

Raising the bar

With its strong concept and cohesive colour scheme, we think this vivacious gin bar is the bee's knees.

One of Christchurch's newest 'it' bars started its life in December 2018 as a tiny pop-up in a single carpark bay on Victoria Street, but it didn't take long for Brett and Hollis Giddens to see gin gin's concept could be successfully scaled into a larger brick-and-mortar context.

"Hollis and I had a new baby at the time so Luke Dawkins, our business partner and general manager, spearheaded the project with me," says Brett.

In 2019, they purchased two buildings on the city's historic New Regent Street with the long-term goal of converting them to hospitality outlets to complement the street's existing mix of niche retail, restaurants, cafes and bars. After the pandemic hit, the existing tenant needed out of their lease and serendipitously made way for gin gin to be relocated into the buildings. Combining the two spaces into one allowed them to expand what was already a strong foundation, increase their offering by hundreds of gins and further champion the burgeoning craft distilling industry in New Zealand and beyond.

"We worked together on the design, poring over the bars and finishing details. We each had different strengths to bring to the project which complemented each other well," Brett says.

"The original venue was eclectic, with pretty much everything being upcycled or reused from previous bars we've had. Because it was so small, it forced people in different groups to interact, breaking down social barriers as well as physical. It certainly wouldn't have worked in our new socially-distanced world! You never really knew what your experience would be like when going to gin gin, because each night took its own course with a different crowd, drinks, music and food vendors. But it was always engaging, warm and upbeat. The demographic was 18 to 80, which is something we've maintained in the new venue."

As one might expect, translating the original vibe into a larger space came with challenges. "We spent a lot of time considering the core aspects of the first version we wanted to translate into the new larger space and figuring out how we could practically do that. Small spaces, lots of plants, colour and a mix of vintage and new were the key elements to achieve that with the fitout, while the service and offering was another thing altogether," explains Brett.



- **opposite:** Glamorous details borrowed from 1920s and 1930s Art Deco design updated with richly saturated contemporary colours nod to American prohibition era speakeasys with a touch of surrealist fantasy.
- Resene Madison walls blend with sapphire velvet curtains and allow pink décor and the ceiling and arched doorway in Resene My Pink to pop in contrast.
- Bar front and stool legs in Resene Permanent Green.

Resene Madison

Resene My Pink

Resene Permanent Green

left: The project team approached the lighting and colour design together to ensure they would get the vibe they were after. Some wall and ceiling surfaces were coated in Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen while others were in Resene SpaceCote Flat to keep glare to a minimum. Fixtures and furniture legs were painted in Resene Lustacryl semi-gloss waterborne enamel. Walls in Resene My Pink and bar front and stool legs in Resene Permanent Green.

below: Walls, bar front and stool legs in Resene Permanent Green.



top tip

When bringing in a mix of seating and table types, paint their legs in a unifying colour using Resene Lustacryl semi-gloss or Resene Enamacryl gloss waterborne enamel for continuity.

“The building is a Category 1 heritage building, meaning that changes to its fabric are generally forbidden. It was essential in our view to ensure that what we were doing with the building added to its heritage and overall aesthetic, particularly given the starting point for the building was as a retail and office space that had been steadily butchered by previous tenants over the years. A lot of very thoughtful change was required to bring the building back to a coherent celebration of its historic architecture.

“The aim was for the new ground floor bar to be the dominant space and provide comfortable and inviting seating centred around the ‘tongue’ of the bar, which is the platform for the cocktail bartenders to showcase their offerings to the guests.”

The brick and concrete walls made hanging artwork and lighting tricky, so the team used Resene paint to add interest instead. Contrasting colours highlight existing features of the building like the windows, archways and stairwell. They also had to manage the close proximity of the tram during building works – the tracks themselves split the outdoor area, creating a point of interest for those enjoying the patio space.

“A feature cornice was added to both of the upstairs rooms, which required a great deal of

research in order to get it right. We wanted to add a touch of heritage back into the building while maintaining the original theme of the premises. The original tiles on the front of the building were saved after the earthquakes, and the cornice was picked to tie in with these,” Brett adds.

At one point, a very large sheet of glazing had to be moved up the stairs for the backing of the upper level bar. “We could have closed this area in, but we wanted to maintain light into the stairwell. Getting anything up the stairs was a mission!”

“It was a great build for me,” says Dean James of Dean James Builders. “The owners have a really good relationship with everyone, and that makes a project so much smoother to work on. They gave me the freedom to do what needed to be done, and everything came out really nice. We worked together and figured out a way to integrate the access doors upstairs seamlessly. The first flight of stairs also needed replacing, and that was probably the most challenging part of the project. But you wouldn’t even know it now. And that’s really the beauty of dealing with a historic building. You remodel or replace something or renew it and when you do it well, from a craftsmanship perspective, no one will even know you’ve done it.”

Brett’s older brother, Darryl, owns Lakes Painting & Decorating and does all the painting and wallpaper work for the couple’s Christchurch projects. He recommended the Resene paints and finishes that were used throughout gin gin.

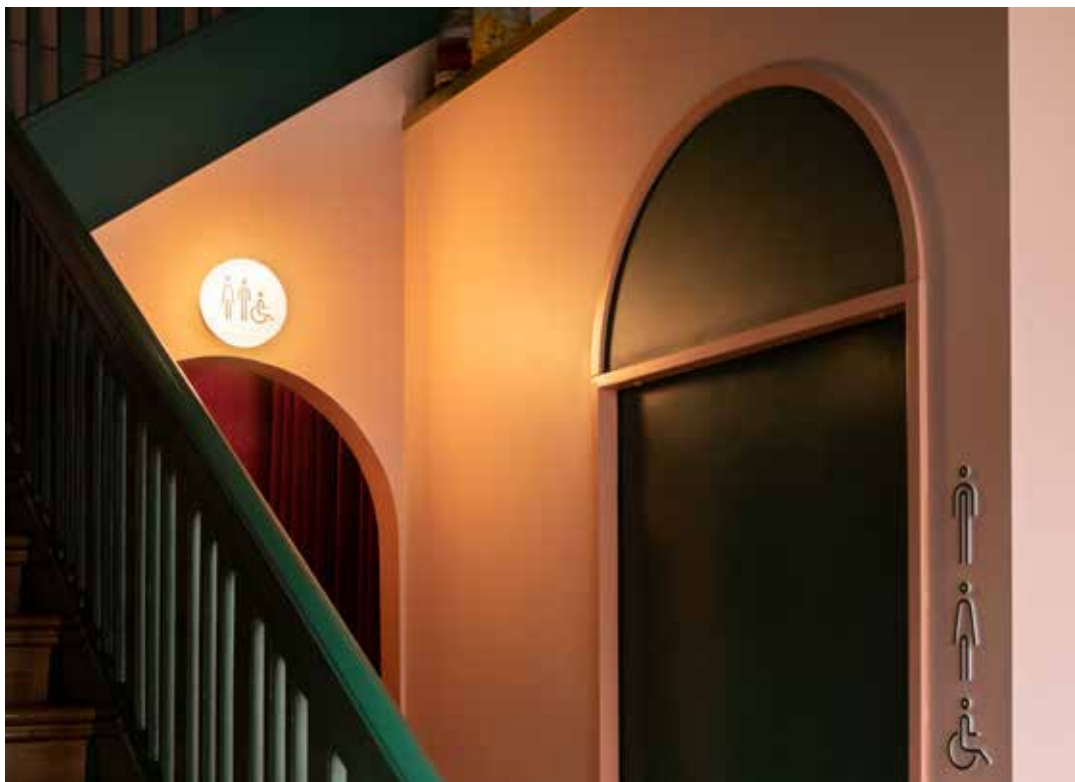
“Working on a 90-year-old building had its challenges,” says Darryl. “When Brett and Hollis bought the building, it was in a pretty rough state and they ripped a lot of the dated additions out to get it back to bare bones. The walls were in rough condition, but the brief was to keep some of that rugged charm in



right: Furnishings in mint green, chartreuse and fuchsia similar to Resene Carefree, Resene Karma and Resene Lip Service not only complement gin gin’s pink, green and blue interior paint palette but also tie into the colours of the façades that line New Regent Street. The repetition of circular and arched motifs creates further continuity. Back walls in Resene Shilo, arched doorway in Resene My Pink and front wall, ceiling, table bases and built-in bench base in Resene Permanent Green.

Resene Karma Resene My Pink Resene Lip Service Resene Madison Resene Permanent Green

Resene Carefree



the fitout to retain the natural aged feel of the building. I went with the best Resene products for the job as, in a hospitality environment, it is essential that everything is as durable as possible.”

Given the entire theme of the establishment is focused on gin, the team came up with an idea to assign botanical themes to the different rooms throughout the bar. “The space had an interesting challenge with being four separate spaces.” says Hollis. “We wanted them to each feel like their own unique place, where a guest could venture from room to room discovering different spaces and vibes. That being said, it was very important that there be coherency between them: no matter where a customer is in the space, it needed to feel recognisably and unmistakably gin gin. We did this by using the same hero colours throughout, Resene Permanent Green, Resene Shilo, Resene My Pink and Resene Madison, and altering the proportions. Each room was inspired by a different set of botanicals used in the distillation of gin – juniper, citrus florals and other herbs and spices – and the paint colours support those concepts.”

“The Resene products we chose simply worked; they are both form and function: the wide colour range meant that I got the look I was after, but

above left and right: Care and attention to detail has been paid to every part of the building, from the exterior right through to the interior toilets, to create a seamless concept and unified colour scheme. Walls in Resene Shilo, trims in Resene My Pink, doors and staircase railing in Resene Permanent Green.

top tip Resene Shilo

Different gloss levels affect how paint colours look. Dark colours like Resene Madison look great in a flat or matte finish such as Resene SpaceCote Flat, which will absorb light and make the colour appear darker and give it a velvety look.

the durability meant that Brett and Luke got the practical application and durability suitable for a busy bar environment.”

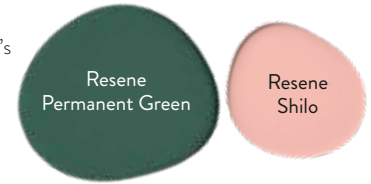
Their efforts to nail the colour palette didn’t go unnoticed by the judges at this year’s Resene Total Colour Awards. The project won the Resene Total Colour Commercial Interior Public + Retail Award and was complimented for the way the bold colours carefully intertwined with one another and paid homage to the architecture.

It’s not the first time the Giddens have successfully launched a business. Brett started Town Planning Group (www.townplanning.co.nz) in 2006, which now has eight staff members between Auckland, Christchurch, Wanaka and Queenstown. Hollis and Brett also own a bourbon-focused bar, Boo Radley’s, that they set up in 2014 so the concept of specialising on a particular spirit was not new territory, either.

“After 20 years of development planning, you tend to get an affection for good alcohol! My planning experience has certainly helped along the way with consenting and licencing. Being involved in development, I always have little personal projects on the go – and this is really where things spawned from after the Christchurch earthquakes when we set up our



left: The arched windows that were already part of the New Regent Street's buildings Spanish Revival style façade fit perfectly with the arched theme inside the bar. An awning in Resene Lumbersider tinted to Resene Shilo with signage and frontage trim in Resene Permanent Green tie well into the existing heritage colour palette of buttery yellows and minty greens.



first bar, Revival, made entirely out of shipping containers,” says Brett.

Hollis also heads up sales and marketing for Valli Wine, so while she has another clear tie to the industry, owning a gin bar wasn't something she ever thought she would do.

“If someone told me when I was 21 years old finishing up a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Louisiana that a few years down the track I'd be living in New Zealand, married to a Kiwi, working in the wine industry and opening hospitality outlets, I would have thought they were crazy,” she says.

“My path has certainly been a meandering one, taking a few turns here and there – and I wouldn't have it any other way. The common thread is the duality: the art, wine and hospitality worlds all have the nitty gritty side – getting your hands dirty, creating and growing – as well as the polished, more luxurious side. The American South where I am from is very much this way, and I was raised spending equal time running around the woods searching for Native American arrowheads as I did in nice dresses going to dinner parties with my parents. I've always said that I love to wear cowboy boots as much as pearls, and all of these areas allow me to do both.”

“The project took longer than planned – particularly with subcontractor delays and the Christmas shutdown,” adds Hollis. “We opened at the end of January, just in time for us to move onto another project back in Queenstown.”

“For us, there is only so much you can 'plan' with a fitout until you are actually in the space, using it and getting the feel for how it all comes together. As much planning that goes into the project before opening, there is at least that amount in tweaks and adjustments after being operational. The best spaces are never

officially finished but evolve over time, building more character and layers along the way. And because we own the buildings that gin gin is in, we've very much taken the approach that it will evolve over time.”

Brett agrees they have made every effort to think ahead and future-proof their set up – not only in terms of the buildings, but also the business operations. “We upgraded pretty much everything that could be upgraded in the buildings, knowing that if we did that now, it would serve us better in years to come. We licenced the venue from 8am to 3am, seven days per week to ensure we have a wide range of operational hours to work within and secured a lease over a large area of New Regent Street to enable about 80 seats out front of the venue. We also have an off-licence which allows us to sell takeaway alcohol, and our house made gin, gin gin gin! Luke distils this himself at Curiosity Gin and it has been a major hit.”

Brett and Hollis are already well into their next project, renovating the historic Waikaka Church – which has already been relocated to the foot of Queenstown's Coronet Peak. The couple has been sharing the journey of this new endeavour on Instagram (@waikakachurch), and based on the wonders they've worked with gin gin, we can't wait to see what shape this new enterprise takes. **BW**

To check out gin gin's latest offerings, visit www.gingin.co.nz.

design Brett and Hollis Giddens, Luke Dawkins
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