

GRAND PLAN

BY PATRICK KEAM

IT'S AN ICON OF THE ADELAIDE BEACHFRONT AND HAS NOW BEEN RENEWED AND REVAMPED WITH AN INVESTMENT WHICH SHOWS STRONG INTENT FOR THE FUTURE. ADELAIDE, MEET THE NEW AND IMPROVED STAMFORD GRAND.





Prime beachfront location in an iconic building undergoing a flourishing refurbishment; what more could you want when taking over a hotel?

That's exactly what Russell Cool got when he joined the Stamford Grand as General Manager earlier this year.

The prominent Glenelg hotel is on the cusp of completing a considerable revamp as it refurbishes each of its 220 rooms, with 188 of them set to be completed before the busy Christmas period.

Not only that, substantial work has been done to upgrade the conference facilities in a bid to improve their already strong standing as one Adelaide's premier corporate and convention destinations.

It's a \$6 million makeover that signals a significant investment in the Adelaide market from the Stamford Hotels & Resorts group on the back of a multi-million-dollar makeover of the Stamford Plaza.

"Stamford Hotels & Resorts are keen to invest in the Adelaide market. Not only spending money here, they've also spent a good seven or eight million in the city at the Stamford Plaza, Cool says.

"Every asset runs through its cycles, usually every seven years you'll do a relatively soft refurbishment, upgrade your furniture and fixtures, then every 10 years you go a bit harder and we're on that 10 year cycle now.

"You want to invest because, over time, people will realise and if you're not investing in the product, they won't be willing to pay higher rates for the same product that hasn't changed.

"So you've got to get that return on investment, a newer, better room and people will start to flock back. So that's what sparked it."

Given that the last time a major refurbishment was completed at the Grand was in the 90s, the facelift is a significant modernisation on the old rooms.

A case in point is the bathrooms. Gone are the out-dated showers over baths, which have been replaced with stylish large showers complete with beautiful mosaic tiling.

The rooms are contemporary and luxurious without being over the top, which goes a long way to harnessing the beauty of the location.

This is especially evident in the seaside facing rooms where the neutral, calming effect of the space leads the way to highlighting the fantastic view of Glenelg beach; it is a great example of a hotel taking advantage of its surroundings.

The previously tired décor has been replaced with modern lighting, carpet and furniture, along with state of the art technology to bring the hotel in line with other top-tier hotels in Adelaide.

The efforts at the Stamford Grand have certainly not gone unnoticed after the hotel won a 2015 Best In Stay award from Orbitz Worldwide, confirming its status as a top-rated South Australian hotel with Peppers Weymouth Hotel the state's only other recipient.

The 2015 Orbitz Worldwide Best In Stay Awards honour nearly 400 hotels in 125 popular destinations based on reviews by Orbitz Worldwide consumer brands (Orbitz.com, ebookers, andHotelClub) customers.



Recognition like this confirms that the Stamford Grand is not only on the right track with its \$6 million dollar upgrades but also that factors such as staff, location and value are all at elite levels.

And you know you're doing well when you're still able to win awards despite being in the midst of a large refurbishment.

Additionally, the conference facilities have had a makeover with new carpet, paint and a sizeable \$350,000 investment in audio-visual infrastructure.

Cool hopes that the improvements to the ballroom will drive the increase of the hotel's share in the MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) market.

"That's the platform for us to jump off of into the next calendar year," he says.

"We run April to March budget years here so we're just in the planning stages now but we are looking for some significant growth in that area because the MICE market in Adelaide is definitely growing.

"There's a lot of interest in coming to Adelaide and our goal is to just take advantage of that and we've taken a bit of a strategic change of direction in that regard which includes being a little more flexible in our pricing.

"The Adelaide market for next year is not looking to grow, all the articles and verbiage is saying that it's going to remain flat, so we've got to be nimble in that MICE market to ensure we can capture what is on offer and hopefully grow a bit higher than the market."

To grow higher than the market the Grand would need to be positioned in a vibrant and successful precinct, something that the Jetty Road and wider Glenelg area is moving towards after a period of uncertainty.

Hotel SA

Vacancy rates on the shopping strip were high but, from September 2014 to April earlier this year they have halved, showing renewed optimism for the revival of one of Adelaide's premier locations.

This may have something to do with the local council, who Cool rates as one of the best he has worked with.

"Holdfast Bay Council, they're remarkable," he says.

"I've never worked with a council that is so engaged with business and willing to help.

"We've had meetings with them on several occasions where we have proposed an idea and they've said yes almost straight away.

"We're in the process of looking to create an outdoor deck for the Grand Bar. We went to them a few weeks back and said we wanted to drive our leisure scene and not just be a nightclub and a bar, so a family could come down and get some fish and chips or a burger during the day and they said 'Absolutely!'.

"They're great, they're really engaged with developing the area."

Despite living in Adelaide for less than six months Cool is across most subjects raised, likely due to his extensive experience in the hotel industry.

"I got my first General Manager job at 28, but there was plenty of hard work before then, and still is," he says,

"When I was 15 years old I started washing dishes after I asked my dad for some money one day and he said 'no' and told me to go and get a job.

"I was there all through school before going to university to study public relations and journalism but only lasted a semester.

"From there I went to study travel and tourism and found my calling I guess. Worked hard and progressed through the ranks."



His work has seen him travel far and wide, in a range of different roles for prominent international hotel brands.

From Food and Beverage Manager at The Royal Opera House – London, to roles with Mirvac in Coffs Harbour and Melbourne before joining The Langham Hotels and Resorts group for eight years which took him from Australia to Shanghai, Hong Kong and Beijing.

With a wealth of experience in the Asian market, Cool will undoubtedly be looking to apply his knowledge to help The Stamford take full advantage of the ever growing influx of Asian tourists to Australia.

“The Asian market is quite substantial in terms of its growth and that’s something we’re certainly looking at,” he says.

“I’ve just come out of China after being there for the past six years, so I know that market particularly well and it’s a market we are definitely looking to gain more traction in.

“Adelaide is not considered a key market for the Chinese right now, it’s usually a second or third trip back to Australia that they explore South Australia.

“But we’ve had meetings with South Australian Tourism Commission and Tourism Australia to see what they are doing over the next 12-18 months and trying to align ourselves with that to take best advantage of the market.”



Through the spirit of relationship contracting, the refurbishment of the Stamford Grand Hotel has been a great success story for the Stamford Hotel Group, Coombs Barei Constructions and all of our trade contractors.

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After managing the day-to-day operations of The Langham Place in Hong Kong, a 665-room, five star luxury hotel including a two Michelin star Cantonese restaurant with an annual turnover in excess of USD \$100 million, the 220-room Stamford Grand may seem like small fish for someone with Cool's extensive experience.

But a return home to Australia and a new challenge in a city he had previously never been to before, suited him and his young family.

"I have a six year-old a three year-old and a one year-old so living in Hong Kong was getting a bit too much for young kids to be growing up in and I spent a good six months looking for the right opportunity," he says.

"I heard about this then did some research and Glenelg, by the beach, why wouldn't you want to be here?"

After taking the job sight unseen after just a Skype interview, Cool was taken aback by the location and the difference between his previous home in Hong Kong.

"I remember I arrived here at about 8:30 on a Thursday night and there was a full moon, and in Asia you don't often see the moon, in fact you don't often see the sun!" he jokes.

"So I was almost spellbound by the moon and then when I woke up in the morning it was a perfect day and I saw the beach for the first time, it was just magic and I knew this is where I wanted to be."



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Cool evidently isn't just here for the short-term and his vision for the hotel's future is a bright one.

"I guess the vision is to bring it back to its grandeur and what it was before, you've got to work your assets as best you can and circumstance, markets and expectations have accelerated the refurbishment program," he says.

"Collectively, the market including government, need to focus on our winter period. I don't think that's any secret, if you asked any GM in the city or any salesperson they'll tell you that the winter market is disastrous for Adelaide.

"You look at Melbourne which has a similar climate yet seems to run

at 85-86% all year round and that's because they drive their events.

"The Clipsal is great and things like when we had the Cricket World Cup, the statistics during the India v Pakistan game here spiked significantly just from one game.

"They need to drive more events into the city because that just helps everyone.

"I know that both SA Tourism and the Minister for Tourism are certainly pushing hard for that, but it is still dwarfed by what the eastern states are doing.

"We all need to work together to achieve that but ultimately it has to be driven from the top."

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