

THE ROTUNDA

NORTH FITZROY'S COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER



**Elm trees
in trouble**
Page 2



**Faith in the
inner north**
Pages 4-5

**North Fitzroy's
sister suburbs**
Pages 6-7



BRUNSWICK ST. FESTIVAL IS BACK



Photo: Marcus Bichel Lindegaard

By Charlie Gill

The *Rotunda* can exclusively reveal the famous Brunswick Street party that once rocked Fitzroy is set to make a long-awaited return. Earlier this year, Yarra City Council initiated a feasibility study for an annual Brunswick Street festival to begin as soon as 2026. The festival, though, will take a much different form to what it did in the 1990s.

"We're really trying our best to make Brunswick Street as successful as it possibly can be," recently re-elected mayor Stephen Jolly told *The Rotunda*. "It's the most famous

street in Australia. If Monopoly had a board game for all Australian cities, Brunswick Street 110% would be on it. We want to bring life back to the area."

The most exciting component of this rejuvenation strategy is the possibility of a new festival. Currently, the Johnston Street fiesta celebrates Hispanic and Latin American culture every year in February.

"The Johnston Street festival is a shadow of its former self," says Jolly. "It actually vacuum cleans money from the area."

This is because alcohol and food is provided by outside vendors like food trucks. The primary objective of the new festival would be to support local traders and venues.

"It does feel like we're on the cusp of something that might bring that energy back again," says Brian Edwards, owner of Avalon Bar. "Maybe this festival could be exactly what Brunswick Street needs to bring it back into people's minds as one of the hotspots of Melbourne."

continued Page 3

EDITORIAL

Summer is here and so is
The Rotunda

How does a priest from Transylvania prepare for his first Christmas in summer? That isn't the set-up for a bad joke you pull out of a bon-bon—it's one of the many wonderful storylines playing out in North Fitzroy this time of year. And if you're counting your blessings the Brunswick Street festival is back or praying Piedimonte's don't sell out to a larger chain, you might be interested in learning more about that priest by reading this edition's deep dive into religious life in North Fitzroy: God's country, yes, but just about the most agnostic suburb in Australia.

Then again, it's well-established we live in a bubble; what's far more interesting is locating the other bubbles around the world. On pages 6 and 7, *The Rotunda* has identified our 'sister suburbs': the six locales around the world—from sugar cane farming towns in Far North Queensland to parkside paradises in South Korea and Bulgaria—that share our DNA.

And yet there's no place like home. On page 10, a young local resident battling serious illness takes stock of the little things that make this neighbourhood great, and on page 11 another celebrates the big things: like the world-famous Art Deco Clifton Hill Maccas. On page 9, *The Rotunda* has determined which parts of our neighbourhood are heartbreak hotspots—ie. where people are getting dumped—and on page 2 we've got a developing story on a multi-storey development in Rae Street.

So, while it might end up making nice gift-wrapping paper, this edition isn't bad reading either. And it couldn't be delivered door-to-door without the efforts of our elite volunteer workforce (like Santa's elves, but better), nor the support of our wonderful advertisers—so make sure to support them. If you, too, are interested in helping keep *The Rotunda* above water, don't hesitate to get in touch with article ideas, buy merchandise or enquire into advertising by emailing northfitzroyrotunda@gmail.com. Enjoy!

Charlie Gill

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RAE ST. DEVELOPMENT ON THE TABLE

In *The Rotunda's* inaugural June 2021 edition, kingpin real estate agent Arch Staver told us why he loved North Fitzroy: “What’s so wonderful about it is that it has intimacy, but you don’t feel closed in. With the exception of along Queens Parade with the proposed very large development, it’s really missed the wrath of developers...,” said the (now retired) Nelson Alexander agent.

Four years later, cranes are still hovering over the delayed Queens Parade development, although they’d be higher if concerned locals hadn’t succeeded in reducing its size through community activism. Overall, Arch is right: while the northern end of North Fitzroy has seen several apartment builds on St Georges Road in recent years, the majority of the neighbourhood has kept its one or two-storey streetscapes.

But amidst the nationwide angst over housing supply—and affordability—a new seven-storey development is being planned at the heart of North Fitzroy near the corner of Rae and Reid streets, opposite North Fitzroy Arms and a few hundred metres from Isabel Henderson kindergarten.

The developer JMSN, helmed by Sam Jamieson, together with architects Warren and Mahoney and landscapers Vivid Green, are seeking approval via the state’s Department of Transport and Planning’s “great design fast track” process. The process allows the development to bypass local council approval.

It wants to construct ten two-bedroom and 17 three-bedroom apartments with the building exterior made of concrete, brick and green tile. It will include 41 underground car spaces and 46 bike spaces on just over a 1000 square metre footprint which also includes 218 square metres of outdoor communal space. It will replace the current one-storey, old brick warehouse which seems to be generally regarded as an eyesore.

To get ministerial approval, it must meet the state’s criteria for “great design”: creating a project that is “neighbourly, welcoming, sustainable, healthy, adaptable” and of “good value”. A *Herald Sun* headline described the project as a “Massive apartment block planned for Melbourne’s NIMBY heartland”, though it might look to the leafy inner-east for a correction on that claim.



Image courtesy of Warren and Mahoney.

The project has already pitted so-called ‘NIMBYs’ against so-called ‘YIMBYs’. The Protect Fitzroy North Facebook page includes criticism of the increase in traffic it will bring and proximity of the kindergarten.

Meanwhile, those who welcome more housing supply will have to wait to discover how affordable a stylish three-bedroom home near the Edinburgh Gardens actually is.

Cohealth crisis sparks inner north uprising

By Peter Barrett

What began as a quiet press release in early October has become one of the most significant community campaigns *The Rotunda* has seen in decades.

In October, cohealth—a not-for-profit charity and one of Victoria’s largest community health providers—announced that in December it would close GP services in Collingwood, Fitzroy and Kensington, leaving 12,500 vulnerable patients without health care and 20 GPs unemployed. The standard Medicare bulk-billing model of funding, cohealth argued, was not enough for its complex-care patients, who typically require longer consultations.

To many, the announcement—leaving vulnerable patients without health care just six days before Christmas—felt abrupt and even cruel. But within days the inner north mobilised, and on October 24, 400 people squeezed inside Fitzroy Town Hall to attend a passionate public meeting. Another 200 listened through loudspeakers on the steps outside.

“It was probably the most amazing meeting I’ve been in in Australia in all my time—and I came here in 1985,” City of Yarra Mayor Stephen Jolly said. “You could sense this is a community that doesn’t take bad decisions lightly.”

“You had [...] the Labor Party, the Socialists, the Greens, the Independents—every person and his dog. And we all put our weapons by the door, so to speak, for the greater good.”

The campaign picked up pace through petitions, rallies, letters, lobbying, and media pressure—and then suddenly, an unexpected reprieve. On November 20, the federal government announced \$1.5 million in funding to keep the clinics open until July next year, along with an independent review of cohealth’s service model, governance and finances.

Retired psychiatrist (and proud North Fitzroy resident) Dr Brian Stagoll OAM, is a spokesperson for the Save Our Community Health campaign. “What binds our community is that we need a big fight every eight or ten years to wake us up and

remind us [of what’s important],” says Dr Stagoll. For many, saving cohealth was up there with saving Fitzroy Pool in 1994 and Fitzroy High School in 2004.

But the fight is far from over. Cohealth will go ahead with pre-Christmas closures of its counselling services and on-site pharmacy. Its Collingwood building at 365 Hoddle Street will be sold in mid-2026 because it’s in disrepair.

Dr Stagoll remains unimpressed: “The counselling services support vulnerable people, struggling with mental health issues, domestic violence, trauma and addiction. The closure of these services will lead to harm and distress in the community, and the burden will fall onto expensive acute hospital services for governments to meet.”

An open letter from the Save Our Community Health campaign demands answers to questions such as “When will cohealth be held accountable to governments that fund them and the community it serves?” But it also asks: “Why are governments who fund these services not acting urgently to stop all service

closures?” If cohealth hasn’t been receiving the funding it needs to begin with, that puts it between a rock and a hard place.

A spokesperson for cohealth told *The Rotunda* they have been “profoundly moved by the courage, care and determination shown across the community”, that it does not concede any blame for the financial situation but “takes its fiscal and governance responsibilities very seriously”, and remains committed to a “strong and sustainable community health service”.

The independent review and federal funding ends in July 2026, a few months before a state election battle between Labor and the Greens. This is what makes Mayor Jolly “quietly confident” that if pressure is maintained these community health services will survive.

But perhaps the real takeaway is that when bad things get reported in the news, people can still say, ‘no’. Mayor Jolly: “You can stop bad things from happening, and that’s really empowering.”



Elm trees slated for destruction

Running behind the Fitzroy Tennis Club is a path connecting Alfred Crescent to Brunswick Street. Strolling down it recently, you might have noticed three large English elm trees with yellow ribbons tied around their trunks. They are three of the 39 trees being removed as part of the City of Yarra’s Brunswick Street Oval redevelopment project that includes an extension of the tennis club’s six courts to eight.

The long-running redevelopment proposal is set to go ahead in 2026. But the three elm trees—first planted in the 1880s—aren’t going without a fight.

An arborist’s report commissioned by the City of Yarra said the elm trees were of “medium

to high retention value”, but also argued they showed symptoms of physiological decline. Retention value drops if a tree is not native. Last December, the three trees were described by the council as “diseased and have come to the end of their life”.

The 3068 Group, made up of 200 heritage-focused local residents from North Fitzroy and Clifton Hill, disagrees: “The trees are not diseased or dying, they are just in the way of an unnecessary expansion of the tennis club into crown (non-council) land that is open urban forest, enjoyed by people and home to wildlife,” president Chris Goodman told *The Rotunda*.

The 3068 Group asked esteemed arborist

Robert Galbraith, who saved Camperdown’s elm avenue (said to be the finest elm avenue in the world), to assess the trees. He found them to be safe but needing some maintenance. In their native England, elm trees can live up to 400 years old.

This year at the Fitzroy Tennis Club, the wait-list for becoming a member has stretched to as long as two years: a problem the extra courts will help to fix. No doubt, though, the community will be taken by surprise when the pathway—not just the elms alongside it—is amputated to make way for the courts.

In a last bid to save the trees, The 3068 Group has made an application to Heritage Victoria.

BRUNSWICK ST. FESTIVAL IS BACK

From Page 1

But how much of a hotspot? In the 1980s and 1990s, the Brunswick Street festival existed as the opening parade of the Melbourne Fringe Festival. Ravers joined forces with the Festival to throw street parties that stretched to the horizon. On YouTube, footage of the 1999 rave is flooded with nostalgic comments: “RIP Melbourne. It used to be such a cool place back then.”

“1999 was the biggest one,” says Emmy Boudry, who filmed the footage and manages a Facebook page celebrating Melbourne street raves from that era. “It was crazy, standing on that stage and looking down that street and seeing people. It was like wow, this is insane.”

“Everyone was so happy, and people would come past and think we were some kind of Fringe performance. And they’d end up dancing, and kids would join in. It was really special in that way.”

One year, the ravers hung psychedelic dragonflies from the tramline (pictured). The parade also featured whacky floats made by traders. Mario Maccarone, co-founder of the iconic Marios cafe, recalls the giant cappuccino and cake the cafe made one year, and the Waiters’ Race—in which waiters would race each other without spilling the coffee they held—that kicked off the festival. But it could only last so long.

“It sort of grew and grew to the point where it started making the front pages of the paper,” he told *The Rotunda*. “It just got too big, and so that’s really why it stopped. It was no fun for traders. The police freaked out... People were climbing over rooftops and awnings.”

“I was 18 at the time and it was mental,” says Huw Griffiths, owner of cocktail and wine bar Lola Belle. “I’d never seen that many people in a space... And if you weren’t part of a very energetic set of people happy to be in a very crowded space, you wouldn’t enjoy it.”

The Fringe Festival brought back the parade for a one-off 40-year anniversary return in 2022, but it was held on Lygon Street. It is clear that the new iteration of the Brunswick Street festival will take a far different form.

“It won’t be exactly the same as it was 20 odd years ago, but it will be a festival that understands the modern Brunswick Street,” says Mayor Jolly. “It will be based around laneways.”

This was what was originally suggested earlier this year by Justin Stanford, co-owner of the Night Cat on Johnston Street.

“We pitched it as something a bit smaller, a bit easier in terms of the use of public space,” he told *The Rotunda*. He has suggested the main stage be located outside the Night Cat, which is also where the last traders’ meeting was held for everyone to discuss their ideas for the festival. A few were keen to incorporate elements of the old parade.

“Some people wanted to close the tram route and take over the whole street,” says Justin. “I’d prefer to leave the trams, and then people can access it.”

Opinion was also split on what time of day and at what time of year the festival should be held. Justin’s preference is autumn.

These details are sure to be addressed by the feasibility report that is currently being prepared by contractor Perfect Events Group, set to be completed by the end of 2025.

“The feasibility study will be presented to Council early in 2026, where councillors will consider its findings before deciding whether and how the festival could proceed,” a spokesperson from the council told *The Rotunda*.

Meanwhile, Mayor Jolly says “it’s definitely happening”, so it seems like the report’s recommendations are unlikely to have trouble getting approval.



The Brunswick Street rave in 1999. Image courtesy of Emmy Boudry.

The festival’s return has fortuitously coincided with a separate venture by Brunswick Street traders. This year saw the unveiling of a council-funded website named One Street Fitz All that features a traders’ directory and interviews with locals.

“Brunswick Street is, and always should be, the proving ground for music,” says Keiran Pidgeon, who designed the website. “I think a lot of that is starting to decline a little bit.. Which is one of the reasons why I’m quite passionate about it, to sort of try and build up Brunswick Street again.”

But to what extent is Brunswick Street actually in decline? Mario suggests it won’t be easy to replicate the same energy the parade had back in the day.

“As a community, we were flying under the radar in many ways, and were all excited to get out there and do something. The festival

grew organically... That’s why it’s always a little bit scary when the council comes in and tries to say we’re going to make everything great.”

“I don’t think the parade’s ever coming back,” says Justin. “There was a lot more tight-knit community in Fitzroy in those days... But the vibe of the festival can still come back, for sure.”

It is up to the council and Perfect Events Group to determine exactly what this vibe will be and how best to achieve it. Maybe they’ll decide to honour the past by kicking off the festival with the old Waiters’ Race. If so, would Marios get involved, given they won eight years in a row?

“I’d want to participate in the festival,” says Mario. “But I’m still kind of quietly cautious about what it really is or what it’s trying to be.”

ALL QUIET ON THE PIEDIMONTE’S FRONT

By Peter Barrett

Plans to redevelop Piedimonte’s appear to remain in limbo months after the City of Yarra refused to sell the laneway behind the long-running supermarket, leaving the future of the site uncertain.

As previously reported in *The Rotunda*, the laneway sale was key to the Piedimonte family’s redevelopment proposal, which included a larger supermarket footprint and 66 residential apartments.

Councillors ultimately voted 6-1 against the sale at a packed public meeting in September, with Mayor Stephen Jolly citing traffic “chaos” for current and future residents. The family had previously warned that without the laneway acquisition they would be forced to close and sell the supermarket. However, in the immediate aftermath of the decision the family told *The Rotunda* that their plans would be reconsidered “in the clear light of day”.

Three months later and that process appears to continue—but behind closed doors. We put several questions to the family—including whether alternative design options are being explored and whether a

timeframe had been set to either continue, sell or redevelop the supermarket—but they declined to comment.

So, *The Rotunda* visited the supermarket to see how shoppers and staff were coping with the uncertainty.

Julia, who shops at Piedimonte’s once a week for speciality European items, says she would be “really sad” to see the supermarket go and would struggle to accept a Coles or Woolworths in its place. For her, the issue is less about development and more about neighbourhood identity.

“This place has a really nice family-run feel to it and it would be really nice to maintain that in some way, to see something that has character stay,” she says. “It’s kind of fun to come here. I find I go in here and I’m, like, in a good mood. It’s sort of old school... also I bump into friends here all the time, that’s also good!”

Campbell, a regular shopper who lives behind the supermarket and took part in the original planning process with a particular interest in overshadowing, is largely unfazed by the current limbo.



Image courtesy of Jackson Clements Burrows Architects.

“It’s out of my hands,” he says, adding that after years of community involvement he feels “over it”. As to the spectre of Coles or Woolworths taking over the site? “We quietly wish an Aldi would move in,” he laughs.

Meanwhile, staff are also in the dark. One employee told *The Rotunda* that

management had not provided an update and that it remains “business as usual” for now.

And so, in the absence of news, life goes on at Piedimonte’s: trolleys roll, shelves are stacked and (thankfully) there are no unexpected items in the bagging area. But for how long?

GOD’S COUNTRY (SORT OF): THE

Statistically, North Fitzroy is almost the least religious suburb in Australia. How have our local churches adapted to their godless environment? *The Rotunda* went on a church-crawl to find out



Reverend Sándor-Csongor Nagy inside St. Luke’s.

By Charlie Gill

Reverend Sándor-Csongor Nagy is used to the perfect Christmas. Growing up in a Hungarian family living in a small village in northwestern Transylvania, he’d wake up on December 25th to grey skies, snowdrifts and a true sense of religious occasion. His father was a pastor, and Sándor himself felt inclined to the clerical life from an early age.

“When I was ten years old, I had an accident. I played with a bow and arrow and it kicked back into my eye, and I almost died. I thought: ‘Why am I still alive? Maybe God has some plans for me.’”

And so Sándor knew that one day he was going to be the pastor of a church himself. What he didn’t know was that God’s plan would send him to a church on the other side of the world: North Fitzroy, Melbourne, Australia. In January this year, 31-year-old Sándor and his wife Csilla arrived at St Luke’s Church, the 115-year-old bluestone icon opposite the Fitzroy Bowls Club. The previous pastor had retired after 27 years, and Sándor was

set to become the new face of the city’s Hungarian Reformed Church.

“It will be interesting to experience Christmas in summer,” Sándor told me during a tour of St Luke’s in November. “It’s a strange thing for us.”

Strange, too, to be a pastor in one of the most irreligious places on earth. As per the 2021 census, 65% of North Fitzroy’s residents have no religion—almost the most of any suburb in Australia—and as the population has become increasingly godless, members of the Hungarian Reformed Church have quietly gathered at St Luke’s to hear the word of the Lord in their native tongue. Sándor’s Sunday sermon, though, is not the only one available to the spiritually-curious in North Fitzroy. Despite its reputation for agnosticism, there are multiple thriving Christian communities scattered throughout 3068 and its surrounds.

Just across the Queens Parade divide is the imposing Church of St John the Baptist, a child of the Gothic Revival constructed

from 1871 to 1907. In March next year, St John’s will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the laying and blessing of its foundation stone, and hopes to have both the archbishops of Melbourne and Perth in attendance. This would potentially constitute the inner north’s most significant divine visitation since the Dalai Lama stayed in Alfred Crescent in 1982 or Beyoncé posed in front of a Brunswick share house in 2013.

“We’re putting up a commemorative plaque on the entrance to the church, and that will be blessed, hopefully, by the Archbishop,” John Andrews, local historian and church archivist, tells me. “We’ll have Mass, followed by lunch and some entertainment, hopefully provided by the Vietnamese and the Irish.”

St Joseph’s Church in Collingwood—which belongs to the same parish as St John’s—has become the home of Melbourne’s Vietnamese Catholic community. Naturally, the demographic make-up of the parish has radically changed throughout the decades. John explains:

“Just after World War Two, the parish was predominantly poor Irish. They moved out into better suburbs. Then the Italian community with post-war migration came. Likewise, many of them moved out. Then a lot of Greeks moved into North Fitzroy, but of course they weren’t Catholic, they were Greek Orthodox, so we started to lose part of our congregation. Then all the young professionals moved in...When you read reports from the Catholic newspaper back in the day, it would talk about events at St John’s with hundreds and hundreds of people. We have to have a 150th to get that many people there now.”

“People only know about God when they hit their thumb and they mention His name.”

And yet current trends—whether it be the male loneliness epidemic or the popularity of astrology among young women—suggest more and more people are yearning for spirituality and connection. Religion is well-placed to satisfy this need, but faith derived from ancient scripture can have difficulty adapting to the social mores of the 21st century. Some churches, though, seem to have worked it out: like Saint Mark’s Anglican Church, across the Alexandra Parade divide on the corner of George and Moor streets.

Saint Mark’s is one of the most progressive Anglican churches in Australia. For decades, unconditional empathy has been its modus operandi, from working with First Nations people to running an AIDS ministry in the 90s. Its support of the LGBTIQ+ community has drawn dismay from other Anglican churches, but as its current vicar Reverend Ken Goodger explains: “If people are criticising you, you must be doing something right.”

As Ken gives me a tour of the bluestone building, he expands on the church’s inclusive philosophy: “Jesus called those on the fringes of society. And I think the call of the church is to do that still. To be inclusive of people who aren’t powerful, aren’t privileged, and who perhaps are struggling in life.”

This call has also been heeded by a far more traditional church not too far away. On a Saturday morning—most definitely not a Sunday—I pop into the North Fitzroy Seventh-day Adventist Church, a charming little redbrick building opposite Edinburgh Gardens on Alfred Crescent, and meet retired doctor Sally Kemp. Her great-grandfather was a founding member of the church. We talk about the weekly soup-kitchen service it provides for homeless people.

“Most of them don’t have family, which is why they need someone who remembers their name. They sometimes ask me medical questions. I’m very fond of them.”

Seventh-day Adventists are known for their emphasis on health (so no alcohol), keen anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ, and belief their co-founder was a prophet: Ellen G. White, who actually came to North Fitzroy and preached here at the end of the 19th century. Sally, who started coming to the church half a century later in 1953, has noticed how the area around it has changed.

“When you look at all of the churches that are empty it makes me sad... I thought COVID would get people to think about God more, but it almost seemed to be the opposite.”

“It’s changed over my lifetime. We used to reach people with the Bible, but people don’t believe in the Bible now. We now have to reach people who are secular. You can’t assume that people know anything about God. They only know about God when they hit their thumb and they mention His name.”

A couple of years ago, the church wanted to book a room at the North Fitzroy library to run an outreach program, but ran into difficulty with someone from the council.

“They said to us we couldn’t use the library rooms because we might say bad things

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GOSPEL ACCORDING TO 3068



about gay or transgender people... It was interesting because we do have a couple of transgender people who come to the soup kitchen. They just assumed immediately we would hold a particular view."

If you stroll down the road from the North Fitzroy Seventh-day Adventist Church, eventually you'll reach the Fitzroy North Community Church on Reid Street (keep going and you'll reach the North Fitzroy Arms; a walking tour of the changeability of this suburb's name). While the S.D.A church aren't drinkers, the F.N.C.C congregation are often nursing a collective hangover. They're young. They're hip. They're not just in the inner-north, but of it.

Shane Meyer Holt is a member of the church's collaborative pastoral leadership team. When he arrived in Melbourne fifteen years ago, he wasn't sure if he'd ever join a church again. Originally from New Zealand, Shane had spent his career in church organisations, and was working as a barista when he stumbled across F.N.C.C.

"It was just open and curious and I could process some of my stuff that I needed to work through," Shane tells me after a recent Sunday service. "It was safe enough for me to feel like I didn't have to leave any parts of me behind to exist here."

"I've seen horrific things happen inside churches, like all kinds of abuse, power being used badly, all kinds of stuff. And it really quickly shattered the illusion...But there's some people who go like: 'This has been a big part of my life. I still feel connected to the divine. I still feel connected to bits of the story. I still want to work out how to love your enemies.'"

And so the church became home to the kind of Christian open about their complicated relationship with Christianity. Fifteen years ago, though, the 140-year-old congregation was slowly dying: propped up by people from the eastern suburbs who drove in to keep it going.

"Really good people, but they didn't understand Fitzroy North. They were doing evangelism nights and were like: 'We don't know why no one's coming.' I think part of the transformation was as people from the community started coming in: the neurodivergent community, more queer community. As soon as you open that space up, you have to challenge and rethink how faith fits into that."

"We don't really have a connection with the local population of this area."

Soon enough, F.N.C.C became, as Shane puts it, "inner-northy". Perhaps, though, the church is defined as much by what the inner north isn't as much as what it is. As beloved neighbourhood cafes close, stalwart supermarkets threaten to sell up to corporate conglomerates and locals' pubs get bought out by large management groups, city-life is becoming increasingly hostile to community living.

"There's an incredible freedom in being in the inner north, but at the same time there's a vacuum as well," says Shane. "Sometimes the fluidity of the inner north makes it really hard

to find connections... What happens when you get sick, who's turning up with a casserole?"

I asked Reverend Ken back at Saint Mark's if there was something melancholic about the situation. Bejewelling the inner-city are beautiful buildings home to communities that foster connection in an increasingly disconnected world. And people walk straight past them.

"I don't think there's a sadness," he said. "I think there's an opportunity for the church to actually build genuine community."

Just not this community. Most local churches are still frequented largely by people who drive in from the suburbs. Middle-class inner-city Melburnians are either highly critical of organised religion ("rightfully so", as Ken says) or completely uninterested by it. Sally, from the Seventh-day Adventist church, has noticed less courtesy being paid to churches: one hot summer's day, a drunken reveller in Edinburgh Gardens defecated out the front of the same building Ellen G. White once preached at.

"I was shocked. I thought there would be more respect for churches. Maybe it's because of church members. Maybe we've let the Lord down," says Sally.

And on lovely sunny evenings, their bins get filled to the brim with rubbish put there by the park-dwelling party-animals: "It's really funny for a church that's teetotaler, a whole lot of wine bottles in the bins."

But who knows what the future holds?

"We have some younger people who've started coming," Ken tells me. "Some come

and don't stay. Some come and do stay. But I have noticed that there are a number of younger people who will come and have a look... Does modern society actually give us any sense of meaning and purpose for life? People are reduced to consumers, and are saying that there's more to life."

John from St John's has also noticed a greater influx of young people recently.

"They're obviously looking for meaning in life, aren't they? If IT and disco aren't providing the meaning, you're going to have to start looking somewhere else."

Meanwhile, back at St Luke's, Sándor has settled into North Fitzroy. Csilla, an engineer, is struggling to find a job and misses her family, but they both like North Fitzroy and might just extend their two-year visa. They love Piedimonte's. Their favourite restaurant is Citrus. It's a nice area, but it isn't God's country, and so I ask Sándor what he thinks about the church being an island in a sea of faithlessness.

"It gives a lot of opportunity to have connection with these people. I think we should work more on this, because we don't really have a connection with the local population of this area...That's why we should also provide an English sermon. That's how you could start a bigger community, greet them and be a welcoming community."

So, if you're keen for a little more spirituality this Christmas—sometime after presents, a little before lunch—pop in to St Luke's opposite the bowls club. Sing a little hymn if you feel like it. Say a little prayer. And then get pissed afterwards.



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“SISTER SUBURBS”: NORTH

We live in troubled times. North Fitzroy needs to establish its own global alliances with similar neighbourhoods around the world

Words by Charlie Gill

Illustrations by Marnie Florence

The world order is collapsing. Climate change is gearing up. Democracy will crumble, the global-supply chain will skid to a halt and nations will splinter into thousands of municipal microorganisms. It will be an awful time to be alive and a wonderful time to be a community newspaper.

After all, *The Rotunda* has always considered this suburb to be a Vatican-style sovereign city-state. Eventually, the mask will slip and we'll finally be able to live freely as the communist paradise Sky News always knew we were. We'll annex Clifton Hill, give dogs the vote and (if they get their way) introduce a strictly One Cat Policy. The decline of the West will mean the rise of the North (Fitzroy).

Given relationships between states are already fraught with suspicion, there's never been a better time for individual neighbourhoods to forge their own alliances. 'Sister cities' already exist, but we need to think smaller. In consultation with friends of this newspaper stationed around the world, *The Rotunda* is happy to announce North Fitzroy's sister suburbs.

Yeonnam-dong, Seoul, South Korea

We're in the Asian Century and need a strong ally in the region. Tianjin, in China's northeast, is one of Melbourne's sister cities, but the City of Melbourne's Tianjin office did not respond to *The Rotunda's* request for comment. We pivoted south and contacted a South Korean friend: Sumi Kang, a software saleswoman born and raised in Seoul. She is also a YouTube vlogger and Instagram influencer with multiple videos fetching millions of views.

Sumi called us from Seoul and identified North Fitzroy's equivalent as Yeonnam-dong: a leafy and lovely area directly next door to the city's trendy tourist nightlife spot, Hongdae. It seemed to mirror North Fitzroy's relationship to Fitzroy. Yeonnam-dong is also famous for a peaceful park that features an old railway line, just like Edinburgh Gardens.

"Dog owners love to just hang out there and they can make their own network with other dog walkers," says Sumi. (Her own dog, a Korean Jindo named Gamja, has 23,000 Instagram followers.)

Yeonnam-dong's property prices are high for a suburb on the north side of the Han River; in Seoul, the south side is posher, like in Melbourne. *The Rotunda* told Sumi the relationship between people on either side of the Yarra can feel tenser than North Korea and South Korea's situation, then realised how culturally insensitive that sounded. Either way, she forgave us, and visited North Fitzroy in late November to properly assess the two suburbs' similarities:

"Like Yeonnam-dong, everything is photogenic," she told *The Rotunda* over coffee at the Tin Pot. "It has a cosy vibe."

Gordonvale, Far North Queensland, Australia

Gordonvale is a sugarcane town just south of Cairns in Far North Queensland. It has been represented in parliament by Bob Katter since 1993. From the chimneys of its 100-year-old sugar mill, a train of white smoke seems to rise as high as the 922-metre pyramid-shaped mountain that looms over the township below, where less than 12% of residents have bachelor's degrees and only 23% voted yes to the Voice referendum.

In North Fitzroy almost 60% of residents have bachelor's degrees, 88% were supportive of the Voice and 100% are ignorant to the challenges of sugarcane farming. On paper, our locales seem as far from a match as any two in Australia. And yet it is also on paper that we share one common denominator: a humble community newspaper.

Like *The Rotunda*, Gordonvale's local rag takes its name from its skyline's greatest icon: *Pyramid Views* has been in production for nine years, founded and edited by local P.E teacher Sandra Charlton.

"It's bright and optimistic, more about stories and less about news, more about civic pride and less about politics, and more about celebrating than finding fault," Sandra told *The*

Rotunda. "It's a conservative town... We've got an Acknowledgement of Country on the second page, and that caused a bit of a stir with some people. So it's mostly human interest stories."

"I couldn't believe the reception. It was immediately warm. It wasn't long before people were just coming up and taking it out of my hand."

Gordonvale is infamous for being the first place in Australia to introduce the cane toad, and last year a 2.3 metre crocodile was captured in the nearby Mulgrave river. North Fitzroy might be to blame for introducing the \$150 ironic mullet haircut, and many residents would genuinely prefer to be attacked by a crocodile than cop an unfavourable VCAT ruling. We're pretty different. Still, if you follow the coast up north far enough, eventually you'll come across a newspaper just like this one.

Jamaica Plain, Boston, United States of America

Should civil war break out in the United States, a North Fitzrovia government would surely back military intervention to defend progressive values against MAGA and co. Accordingly, we need an alliance with another charming but gentrified left-wing enclave: Jamaica Plain, Boston, Massachusetts.

Boston and Melbourne are officially sister cities, but the Melbourne Boston Sister Cities Association seems dead in the water, so *The Rotunda* organised an interview with David Ertischek: editor and owner of local news website *Jamaica Plain News*.

"Jamaica Plain is, like, off the deep-end when it comes to the left. You've got liberals, and then you've got JP," David says.

This is because the respective histories of Jamaica Plain and North Fitzroy run parallel. In the mid 20th-century, it was largely home to the working class, and in the 1970s community activists stopped the state tearing the suburb apart with a multi-lane highway (now, the area is a linear park with playgrounds and a bike path). During the early 1990s, artists and young professionals moved in, and as of 2025 property prices are through the roof.



"I'll meet people who bought their house for like \$63,000 and then they'll sell it for \$1.5 million," David told *The Rotunda*. "We have an old school pub or two, but besides that you've got modern restaurants making meals with fancy ingredients."

Our links, though, aren't limited to resplendent gardens, a history of community activism and a common political persuasion. Our neighbourhood's atmosphere wouldn't be the same without trams, and streetcars have long been part of J.P.'s identity. Sadly, they got phased out in the latter half of the 20th century, but you can listen to the sounds of nearby above-ground trains and imagine they're still there.

"My friends come from rural areas to stay with me, and say: 'I don't know how you live with that.' And I say: 'It just sounds like a wave.'"

11th arrondissement, Paris, France

A few years back, a member of *The Rotunda's* editorial staff was partying in a Parisian nightclub when they looked at the wall and saw a picture of the Edinburgh Gardens dog-field. It wasn't a drug-fuelled vision or a message from God

FITZROY'S KINDRED SPIRITS



to come back home. Actually, they'd found themselves in 'Fitzroy': a bar in the city's trendy 11th arrondissement that takes its name and inspiration from North Fitzroy's more famous neighbour.

The Rotunda contacted 'Fitzroy', expecting them to treat it like a divine visitation, but they didn't respond after multiple attempts. Clearly, the AUKUS situation—in which Australia scrapped its contract for French submarines—had engendered the same kind of populist fury that, 236 years ago, tore down the Bastille less than 300 metres away. Even the Fitzroy bar was boycotting Fitzroy. And yet the imposters—who have a 'Fitz Spritz' on their menu, but no sign of Carlton Draught on tap—had put *our* dog-field on the wall. It was infuriating, and not a good start for our sister suburb relationship. It's a relief we can make our own baguettes.

The Rotunda then realised we'd been yet to take advantage of the inner north's greatest asset: our reputation as cafe experts. Maybe we could break bread by actually breaking bread? And so we sent a reporter stationed in Paris to interview a waitress at a popular local cafe that serves Australian-style brunch. The cafe was called Passager, on

Avenue Ledru Rollin, and the waitress was named Sasha. How would she describe the 11th?

"Up and coming while still classic. A good mélange of past and present...It's super creative."

It does sound like a match. And what about when it comes to coffee?

"We're currently using more oat milk than we are regular milk," Sasha told our correspondent.

Bang. Definitely a match.

Ivan Vazov, Sofia, Bulgaria

Joanna Murray-Smith is an internationally renowned playwright and longtime North Fitzroy resident. In early November, she was on a trip to Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, where a theatre company was putting on four of her plays at once. The trip, which she described to *The Rotunda* as "surreal", involved being interviewed on live television alongside an interpreter from the United Nations. She also discovered that the Bulgarian translator

of her play *Honour* had added an entirely new final scene. Either way, audiences adored it.

"I was mobbed. It's going to be hard coming back to Australia."

Given it seems essential for North Fitzroy to have some presence in Russia's backyard, *The Rotunda* gave Joanna a separate mission to identify Sofia's North Fitzroy equivalent. Preliminary research had suggested similarities with a neighbourhood close to the inner-city that was coincidentally named after Bulgaria's most famous playwright: Ivan Vazov.

"It has a similar arty feeling to our neighbourhood," says Joanna. "It's about the same distance from the city-centre as North Fitzroy is to Melbourne's CBD. And there's a lot of political and artistic graffiti." Unfortunately, it doesn't have a community newspaper, but one of Vazov's most famous plays is called *A Newspaperman*.

During her live interview on national television, Joanna told the Bulgarian public she'd been sure to visit the Ivan Vazov museum while she was in Sofia. *The Rotunda*, however, can confirm Joanna had never heard of this man in her life prior to our research request. Now, given her trip to Sofia was such a success, she says she wouldn't be surprised if they named a suburb after her. Otherwise, if we do end up annexing Clifton Hill, it might get a name change.

Santa María La Ribera, Mexico City, Mexico

We needed a sister suburb that was home to a glorious monument just like ours. It seemed likely we'd find one in Mexico City—a place known for its eclectic and brilliant architecture—so *The Rotunda* spoke to locals online and enquired about neighbourhoods with a deep sense of community that also have a rotunda. The answer was Santa María La Ribera, not far from the city centre.

24-year-old North Fitzroy Primary School graduate Cohan Feary has been travelling the world for almost a year. In mid-November he was in Mexico, so we asked him to check the area out. He then sent a completely unsolicited but nonetheless brilliant 1000-word report. We've included an abridged version below:

"The expedition began with a 'pulque pina', perhaps the equivalent of a negroni at Monty's, but pineapple-flavoured and fifteen dollars cheaper. We took the train to the end of the line, Buenavista, which spits you out onto the main artery that runs through Santa María La Ribera: Calle José Antonio Alzate, its very own St Georges Road."

"Eventually, we made it to the guiding force behind this journey: the Alameda de Santa María La Ribera, a big rotunda in the middle of a small park. The rotunda is significantly more grandiose and colourful than its North Fitzroy counterpart."

"Strangely, the park—which is bordered by a plethora of bars and grocery stores—might have more gum trees than Edinburgh Gardens herself. Perhaps we need some native regeneration in our own backyard if a park in Mexico feels more like home than my own walk to primary school."

Cohan, who's currently in the Canadian Rockies, still isn't sure when he'll come home. We'll try and plant some gum trees before he gets back.

The next steps

Truthfully, there were so many great candidates around the world suggested by various friends of *The Rotunda*: from Silver Lake in Los Angeles to Cihangir in Istanbul. But after deciding on the six neighbourhoods around the world North Fitzroy ought to join forces with, we realised how challenging formalising these relationships would actually be. The City of Melbourne were hopeless, but the City of Yarra at least told *The Rotunda* that entering a sister suburb arrangement would probably need to be ticked off by the councillors. Meanwhile, we used our VCE French to write a letter to the mayor of the 11th arrondissement, resorted to Google Translate to write an appeal in Bulgarian, and tried to buy a fax machine so we could contact the municipal authority for western Seoul. So far, none of our olive branches have been picked up and no ceremonies have been planned. We'll let you know how it goes.

TINY GREEN HOME

By Peter Barrett

Like a giant shaggy muppet, the Grass House rustles and shimmers in the breeze, just a stone's throw from Edi Gardens. If, like me, you've ever wondered what it's like to live here, you're in luck. On a recent sunny winter's afternoon I met its lovely owners: Caroline, her partner Duncan and Moto, the English Labrador.

Caroline, a freelance architect and academic, bought the house with Duncan in 2019. Previously based in Queensland, the couple had spent the previous two years intermittently flying down here to hunt for a suitable North Fitzroy address: "We would come to Melbourne, stay in the city and catch a tram out here [...] and just sit in Wild Things at the front and have lunch. We just really liked the vibe of it."

After buying the tiny 47m² house—originally designed by David Luc—they engaged architecture firm Multiplicity to renovate the interior and maximise space. Upstairs, where we had our chat, is the kitchen and dining area. Windows here offer views over nearby rooftops framed by fronds of native Lomandra and cascading "Silver Falls" Dichondra that return playful shadows on the timber

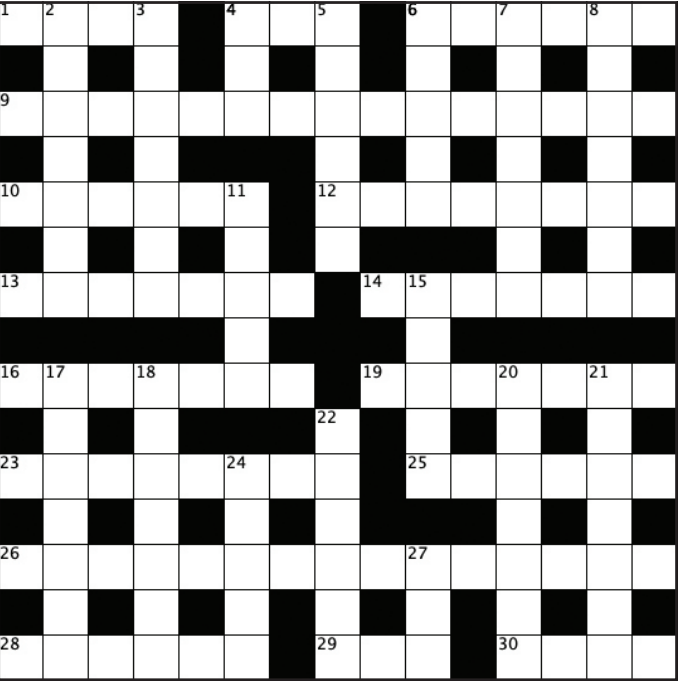
interior. Above us, a narrow strip of blue skylight is also fringed by grasses, which gently ripple in the breeze.

Caroline and Duncan are used to hearing people commenting on their strange-looking home (they can hear pretty much everything that people say out on the street, so be warned). "The biggest comment we get is, 'Where are the windows, it must be so dark?' Well, look at it, it's this light-filled all year round."

All those grasses must be difficult to maintain though, surely? "We do very little to it," she says. "Every now and again we get out there and spend an hour just trimming the vines downstairs back and cutting that up." After purchasing, the couple replanted the grasses and fixed the reticulated watering system. The company that installed the grasses—Mcnuttndorff Landscape—visit two or three times a year with a ladder to do the weeding and replant any fatalities (last summer a patch of about a metre succumbed to the heat—the first they've ever lost).

So, what's it like to live here? "We really love it. We feel enveloped by vegetation." It looks great to us too!

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD by CN #18



ACROSS

- 1 Keep sappy love fringes (4)
- 4 Unhappy hour belongs to us (3)
- 9 Perplexed, I halt thy commune, cohealth (9,6)
- 10 Sir can confuse cane toad town (6)
- 12 The last five frolicked at Midsumma or Moomba (8)
- 13 Desired disposal of dove etc (7)
- 14 Drooped, Angel wavered in DD cup (7)
- 16 One mane flows like coral (7)
- 19 Local McDonald's style of company trade? (3,4)
- 23 Sofia's here first, but Uganda looks great and Rome is awesome (8)
- 25 A Person in Neon: Young Adult novel (6)
- 26 Mi3056's treat. Listen to live music here! (9,6)
- 28 Non profit aid pun? Hilarious (6)
- 29 Internal cramp impact (3)
- 30 Top playwrights entertain the senior dogs and cats (4)

Note: Many clues relate to articles in this edition of *The Rotunda*.

Help us 1-across 4-across 9-across!
You can use this QR code to join the mailing list for campaign updates.

DOWN

- 2 Havoc adorns innards smashed on toast (7)
- 3 Bedlam stirs, even alternatively provides shade in Edinburgh gardens (3,4)
- 4 Possess crown without Councillor (3)
- 5 Approve? Somehow fair, thank you (6)
- 6 It hurts coaches, losing 100-0 (5)
- 7 Making jokes about Carol after chai (7)
- 8 Anger at rogue turn (7)
- 11 The hipster noted inner authoritarian (5)
- 15 Australian Open art: addled artery (5)
- 17 Particle sounds new and torn apart (7)
- 18 Bright pink, Ma swallows rep (7)
- 20 Outing Princess with messy party (3,4)
- 21 Abbotsford place for nuns let off steam after scam (7)
- 22 Ballerina and Cerberus' three heads intertwined (6)
- 24 Tiered is a convoluted English word (5)
- 27 Satsuma loses a Saturday tally (3)



Solution: northfitzroyrotunda.com/cheat

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HEARTBREAK CARTOGRAPHY

Which locations in our neighborhood are most synonymous with romantic anguish? Where are people getting dumped? *The Rotunda* investigates

By Maddie Sargeant

If I walk from Alfred Crescent, slip behind the Fitzroy Football Club rooms, wander down Reid Street past the North Fitzroy Arms, and thread through the side streets to Curtain Square, my mind can find itself ablaze with punishing memories of lost loves. Traversing the memory minefield of one's local suburbs is not a unique experience. Edinburgh Gardens and the streets which sprawl from it have housed many a hard conversation. The nexus of pain is the ominous Brunswick Street Oval's Heartbreak Hill (also known as Hipster Hill), our own Mount Vesuvius oozing bungled "situationships" and attempts at "ethical non-monogamy".

I wondered if Heartbreak Hill was a shared experience. If more people had sat watching people frolic across Brunswick Street Oval, or had a stranger's sausage dog rummage through their bag, while someone they loved told them that it was "over". So, we polled you and received some pretty interesting results. For some, we were even able to provide a space for catharsis for pent up emotions lingering after recent break-ups.

Of the public break-ups reported, an overwhelming amount occurred in parks; Edinburgh Gardens made up 55% of break-up spots, with Curtain Square, Carlton Gardens and Argyle Square trailing behind. Yet heartbreak seems to start in Edinburgh Gardens before the dreaded "final chat," with locals preferring to drag their soon-to-be un-loved ones to Edi's for many tough

conversations. The place most widely acknowledged as embarrassing to be dumped in front of was Standing Room. No less mortifying, however, would it be to be eviscerated in the most performative seat in Melbourne, the Tin Pot corner spot.

Those who contributed qualitative data were able to provide some juicy gossip about break-ups smattered around the place. We heard that a member "of a well-known local band" dumped his "French boo" for everyone to see at the North Fitzroy Arms, citing misunderstood levels of commitment. He wanted casual, she wanted more, a tale as old as time. Break-ups over beers was another common trend—housemates in a tryst ending things while their shared housemate pours their final beverage—while a screaming match in the Red

Triangle kitchen presumably culminated in a severance.

One contributor found a local girl's habit of luring her discarded loves to the same cafe in Richmond "cursed"; I found it rather genius. If you localise your pain, it does not splinter into every crevice of your waking life. Another favourite was the dodged relationship in which a first date at Monty's impersonated his favourite Star Wars character, smelled their neck "like a vampire," and bragged about a tenuous connection to a local musical icon.

More optimistically, your lovely community imparted plenty of sage advice to mend a broken heart. Drowning one's sorrows after a breakup at Monty's was a common antidote. Those who partake in healthier outlets found that running or going for

a climb helped. Odd-balls roamed the cemetery. The pragmatists suggested jotting down thoughts. Swimming was suggested, in a pool or the ocean; no better way to mend a heart than it jumping into your throat, right? Others' outlets were less comforting; some wished for isolation and an absent mind. Yet, overwhelmingly, remedies came in many wholesome forms. Friends appear to be the heart's greatest ally. The creatives leant on writing songs. A coconut water from Piedi's was seen to be a great help. A potato cake with chicken salt from Super Tasty and a cherry pie from the Tin Pot apparently both serve as comforting gastronomic delicacies.

Now that we have walked you through the grizzly, I can impart some community-endorsed first date ideas. Our many brilliant pubs and bars got airtime; Monty's classically reigning supreme. However, I thought we could do better than thrashing our old haunts. I am speaking to you, the person who thought that Amarillo was a good date spot even after being dumped there. Some ideas were specific, such as the person who suggested meeting at Piedi's to bond over drinks and snacks before sitting "at least 50 metres from a footpath" in Edi's. Gastronomically, takeaway Malaymas and sitting on Heartbreak Hill (to foreshadow an inevitable break-up) was also recommended. The yuppies, meanwhile, leant into refinement with suggestions for more elevated places, like Sense of Self, brunch spots and bookshops.



LUDO: HUNT FOR DEZI HIGHLIGHTS HYPOCRISY

The efforts of the Belgian Shepherds who have failed to find Dezi Freeman would be better spent finding missing pets

By Ludo

Why do we get dogs to look for missing humans but rely on humans to find missing dogs? This is the question that's troubled me deeply as I've obsessively followed the hunt for Dezi Freeman. Given the fact they're stronger, quicker and larger than me, I do get a *little* satisfaction out of the Belgian Shepherds' lack of success in sniffing out the cop killer. But I also just shake my head at the lack of critical thinking: humans give dogs their most important search-and-capture jobs, but posters for missing pooches are taped to lamp posts at a human-only eye-level.

I'd say we'd be better off putting GPS-powered microchips in humans rather than canines, if people like Dezi weren't convinced that was already reality. In the meantime, he'll keep wandering freely through bushland while owners tearfully lament they've "done everything" to find their beloved animals. "Doing everything" would be insisting the powers that be redirect some of the Belgian Shepherds towards finding their pet, or maybe reminding the dogs they have no way of spending the \$1,000,000 reward for locating Dezi.

Then again, the pets that humans think have gone missing might have just left to find themselves. Certain strays see themselves as outlaw fugitives living outside the system rather than as unloved victims. Often, when hounds come home and see the poorly put together pleas for information their owner has designed—really, you used *that* picture of me?—they wish they'd never returned. Plus, you could argue it's safer for dogs to retreat into the natural world and fend off foxes, possums and feral cats than live in the human world and deal with law, bureaucracy and politics.

Case in point: at the The Lost Dog's Home in North Melbourne this past September, a twelve-week old staffy named Murphy was euthanised because he'd failed to pass a temperament test. I'd never heard of temperament tests, but Google says they assess the prevalence of traits like fear, aggression and sociability. In that case, I'm all for them. How many dogs are forced to enter strange homes without knowing the unpredictable personalities of their new parents? How much collective Dalmatian stress could have been avoided if due diligence had been done on Cruella de Vil? The reason dogs relieve themselves all over the carpet when they first arrive isn't "poor toilet training", it's the terrifying thought that our new owners might be psychos.

Using that kind of test on dogs, though? I'm not so sure about that. Unsurprisingly, Murphy's story picked up a lot of media attention; Georgie Purcell of the Animal Justice Party described the decision as "disgraceful". So, it's fairly clear that humans are prone to bungling dog rescues. Far more drama is caused than necessary. If Dezi Freeman is found, the jury will not be made up of dogs, and by the same token humans should give dogs responsibility for finding *our* missing brethren and negotiating their re-entry into the world. We would handle it far more smoothly.

And so, as a dog, I would like to briefly address the many runaway hounds of Melbourne. I get it, I really do. There's more to life than going on a short walk every morning and listening to the six o'clock news at your owner's feet every night. We possess the same DNA as our wolf ancestors; our noses perk up at a strange scent on the wind; the world only makes sense during the thrill of the chase. But listen: you can be free and still come home. You can return on your own terms. You can slip back into place like you never left. Humans might be chaotic and strange, but at the end of the day they love us like no other species can. And if you start back now, you might make it home by Christmas.



North Fitzroy would be a nice place to die

As a 21-year-old local grapples with a life-altering diagnosis, she takes stock of the lovely places and moments that make this neighbourhood great

By Nalini

North Fitzroy would be a nice place to die. And those of you who call it 'Fitzroy North' will forgive me for my phrasing, because—while I am only 21—I *am* dying.

Technically, after this business quarter (two surgeries, six hospital stays, 32 medical appointments), the tumours seem to be falling behind their own set of KPIs. I could say this means that I'm no longer dying—but that wouldn't be true. We're all going, just some faster than others.

I guess not everyone thinks of it that way. I mean, they say to live every day like your last, but what does that mean in the face of a life-changing diagnosis? Does it mean jetting across the world like Walter Mitty? Conquering your biggest fears, skydiving out of a plane? Finally signing up for that dance class or those singing lessons? Maybe. But dying doesn't have to be loud; an accomplished dying can be a quiet thing. Slap a bunch of troubling CT-scans over your windshield and you'll find you can only see a few metres in front of you.

Thinking about mortality means that suddenly, the city skyline in the distance doesn't seem as important as the little magpie on the side of the road who hops out of your tyre's way lazily, as if it believes you to be a good person and trusts you to stop. It means you'll be distracted by the kids walking home from Fitzroy North Primary School, laughing and slapping at each other's backpacks (that are way too big for their

bodies), and the way their spindly limbs seem bursting with energy. You'll notice the way the old woman wields the hose in her front garden like Zeus might wield his thunderbolt; the way the plants, in the dry heat, bow down to her like subjects.

Being so intensely aware of mortality can change the way you see the suburb you've always taken for granted. You'll find the news is often filled with photos of council re-developments, protest signs, and the other Important Events. But if I were to write a love letter to North Fitzroy, these are the moments I'd capture:

The moon shining onto a dark alley somewhere off Scotchmer Street
My friend and I are walking back from a delightfully unnecessary Piedimonte's run. Our chip bags crinkle guiltily in the dark alleyway we decide to take as a shortcut. The only other sound is the uneven tread of our sneakers on the slippery cobblestones. Halfway through the alleyway, we stop. A faint singing voice; soulful, groovy bass. Me, my friend, and the moon are suddenly blessed with a jazz concert. For a few minutes, we strain to hear the music through the fence and garage door that separate us from the sound. And then my friend, drunk on nothing but cold, dewy air, begins to dance.

Level two of North Fitzroy Library
I spend a week frequenting the library at

the same time each day and get to know the regulars; not by their names, but by the familiar comma shapes of their bodies as they bend studiously over their laptops. One woman wears all black, every time, but she wears it like a canvas; there's an artistic quality to the possibilities behind a silhouette. I imagine, every time I see her, that she is typing a feminist manifesto or PhD thesis on inner-city urban planning. There's also an older gentleman who stays until after sunset many nights, examining a spread of newspapers. Every time I notice these regulars, I ask myself what exactly they're all doing and why. Sonder: the realisation that every living person has a life as complex and rich as your own.

The view of St Georges Road from the window of Tin Pot cafe
Specifically, that single plush armchair in the corner, where you can make extended and extremely awkward eye contact with Piedimonte's shoppers as they wait for the lights. You'll squint at them because the sun through that window is so damn bright. While sitting there, you will inevitably be asked a few times if you'd like cake along with your tea, and the question is delivered with such a 'you deserve it' tone that you'll probably cave and order yourself dessert.

A single patch of grass on the northern end of Edinburgh Gardens
I make a new friend and we spend the entire

day writing stories together under the shade of an elm tree. We talk about dying. We talk about living. The sun filters through the leaves leaving kaleidoscope patterns on my friend's skin. Near that same tree, over the following week, I witness: two adult men chasing a kite with great, laughing shouts; a community wrestling match performed in blow-up sumo suits; and a composer sitting alone in the clearing, playing a guitar just for himself and the trees.

TBD...
You know in movies when they play those flashbacks of when someone's mother was still alive? She'll be laughing and swatting at the camera in some picturesque location, ocean waves or maybe with a sunset behind her. Someone, get the tapes! Hit play when I'm jaywalking on my way back from Standing Room, iced matcha in hand, making eye contact with a cute sausage dog. Hit play any time, because I don't need the ocean for my postcards. I guess what I'm saying is: think about the moments you'd like to print off, even if they're not the traditional ones your mother would prioritise for the family photo album. And just... don't wait until you get a killer diagnosis to do it.

If any readers would like to reach out for support or to discuss similar experiences, my inbox is open:
nalini.j000@gmail.com

POET'S CORNER

Dear poets,

Sometimes a poem lands in my inbox like the big magpie in my parents' backyard. Coming close enough to (almost) touch. It looks me in the eye and urges me to feed it (or read it) again and again.


This edition I present to you a poem by Michael Farrell. A long-time resident of the inner north and accomplished poet and author.

If you'd like your work featured in Poet's Corner, please email: poetscornerrotunda@gmail.com

Love and poetry,

Steph

@theatticpoet



Lunch On The Grass

I'm naked but otherwise legal, sitting on the grass with Jay and Adam. I've just smoked a doobie for the last time but I don't know that yet. We're eating ribbon sandwiches from Alimentari in Carlton Gardens. I'm feeling edgy, and not that good edgy related to orgasm, nor that middleclass edgy, that comes from transgressing your own decorum.

I speculate merely. I speculate like a good sex worker in a folding Dutch window. I've lost my phone in the grass but I don't know that yet. Jay and Adam are elongated thumbnails – virtual ciphers. But they're wonderful company at the time, up to a point. Has that point been reached? Jay chews, animating their moustache. Adam yawns

Michael Farrell's poems and stories have largely been inflected with the inner north of Melbourne since moving from St Kilda to Fitzroy in 2008, and then to Carlton in 2023. Michael's most recent books are *Googlecholia* (poems, Giramondo Publishing) and *The Victoria Principle* (stories, Giramondo Publishing).

While drinking wine, alas for his white doublet. Alas for his goblet, too, but it doesn't know that yet. Adam grew the grass. Adam works, see, for the council. Jay is a food taster for the king, in a relatively safe age. They know their ribbon sandwiches. They know their spatchcock. 'Spatchcock' is Jay's mot du jour, a little game they play on days

Like these, languorous legal days in Carlton Gardens, where I have accepted my body, and let go of decades of relative beauty, a moment of which includes being a life model: another a model for Bega Cheese. Jay smears vegemite on my thigh and it doesn't irritate me a bit. Yes it is warm, if you're wondering. Love is on my mind, wherever that is.

Number wrangling for creative types

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THE STORY OF CLIFTON HILL MACCAs

Queens Parade is home to an Art Deco masterpiece that comes with fries and was designed by the same architect as the Shrine of Remembrance. How did it come to be?

By Eleanor Doran

Asynchronous beeping noises, pleather booths, the distinct smell of hot oil and the authoritative calling of numbers. There are many features of the McDonald's at 199 Queens Parade Clifton Hill—affectionately known as Clifton Hill Maccas—that are similar to any other franchise fast food spot. However, home in a two-storey 1930s Art Deco building is what distinguishes Clifton Hill Maccas from its peers, even appearing in *Architectural Digest's* online list of the most beautiful McDonald's in the world. So, how did this remarkable building come to be? And how did it become a fast food restaurant?

Nestled in a triangular site between three major roads, Clifton Hill Maccas is well positioned to service travellers heading north towards High Street, south down Hoddle Street or east along Heidelberg Road. Approaching the building from the west end of Queens Parade gives you a great vista of the curves and lines of the building. A vertical column, detailed with tiling and vertical fins, cuts the building in half and rises to a curved finish, where a large red McDonald's sign marks its tallest point. On either side of the column the building's curves are accentuated by lined tiles, curved windows and a balcony that wraps around the first floor.

I meet architect Sam Mofflin at Clifton Hill Maccas to discuss its striking features over a meal of cheeseburgers and chocolate milkshakes.

"It's largely horizontal, with the horizontal concrete balconies, the horizontal banding of the tiles and brickwork in contrast to the strong vertical entry," she tells me. "It's sort of signalling the entry for you, which gives it a nice street presence as a result."

Inside the main dining room, finding heritage details becomes a little trickier, but they are there. Mofflin points out ornate cornices, curved windows and timber framing—details that would be hard to find at another franchise. Heading to the rear drive-thru, it's a concrete view of cars snaking past the building's most colourful neighbour. From this vantage point, it's hard to imagine you're dining at what the Victorian Heritage Database

describes as "Victoria's most exquisite and intact example of the Jazz Moderne style of architecture".

Before it was Clifton Hill Maccas, the site at Queens Parade was home to the United Kingdom Hotel: a pub with a chequered history built in 1880. In 1930, the bar manager escaped conviction after being accused of hindering the efforts of a plain-clothed police officer, and in 1936 a waitress was shot in the back outside the hotel. Newspapers at the time describe the first iteration as a "lonely wayside inn" where coaches could break on long-haul journeys.

But in 1937, the pub was revamped, replaced with the building we know now. Designed by architect James Hardie Wardrop, *The Age* declared that "a new standard in suburban hotel architecture is set by the new United Kingdom Hotel... The building itself conforms to the rounded triangular site and forms an arresting focal point, with the tower in terra cotta and glazed tiles at the apex." The hotel had fifteen bedrooms, a number of sitting rooms and dining rooms with a rounded public bar on the ground floor that mirrored the curve of the building.

"It's hard to imagine you're dining at 'Victoria's most exquisite example of the Jazz Moderne style of architecture'."

Wardrop was involved in the design of several other buildings around Melbourne. Alkira House, a six-storey building on Queens Street in the city, was another example of Jazz Moderne style that the Victorian Heritage Database describes as "extremely avant-garde and rarely adopted for buildings in this state between the wars". He also designed the facade of what was previously the Clifton Motors Garage and more recently Free to Feed: a neighbour to the McDonald's with a similarly curved and geometric facade.



Eleanor standing in front of the Maccas.

But despite its fame, the Maccas is not the most famous building Wardrop designed. In late 1923, he and architect Philip Hudson won a competition to design a National War Memorial for Victoria—both were returned servicemen—and in 1934 the Shrine of Remembrance was completed.

Dr Katti Williams, a Research Fellow in architectural history at the Melbourne School of Design at the University of Melbourne, has researched Wardrop and Hudson. Wardrop was Melbourne-born, had trained with a prominent Melbourne architect and spent time in the United States and England early in life before serving in World War One. For Williams, a theme of Wardrop's work is his sense of detail. "He certainly seemed very interested in detailing. He was a very artistic man and

had a brilliant eye," Williams tells me.

Wardrop would go on to serve in World War Two in Australia and continue his career as an architect. The United Kingdom Hotel would be delicensed in 1988 and become the McDonald's we know today. While there's some kind of cynical comment to be made about how such a remarkable building, designed by a renowned architect, could become a fast food restaurant, there's also something to be said for McDonald's successful stewardship of its heritage status. As Mofflin points out to me, the McDonald's site has fared better than the facade of the former Clifton Garage. In the last 40 years, the building has enjoyed a new chapter, serving a new cohort of patrons with Quarter Pounders rather than pints.



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LOCAL BOOKKEEPER HAS CREATIVE FOCUS

Counting Clouds, a bookkeeping firm born and raised in North Fitzroy, has made its name wrangling numbers for artistic types

Line Paras moved from Denmark to Melbourne in 1998. There aren't many cities with greater distance between them than here and Copenhagen, but it didn't take long for Line to find somewhere she truly felt at home: the inner north. It wasn't necessarily the beautiful parkland or city views at sunset, but rather the people who lived amongst it all: musicians, actors, painters, designers, creatives.

Line—who first made a living as a jewellery-maker and hospitality worker—soon joined a band herself, playing bass and singing in The Gems, a 70s-rock inspired four-piece that became part of Melbourne's band scene in the late 2000s and still plays today. At some point during her time belonging to the city's artistic scene, Line realised something: creative types typically aren't numbers people.

"I had lots of friends and connections that were creatives in the inner north of Melbourne, where so many people are self-employed and everybody struggles with their admin and bookkeeping."

So she decided to start doing bookkeeping. By 2014, having worked at other firms handling the accounts of various Melbourne businesses, Line decided to start her own. Her new firm, Counting Clouds, soon forged lasting relationships with inner north businesses and sole traders. Counting Clouds' first client was Manny's Music Store on St Georges Road; they then started working with

the Natural Shoe Store (that used to be beside Piedimonte's). Now, Line is 'She-E-O' of a much larger team that keeps the books for acclaimed Melbourne bands like CIVIC and Teen Jesus and the Jean Teasers, and more.

"Because I like doing it, and because I relate to these people, it came naturally to me to work with my people... It's nice to think that you play a little part in helping these incredibly, talented, creative people bring all of their stuff to life, even though we do the boring part."

The boring part is ensuring compliance with tax obligations, making sure systems are being managed correctly and helping businesses stay in the black. Counting Clouds also offers consulting services, budgeting and 'Hour of Power Sessions' in which they quickly provide a snapshot of a business' financial position.

Of course, this kind of expertise is helpful for all businesses, not just creative ones. Counting Clouds works with all kinds of clients in all kinds of situations. They understand that each is unique, and requires its own approach.

"Everyone who runs their own business probably has a perception that the way that they run their business is quite unique, or that a bookkeeper might not understand, because they may have different income streams, or may be running an online shop... but we've really seen it all."



Line Paras, founder and CEO of Counting Clouds.

Counting Clouds' identity isn't solely defined by who they work with, but also where they work. Indeed, if Line found her home within Melbourne in the inner north, she found her home within the inner north in North Fitzroy. Her daughter went to Fitzroy North Primary School, they currently live in North Fitzroy and Counting Clouds' office is in a nearby apartment.

"Being able to run into clients in the street is really quite nice for me. It feels like both my work and my everyday life is surrounded by community, and in a big city like Melbourne, that's pretty special, right?"

Melbourne is the arts capital of Australia and the inner north is the arts capital of Melbourne. That's thanks to the countless people with big imaginations and tireless work ethic who flock here, whether they're singing, dancing, acting, writing, designing, painting, or sitting off-stage, dotting the Is and crossing the Ts.

So, if you're interested in working with Counting Clouds, visit countingclouds.com.au or email help@countingclouds.com.au

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Carols in the Park

Thursday 11 December, 6pm to 9pm
Burnley Park, Richmond

New Year's Eve

Wednesday 31 December, 4pm onwards
Edinburgh Gardens, Fitzroy North

Victoria Street Lunar Festival

Sunday 1 February
Victoria Street, Richmond

Victoria's Pride

Sunday 8 February
Gertrude and Smith Streets, Fitzroy

Fairfield in Feb

Sunday 1 February and Sunday 15 February
Fairfield Ampitheatre, Fairfield

Johnston Street Fiesta

Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 February
Johnston Street, Fitzroy (between Nicholson Street and Brunswick Street)

