

Winning and dining

Steve Brice joined Arsenal 15 months ago at a key time when the use of space was being planned and the furniture and restaurant layouts defined. Brice is confident that his team has got it right in terms of operational issues and achieving the sense of arrival and the meeting and greeting.

"It's very much a one team approach," says Brice. "The whole experience will be Arsenal-led in terms of customer service."

The aim of Club Level is to offer some of the best seats in the house and then to provide convenient access to a wide choice of drink and dining options. The price points go from corner sports bar to bistro or buffet and up to a la carte. Brice foresees corporate hosts booking the restaurants to entertain clients at certain games during the season. Catering partner Delaware North Companies (DNC) takes care of the food and beverage side of the equation.

From the Club seats fans walk into a corridor that leads right around the bowl, so fans can meet up with friends from any seating area. Arsenal's in-house TV channel will play an important part at both ends of the day, kicking off the show more than two hours before the game and broadcasting exclusive interviews after the game. Free drinks at half-time and a smattering of Arsenal legends and celebrity fans will add to the special atmosphere.

Club Level is sold out and Arsenal is now encouraging fans to join the waiting list. The club has retained a few tickets so that they can offer a one-match experience to some fans.

A Platinum Club offers benefits for business people who want business breakfasts and talks and to network with other fans during the week.

Brice believes Arsenal has the right infrastructure in place to make the fan experience more welcoming and informative.

Raising the bar

The partnership between Arsenal and DNC offers an opportunity to take catering at UK stadiums up a notch. DNC Managing Director Jonathan Tribe, speaking at Stadia & Arena 2005, described the contract under which DNC invests £10 million into the catering hardware during construction and a further £2.5 million in the first three years after opening.

In return DNC has an exclusive for 20 years,

Arsenal and Delaware North Companies have entered into a long-term contract and are now operating as 'one team'.



Steve Brice, Arsenal Head of Hospitality.
Photo: David Price/Arsenal FC.

paying a percentage (up to a maximum of 21%) of the annual revenue – estimated at £17.5 million – to Arsenal.

The DNC office is located on site, with twice weekly operations meetings during development. Shared IT systems and processes make it easy to access information between the two organisations.

DNC is responsible for kitchens and dining areas, retail areas, external units on podium and catering for meeting and conference facilities.

"One of our core strengths is the way in which we deliver a first-class service to our consumers and respond to their needs. And this involves looking at all aspects of the service delivery process," says Michelle Bourke, DNC Marketing and PR Manager.

"This involves selecting the finest fresh produce, selecting the right staff, implementing effective service processes and, of course, the design of important elements such as kitchens' layouts and the overall design of the restaurants/outlets.

"Understanding the consumers' needs and behaviour is another vital ingredient when designing restaurants and bars, especially the football consumer. How do they like to eat? When do they like to eat? What do they like to eat? These are important questions to ask."

Invisible mechanics

Rosborough Pratley Associates (RPA) were responsible for the final design drawings for catering outlets and restaurants. James Breaks, RPA's Design Studio Manager, explains that the aim was to produce a highly service-driven facility. "The massive scale and mechanics involved will be invisible to the fan who benefits from less time spent queueing and more time spent participating, socialising, and enjoying Arsenal's many successes," he says. Leading the whole catering fit-out operation was Kent-based catering services specialist KCCJ. KCCJ was also responsible for routing the drink distribution piping to fit alongside other services. "Our target is to be able to offer a drink to at least 50% of a maximum crowd during the 15-minute half-time break," says KCCJ's Managing Director Kevin Slatter.

Serving drinks at speed will be achieved via a multi-dispense system called Ultra-Flow, from IMI Cornelius. Ultra-Flow pours an exact half-litre glass in five seconds. A glycol-based cooling system will keep the delivery pipes cool so drinks don't warm up en route. More than 2,400 pints of beer can be poured every minute from all outlets, so there shouldn't be many customers who can't get a drink when they want one.

Thirty-five concession kiosks at General Admission Level add up to 280 meters of countertop. The boxes are catered for by eight kitchens and 75 pantries with a capacity to serve 2,000 meals on a match day. Club Level ticket holders will be able to dine in one of four restaurants with seating for 3,000 covers. Eight kitchens will service Club Level.

There will be a 300 cover restaurant open to general admission ticket holders on a match day in Arsenal's new Head Office building. DNC employs 24 full-time staff, with 1,100 casual catering staff on match days.

Michelle Bourke believes that the strong relationship that has been built between DNC and Arsenal ensures the co-operation process is effective.