

MAKING MERRY

A family instinct for tapping the zeitgeist has seen these siblings build an empire of cool.

JUSTIN HEMMES' OFFICE AT MERIVALE REFLECTS THE FLAVOUR OF MERIVALE'S MANY VENUES: SLICK AND SOPHISTICATED SOFTENED WITH QUIRKY CHARM AND LUSH GREENERY. THE ENTREPRENEUR, PICTURED BELOW WITH HIS SISTER AND BUSINESS COLLABORATOR, BETTINA, IS AS LIKELY TO BE FOUND MINGLING WITH GUESTS AS IN THE OFFICE.



THE RICH DARK INTERIORS OF THE MERIVALE OFFICES, ABOVE, EXUDE A SERENE AND GLAMOROUS AIR. THE LEVEL 4 PRIVATE DINING ROOM AT IVY, BELOW, IS A LUSH ILLUSTRATION OF BETTINA'S LOVE OF FOLIAGE TO ADD AMBIENCE TO THEIR VENUES.

FROM HIS OFFICE balcony, Justin Hemmes has a bird's-eye view of streams of pleasure-goers drawn to the bars and restaurants of the Ivy complex below. But arm's-length observation isn't his style – the Merivale Group CEO is as likely to be found mingling with punters in one of his venues, or the builders on site at his latest project as he is brainstorming in his office with architects and designers. "I'm the ultimate customer in that I love going out, being around people and having fun. I'm actually creating venues that I want to go to myself," he says.

With Merivale's impressive portfolio of restaurants, bars and nightclubs dotted around inner Sydney and the CBD, such as Establishment, Lotus Bistro and Bar, The Beresford and a raft of venues including Ivy, perhaps Sydney's definitive nightspot, Hemmes is never short of options.

Justin is the public face of Merivale but beside him at the helm of every project is a significant creative force – his older sister, the media-shy Bettina Hemmes. "She has all the style and taste – I have none," jokes a poker-faced Justin. The closeness of the siblings is an essential component of their success. Each brings an innate sense of style, complementary skills and a commitment to quality and good design.

"Jus comes up with concepts for every venue and location. He has a business brain but also creativity," says Bettina, whose role is to bring personality and atmosphere to venues, sourcing art, soft furnishings and unique pieces from a variety of sources, from high-end design stores to flea markets.

Merivale has been synonymous in Sydney with cutting-edge design since the siblings' parents, John and Merivale Hemmes, established House of Merivale, a chain credited with revolutionising youth fashion in the 1960s and 70s. Bettina worked in the business until 1995, when her parents retired and she and Justin decided to trade fashion for hospitality. >

