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Hugos' partner Dave Corsi compares the Kings Cross venue's new private dining area to a graceful take on a mid-life crisis — like choosing the stately Mercedes over the flashy convertible. It was a case of restraint Corsi says, rather than doing "something architecturally whizz bang that the room didn't lend itself to."

From the beginning, parameters were tight. Working within Hugos' comprehensive branding and a space the width of a driveway (the dining room actually sits on top of the complex's vehicle entrance) left little wriggle room with the design. But somehow the new slender passage rounds out the existing dining area and creates a sense of flow that once stopped at the back wall.

"Gun barrel spaces like driveways are direct and fast so we compartmentalised it: the first third expands the sunken lounge and looks over the street action, the middle third is essentially the private dining room, and the inside third connects with the bar, kitchen and back of house creating

an island out of the bar," says Patrick Nicholas, Director of Squillace Nicholas Architects.

"The restaurant now seems complete; it actually opens up into a better restaurant. I wish we'd done it like this from day one," says Corsi. And it might be coined as a private dining experience, but the addition has got bums on seats as opposed to languishing on the waiting list. "Now it's just bang you're down, bang you're down," says Corsi, in a charmingly *Underbelly* way.

The illuminated onyx bar and rich upholstery might seem a bit mid-life crisis flash, but Corsi says those touches are tempered by a lot of mature practical aspects you can't see — like the hefty glass protecting the prized onyx, and a lot more infrastructure back of house. Besides, he says, "It's nice to walk into a venue where you can see some effort's been invested. Where you sit on the banquette and think, 'wow, they didn't scrim here.'"

PRIVATE HUGOS' ENLARGEMENT

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