportunities.

"There should be a cracking bar for people to gather around and some soft seating for later in the day.

"Even the invitation is key. A superb invitation is talked about before the event and sets the tone for the day in advance."

And just like the fashions on the field, a marquee should always be appropriate for a daytime racing event, Henderson says. "It shouldn't look like a nightclub."

This year Lavazza is going black, white and gold with bespoke traitoria-style furniture to push their Italian angle.

Meanwhile, David Jones is setting up across town in Caulfield with a black and white, houndstooth-inspired marquee to celebrate the department store's heritage.

Of course, food and celebrity are essential to the marquee experience. Celebrity chefs are even better. Lexus has Neil Perry on board to feed their very important masses.

David Jones is working with Melbourne chef Adam de Silva of Coda and Tonka fame to design their menu.

Next door in the Melbourne Racing Club, high-profile chef Ian Curley of The European Group has set up for the season in the aptly named Black Cavalier Restaurant. Curley is striving to redefine major event dining with restaurant-quality



Clockwise from top: Emirates marquee 2012; David Jones Caulfield Cup marquee 2012; Lexus marquee 2012. PHOTOS: COURTESY EMIRATES, DAVID JONES, LEXUS



### Complete the VIP experience

Racegoers can continue the trackside frivolity at many of Melbourne's rooftop and alfresco bars, including Marlene Brussels and Siglo, or on the river at Pony Fish Island, Boatbuilders Yard, The Common Man or Melbourne Public.

Counter the cocktails and canapés with a taste of Melbourne's fine dining scene at hotspots such as Andrew McConnell's latest venture Moon Under Water on Gertrude Street and other highly acclaimed restaurants such as Jacques Reymond in Toorak, Ben Shewry's Attica in Ripponlea and Shannon Bennett's Vue De Monde, on the 55th floor of the Bialto building.

No time to book? Cumulus Inc, Tonka and Grossi Florentino are just a few familiar names leading the way, with Cumulus Up, Thali at Tonka and Ombrà Sahmi Bar respectively catering to walk-in diners looking for cocktails, wine and bar snacks.

Settle in for a nightcap at a Melbourne laneway bar, such as Bar Americano, Eau de Vie Melbourne, Bar Ampère, Lily Black or 1806.

food, atmosphere and service. "I don't do function food," he says.

Emirates has a reputation for pulling out on the stops on race day. Its birdcage marquee has always been the biggest. This time, it is going even grander, adding a further three metres on top.

It has also started releasing details of what it says will be the southern hemisphere's first digital component inside the marquee.

Designed by Katrina Regan of CI Events, the marquee is designed to whisk guests away to Dubai for the day.

"It will be filled with fabrics and furnishings sourced from Dubai's marketplaces and draw inspiration from the sleek and modern advances that make up the magnificent Dubai skyline," says Boutros Boutros, Emirates divisional senior vice president, corporate communications, marketing and brand.

But of course, it's all about the brand. Boutros attests sport is the ultimate egalitarian marketing tool.

"Sport transcends all in Australia, so it gives us the opportunity to engage with everyone as equals."

So it seems good design is indeed good business. But, really, why talk shop when the champagne is flowing? **AFR**

UNDERTOW MEDIA