

THE ROTUNDA

NORTH FITZROY'S COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER



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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first issue of your free community newspaper, *The Rotunda*.

Throughout Covid, we have all depended more on our own neighbourhoods. Lockdown put the emphasis back onto village life – seeking and finding everything we need in close proximity to home.

North Fitzroy has always had a great sense of community, but has never had a newspaper to grow, record and celebrate it. Hence this initiative. It's been created by a first year university student who has decided to give it a go.

In this issue, we have an in-depth with the leaders at the Fitzroy Football Club, a pub crawl documented in real time (ends in disaster), we talk to Giovanni Patané from local restaurant Supermaxi about his love of cars, have a Q and A with local artist Clare Bowditch, have a poem about the rotunda itself – and much more.

We even have a top dog reporter filling us in on what's been happening at the Edinburgh Gardens dog field. How many other newspapers can boast of a dog reporting from the actual field?

If you like what you're reading, please consider contributing to it or advertising in it by emailing me, Charlie: northfitzroyrotunda@gmail.com. It's going to be impossible for me to sustain it without any financial help.

“The Rotunda is for those who complain about the noise in the park on summer nights – and those who are making it.”

I'm not looking to start something like News Corp. It's just about making something entertaining and independent, that speaks to you and your neighbour equally. For those who complain about the noise in the park on summer nights – and those who are making it.

We respect and acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.

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Piedimonte's set for dramatic transformation



Image courtesy of Jackson Clements Burrows Architects

By Charlie Gill

The Piedimonte's supermarket development saga that has held the community in its thrall has reached a critical junction. Four years on from the development first being proposed in 2017, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) approved plans this month for the demolition of the current Piedimonte's building and surrounding structures, making way for the construction of two new buildings.

Building A, facing St Georges Road, will be seven stories high while Building B – the site where the Motley Bauhaus and Muscrats

are currently situated – will be four stories. Together, these new structures will house a revamped supermarket and liquor store with a multi-story apartment complex above it.

In 2017, a more ambitious proposal sparked community uproar, with over 600 objections put to council. Building A was to be nine stories and Building B seven stories, with over ninety one-bedroom apartments.

A revised plan saw Piedimonte's reduce the project to seven stories and five stories, with approximately thirty fewer apartments, most of them for two or three people.

In May 2020, a six-storey Building A and a five-storey Building B was recommended by council officers to the City of Yarra councillors, who then voted against it 7 to 2.

Piedimonte's subsequently appealed the decision, taking it to VCAT. The Piedimonte's legal counsel contested the matter with the City of Yarra, Fitzroy North Residents Action Group (FNRAG) and other concerned action groups. The hearing commenced December 7th 2020 and ended with a site inspection by VCAT on December 22 2020.

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Premiers we'll be this year?

'Roys' look to season 2021

By Charlie Gill

There are not many football clubs in Australia with a more storied history than Fitzroy. From its eight VFL premierships, to its merger with the Brisbane Bears, to its introduction to the VAFA in 2009 – the club is no stranger to change and adversity. While COVID-19 presented its challenges, Fitzroy persevered as it always has.

"The thing that we focused on really quickly was keeping the Fitzroy football community engaged," says Joan Eddy, in her eleventh year as president. "As well as making sure the players still felt connected to each other."

The players did gym and pilates classes online. This paid off, according to the seniors men's coach Luke Mahoney: "The majority are fitter than what they would be during preseason last year." This enthusiasm proved contagious, with the club having almost 100 more than the average number of players they usually would in January.

"You don't realise how much you do love it until it's taken away from you," says Luke.

This year, both the senior men's and women's teams are playing in the second division from the top in their respective competitions. In 2019, the men's side narrowly avoided relegation by winning its last game of the season. So where does it hope to finish this year?

Mahoney says he is "certainly not ruling anything out", citing the team's younger players ready to blossom: "The really exciting thing about us as a group is that we have a real core of players in the 21 to 23 (years) bracket."

Those youngsters include Bill and Ted Clayton, Donovan Toohey, Harrison Grace and Jack Hart, amongst others. More experienced players include full back Max Ellis, who has won the last three Best and Fairests. Midfielder Julian Turner – who has played for the 'Roys' since Under-10s – is captaining his fourth season.

As of round six, the men's team is sitting second-last on the ladder, though after round five they had the competition's third-highest percentage. "So we're still every chance to make finals," says Joan.

Meanwhile, this season is Bronte Ryan's first as coach of the Fitzroy-ACU Women's team, which began in 2015. "Our male players were like, 'yeah, bring it on, about time'."

Stars of the women's team include defenders Lucy Kerr and Jess 'Lenny' Hayes, ball-magnet Erin Gogerly and captain Cass Blake.

The pool of players for the team to choose from is growing larger as women's football becomes increasingly popular.

"More and more people that were kicking footies around with their dads and their brothers at a young age are coming and giving footy a try," says Bronte.

She cites Rising Star-nominated Ellie McKenzie, who played for the Fitzroy juniors before being drafted to Richmond with the first overall pick in the 2020 draft.

"She's not going to be the only one. Females have their whole pathway ahead of them now. They can play Auskick right up to AFLW with no break."

As of round 6, the women's team is also second-last on the ladder – though Joan remains optimistic: "We've been in every game and we've been close. We just haven't been able to quite stay the course. So again we just need to win 3 or 4 more and we could make finals."

Last year allowed the club's administration to fast track initiatives such as a formal leadership program. "Not just leadership in your playing group, but leadership more broadly – in terms of what culture we want to develop at the club," Joan says.

The club is also developing a respectful relationships program aimed at "taking on the issues around gender equity and violence against women".

"Community sporting clubs can be incredibly powerful influencers."

But such initiatives were compromised by the Yarra Council's sudden announcement in late March that they were dramatically hiking up ground hire fees, with potential increases of more than 300 percent.

The community clubs were informed on a Friday evening and were told it was going to a council meeting the next Tuesday. "It



was not something we could absorb easily in four days. We're all volunteers."

The Edinburgh Cricket Club's programs – such as the one encouraging the participation of immigrants from the Atherton Gardens housing estate – would be unable to continue due to price hikes that were meant, according to the council, to promote "inclusion and diversity".

The fee increases were reconsidered following widespread outrage. The policy is still up in the air, but Joan is "feeling hopeful we can get it back on track".

It resulted in a membership boost and greater attendances; more spectators sitting up on the grass slope next to the grandstand.

"We call it 'Hipster Hill'. The opening round wasn't great weather, but we still had seventy people sitting up there."

Joan, Luke and Bronte are in agreement on what makes the Fitzroy Football Club special. "We are really conscious of how privileged we are to have the legacy and history of this football club. We have to carry that into the future and keep this football club going forever, hopefully, whatever that means," says Joan.

As Luke puts it, "the unique thing about it is you've got people that come down to barrack for the jumper and the club".

"I've been stopped a couple of times just wearing a Fitzroy shirt out and about," Bronte says.

But can the beauty of running onto Brunswick Street Oval also be a burden? Many of the club's lifelong supporters can remember watching the Roys play Carlton or Collingwood on the MCG. Is there an extra level of responsibility to honour that legacy?

"I do think it is an added layer," says Joan. "Our players soon realise what the importance of the Fitzroy jumper is. We get crowds that a lot of other amateur footy clubs could only dream about."

So what is the club's trajectory? To be playing at the highest level with its flagship teams? Soon, they will begin community consultations to determine expectations. "As the president, I might say I think we should be aspirational for Premier."

The Roys have been playing football for nigh on 140 years and don't look like stopping anytime soon. This club we hold so dear has had an eventful history: of glory, turmoil, ecstasy, tragedy – but in many ways, not much has changed. In 2021 a bunch of young men – and now women, too – are running out onto Brunswick Street Oval to play football; the community watching on as it always has.

This Saturday, the 29th of May, the men's team are playing away at Williamstown, while the women's team is playing a twilight match under lights. Brunswick Street Oval, 4.45 PM.



Photos supplied by the Fitzroy Football Club

'WE'LL PLAY IT BY BEER': A NORTH FITZROY PUB CRAWL

A pair of good time Charlies try a pint (or seven) at some of North Fitzroy's finest.

By Charlie Gill

When one finds oneself in North Fitzroy and one craves a pint of one's favourite beer, one finds that one beer turns quickly into two. We are spoilt for choice; our suburb is bejeweled with pubs – so what differentiates each one? We sent our editor in chief, Charlie – along with his friend Charles – to have a pint or two at six different pubs and note their observations.

A pint of Prancing Pony Hopwork Orange at The Royal Oak (A.K.A Dr Freeman)

We are beginning our night at The Royal Oak on the corner of Nicholson and Freeman – and despite the fact that not a drop of alcohol has yet graced our lips – feel disconcerted. Where are we? While we were never regulars, The Royal Oak was known to be something of an old-fashioned pub, even if the TAB was removed a couple of years back. But there's no Carlton Draught on offer, and I'm drinking an APA whose name references a 1970s film.

We are having a cinematic moment – I realise from spying a flyer on our table that we aren't at The Royal Oak. We're at Dr Freeman. The owners decided the venue needed a tonal shift and a name change. I can't say for certain what's new and what's old – but the exposed wiring, flowery wallpaper, low-hanging fans, taxidermied birds, candles and jazzy, ambient music tells us this place is undergoing a transformation. As Octavian became Augustus, the Royal Oak has become Dr Freeman.

An upside down row-boat hangs over the top of a blue felt pool table, and dangling from that is a low-hanging lamp straight out of an interrogation room (when you play pool at the pub against your mates, questions are being asked of you.) We'd love to stay and have a game, but we just finished our second pint and have more pubs to get to.

A pint of Bonza Australian Ale at The Tramway Hotel

Certainly, the consumption of a small amount of alcohol can render said

consumer disinhibited. Their thoughts become unfettered; they bask in their own intellectual liberation. Indeed, some may say this eradication of insecurity lends itself to a pretentiousness; perhaps even a self-seriousness and an erroneous belief in one's own intelligence. I'm sure that sort of thing can happen to other people.

Me and Charles are having a great time. He notes that the beer is bonza both in name and quality. And the pub, at the roundabout on Church Street and Rae Street, is lovely. I am trying to jot down his brilliant thoughts as he speaks: "Look at the clash of colours, a black wall opposite a white wall. The shape of the tables in contrast to the bar...It's like Picasso. Do you know what I mean, man? It's Cubism, for real." So true.

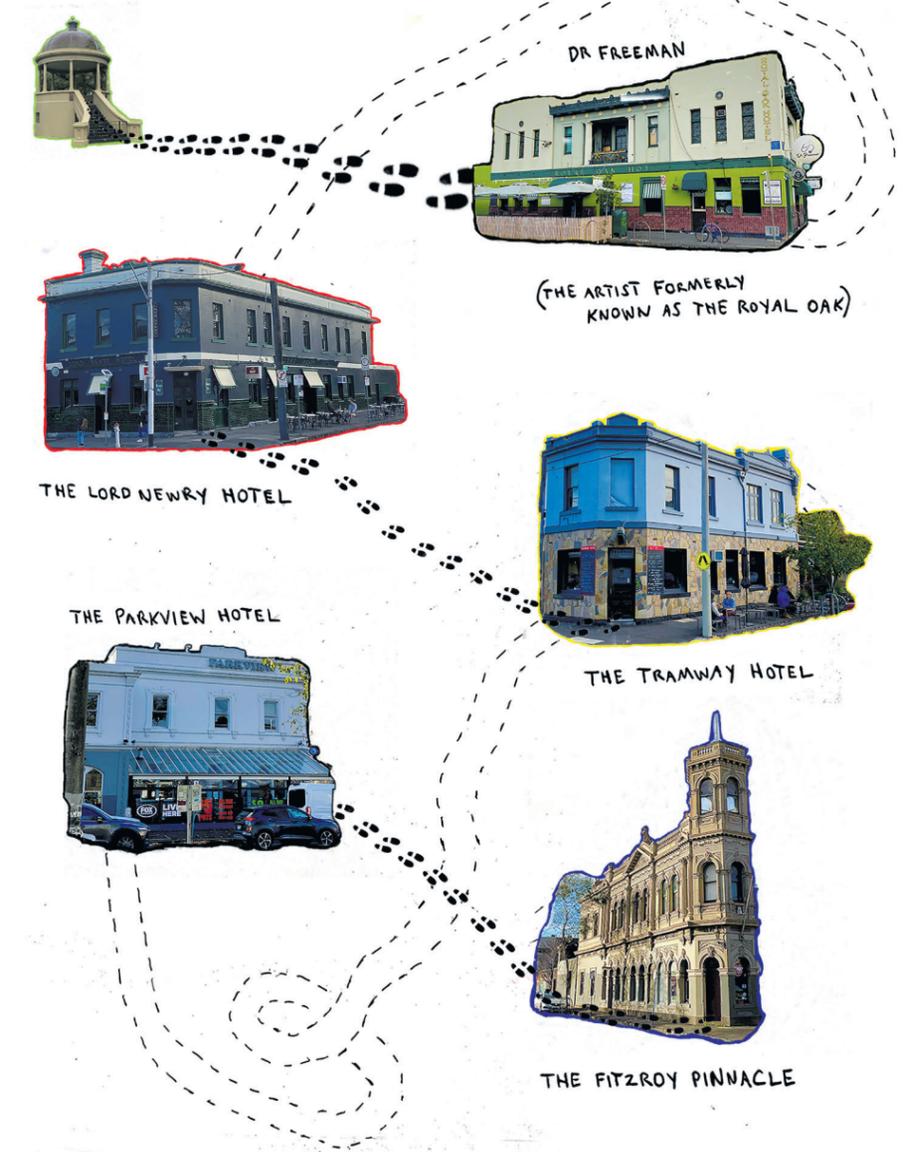
"The Parky - it's not like you're having a beer in North Fitzroy, it's like you're having a beer with North Fitzroy."

Two pints of Coopers Pale Ale at the Lord Newry Hotel

We're at the Lord Newry and the ground feels unstable under my feet. am I really this much of a lightweight? No! It's not the beer, it's the pub! The Newry's exterior is painted deep sea green and it's interior is chockablock with paintings of ships, such as the Wappen Von Hamburg (1669 - 1683). Charles just ordered a pint and said "arrrr me hearty it's time to party!" I laughed. I look into my glass and see a naval battle occurring on the surface of my pale ale. The bartender just told us they're closing up now, I said "shouldn't you be asking us to walk the plank?" He did not find that funny.

A pint of Brooklyn Lager at the Parkview Hotel

We are at the Paarrkkkkkyyyy. We bumped into some friends Guys what do you love about this place? "It's not like you're having a beer in North Fitzroy, it's like you're having a beer with North Fitzroy" That's brilliant



thats definitely going in the article haha who said that? I need to credit you! "And what do you think about the bull terrier's castration A siberian train station The cafeteria's degustation Anterior decarbonisation No no No the interior decoration? What do you think of the interior decoration? It's nice Velvet. Wood floors. Potentially bulletproof windows, but I didnt ask the bartender so I can't say for sure...

A pint of Stomping Ground Kiwi Smash Sour at the Fitzroy Pinnacle

"The Pinnacle is like the parky's younger brother The Parky did a business degree at LaTrobe, was gonna play AFL if he didnt injure his knee in 2014 but the pinnacle is doing arts moved straight into a sharehouse

and goes to doofs" do you think thats good should i put it in? Or not? Charls answer me...Are you even listening to me? Should we

A pint of Prancing Pony Hopwork Orange, Bonza Australian Ale, Coopers Pale Ale, Brooklyn Lager and Two Birds Juicy Pale Ale making its way out of me via my mouth Blaarrgghh...uhh..b largh.. wait.. ALL OF YOU CAN CRASH HERE just leve by 12 Mum is hacving a lunch tomorrow... actually you know what YOOURE ALL INVITED.. youre all inviited...oh my god... im never donig tis againi... Maybe i should call Josie.. ii wonder what shes doing right now...i miss her... oh... this definitely cant go in the article...

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Clare Bowditch: North Fitzroy's 'own kind of girl'



Photo: Anna Robinson

The performer speaks to *The Rotunda* about art and the neighbourhood

Interviewed by Charlie Gill

Do new songs come to you in unexpected moments or do you have to be focused on the task to have a new song form itself?

When I was a young woman studying in Canada, I was told this story by a First Nations chap from Vancouver about songs, and how they're never really ours to own, they come to us from the land, from the trees, from 'place'. I loved that idea: that songs already exist, and my work as a songwriter is really just to present and listen for them when they pop up.

I'm sure Berlin as a city shaped the songs you wrote on *Modern Day Addiction*. Do the characteristics of the inner north impact the songs you write here?

Going to Berlin was a grand creative adventure but what it really gave me (besides an album of songs) was a chance to crystallise and formulate what it was that I was most missing about home. My longing to come home was so strong. This is a pretty precious creative spot; there are lots of songs in the trees in this area.

Berlin is an exciting city but there's just too much good stuff going on here in the inner north.

How long have you lived here?

I first moved here to Fitzroy after I left high school, I lived on Victoria Pde and then Argyle street, then I was in Thornbury for nine years, I was in Coburg for five years and we've now been in North Fitzroy for nine years.

Can you think of something that makes the area especially different to other suburbs?

We're very close to the city, we have a bohemian history, and we have a socially diverse and interesting history. The beauty and richness of Fitzroy really comes from that history, and from the stalwarts – people who have been here for decades.

A lot of important Melbourne stories have been born and told in these streets. When I was growing up, this was a place where students, artists and big working-class families could afford to live. A lot of people who added so much to the cultural

life of Fitzroy – the ones who made it a place that other people wanted to flock to – can no longer afford to live here. That bit pisses me off.

What three words would you use to describe the area?

In year 11, my best friend lived in a warehouse just off Brunswick Street, so I got to spend a lot of time here. To me this was an area full of music, of 'underbelly', a big stirring pot, and these things made it colourful and poetic (that's four words - sorry). It's still colourful and poetic, still a rather beautiful and interesting place to live, but it's a divided place to live, too.

Divided?

With increased rules and regulations and not enough investment in social housing, there is now a tension here between old and new, in a way. It can feel like the heart or the history of this place is being eroded through gentrification and the rising cost of rent.

When I was a young woman, you could afford to rent a shop here and give an idea a crack. That's not as possible these days, and it's a real pity. A lot of people have made a lot of money by capitalising off the back of that feeling of culture, colour and aliveness by developing and selling big.

Do you think that the tyranny of distance from the rest of the English speaking world is a help or a hindrance to Australian artists?

We end up defining ourselves in opposition to the rest of the world, just because of geography, so from a creative point of view I think, it's really quite useful to be part of Australia.

"This is a pretty precious creative spot; there are lots of songs in the trees in this area."

But from a 'make your living as an artist' perspective, things are tricky – our audiences are incredibly small, and our geography incredibly vast. When you're in America or Europe you've got access to a lot of people who appreciate your art in a way that allows you to make a living, thanks to larger audiences.

In this sense, being part of a small island nation whose government doesn't seem to understand the importance and possibility of the arts continues to be a source of some despair and frustration.

Your book *Your Own Kind of Girl* came out to rave reviews in 2019. What's more difficult, writing an album or writing a book?

Writing a book, which I promised myself I'd write when I was 22 and I didn't have the courage to start until I was 40. It was about the most difficult time in my life, and trying to forge my identity as an artist and as an adult.

But when you tell an honest story in the world, the joy of it is that other people tell their honest stories to you. That has given me a very deep sense of belonging and purpose as an artist.

Are you working on new music or a new book at the moment?

I lost my mum last year, and part of processing my grief has been to walk my neighbourhood and just live as a much quieter person, taking in the Merri Creek, looking around at the other people who are doing the same thing.

I feel like ideas are percolating, but I've also had an album ready to release for about a year and a half. We've been waiting for Covid to give us a chance to tour it. I'm supposed to be writing a book, which felt impossible to produce in the year that's been, with three kids at home and many other things to make sense of. I'm always working on things, but I'm always worried that I'll never get there. I seem to have a gift for worrying.

Three artists that you currently love listening to?

I'm really enjoying Stella Donnelly and Alice Skye and Gordi. And Archie Roach, always (so many of his songs are set in our neighborhood). Another person I'm really enjoying is Gretta Ray; loving her last single.

What's one song you wish you wrote?

Gosh, there are many. But I think that one of the songs I would love to have written is *Avant Gardener* by Courtney Barnett. It's lots of things, all at once.

Where do you get your coffee?

I don't know the name of the place, it's that little hole in the wall on Richardson Street.

If you look hard you'll find it.

Piedimonte's set for dramatic transformation

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VCAT's final decision earlier this month overruled the council and allows Piedimonte's to proceed with their revised proposal, but with one apartment less in Building A and one story (three apartments) removed from Building B.

FNRAG sent an email to its supporters on May 13th, expressing its disappointment but acknowledging that its advocacy led to a "significantly improved development".

FNRAG's Glenn Morrison said that the residents were never opposed to the idea of development itself, though they hoped for something with a lower density, more consistent with the area's village vibe.

"The VCAT fight was all about the sheer scale, mass, height. (The proposed development) was too big for this neighbourhood. North Fitzroy is pretty unique in that – as they call it in urban design parlance – it's a fine-grained neighbourhood, with lots of small entities."

Joseph Piedimonte, Operations Manager for Piedimonte's, said they welcomed the VCAT decision.

"As a business we heard the community's concerns with the initial design in 2017, we employed new architects and redesigned the whole concept to address those concerns."

The hearing was undertaken with the understanding that following the

final decision, there will be no further recourse for any of the involved parties. The development, however, is contingent on Piedimonte's purchasing the laneway off Scotchmer Street from the Yarra Council.

Expectation is that the Council will indeed sell the laneway. Should this expectation be met, North Fitzroy's village will be set for change – though how much change is yet to be known.

Food, family and fast cars

Supermaxi owner Giovanni Patane tells *The Rotunda* what starts his engine.

by Charlie Gill

A popular pizza at St Georges Road restaurant Supermaxi is the GTV 105 Series 2.

"It's got grated zucchini, which is the green of the car. Muschio verde. We put a touch of chilli because it has that little bit of spice, you know what I mean? Because it has a 1750 motor...and the cherry tomatoes are the wheels in motion."

"Most people just say 'Oh, I'll have the GTV 105'. But then there's the people that know that it's a car, and say 'you got one?' And I say, 'Yes, I've got one.'"

Giovanni Patané has loved food, cars and people for a long time. His father – who migrated from Sicily in 1956 – worked as a welder and as a waiter for an Italian catering company on weekends. Giovanni joined him from the age of 13 to 18, paid \$20 for twelve hour days.

That passion for food never wavered and in 2010 he opened Supermaxi with his partner Rita.

Supermaxi is housed in a nondescript brick building on the corner of St Georges Road and Railway Place. The building dates from 1971 (same year as Giovanni's beloved GTV). Before that, the corner site was an old Victorian building – one of Melbourne's first espresso bars in the late 1950s, where migrant men drank coffee, played billiards and "probably (did) a few other things that weren't legal".

So why North Fitzroy?

"North Fitzroy is a very colourful suburb," says Giovanni sitting at the window. "The shops are great, the village has got a good feel. You've got Piedemonte's supermarket, you've got two great bakers in the same 'hood. But we always felt that North Fitzroy was a place that needed a casual, well-cooked type of food place in it, because it really lacked that."

Eleven years later Supermaxi is a beloved North Fitzroy institution. Even last year as the pandemic ravaged small businesses, Supermaxi stood firm.

"It was always going to be fine, even when we had those really tough, tight restrictions – a 5 kilometre radius and an 8 o'clock curfew – people in this area were here week in, week out, picking up their food."

So how did a motor vehicle end up on a pizza menu?

Giovanni starts to answer: "Cars, cars...I love cars" – then stops and glances out the window – "look, there's a beautiful car just driving past us now, an SS Camaro."

His obsession began as a child returning from his extended family's fruit farms in country Victoria. Sometimes he went back with his father, or in a truck going back to the market. But it was one particular trip with his uncle that seared his consciousness.

"It was a red Alfa Burlina with a black interior and white woolen seat covers. I sat in that car about 8 or 9 years old, going home after lunch, and my uncle already had half a bottle of wine underneath him.

"I'd never sat in anything like it...the smell of that car, the vision I had sitting from the front seat, the actual noise of the carburetors. They had long driveways before you hit the tarmac. Once we got on the roadway he just went BANG!

"We're sitting at 100 miles an hour from Merrigum to Tatura. I was scared, but I couldn't believe that a car could go that well. And the noise of that car, the sound of that car – it burnt me, badly.

"We spent most of the time in the right hand lane on the Hume highway overtaking people. My uncle is smoking away, flying. "We got home at about 5.30 in the evening – and I walked inside the house and said to Mum and Dad: when I grow up I'm gonna buy an Alfa Romeo."



The year is 2021 and Giovanni has five Alfa Romeos. When he was 18, he wanted to buy one he spotted at a car lot in Sunshine, but his father convinced him otherwise.

"He said 'Buy your first house. Then you can buy as many of these Alfa Romeos as you want.' It was very important for Italian migrants to get yourself in a position of security and comfort, because they came from misery."

"It doesn't matter who you talk to, the love is exactly the same, regardless of what car you have. What brings everyone together is that love."

Another thing that brings everyone together? Food.

"My love of food comes straight from home. My mum is a fantastic cook. My father grew a lot of his own produce."

Giovanni does not treat his cars as trophies. Like a pizza, a car is not just meant to be looked at. It is a moving image.

He bought his first car in 1988, a white Sprint. All of the cars he has now are from the years 1970, '71, '75, '77 and '79.

"So I'm living in the seventies. Everytime I'm sitting in one of those cars I'm transcended back to 1970, every single time, in each of them.

"Whatever problems I have, they just disappear as soon as I hold that wheel, I hear that motor and I smell that car. I love it."

For Giovanni, the car is a moving image – "more than just four wheels moving along on a piece of tar".

He lovingly describes the interior of the GTV 105:

"It's just black vinyl. It's got a lovely woodgrain dashboard and console. It's got two beautiful little binnacles. One for the revs and one for the speedometer. A beautiful insignia of the Alfa Romeo logo on the wheel. White headlining, which is absolutely beautiful still today."

But Giovanni does not treat his cars as trophies. Like a pizza, a car is not just meant to be looked at. It is a moving image. "I try to drive them at least once a week or once a fortnight. I could drive to Woodend to buy a few pies and the journey to get those pies is the experience."

"We were never spoiled with toys or clothes, but our fridge was always full. We've always cherished the time together at the table."

That feeling of togetherness was stolen from us last year, but Giovanni says many realised that "you don't need to look too far outside of who you are and what you have and where you lie to have happiness".

And if he could own any car in the world? An Alfa Romeo Stradale 33.

"Late '60s. Blue. Only one in the world. That car is probably the most beautiful car ever built."

Based on its popularity, it's safe to assume that Supermaxi is the Stradale 33 of Italian restaurants. Or that the Stradale 33 is the Supermaxi of Alfa Romeos.

"Well a car and a restaurant...I'm in the driver's seat of both of them. Yeah, running a restaurant is like driving a car: you gotta pull all the levers. At the right time.

"But with the restaurant...it's about people gathering. The most beautiful times you have is sharing food and wine with people. "I would put food as number one priority, if anything I had to have in life as a constant, it's good food."

Food and then petrol? "Petrol would be number two."



Photo courtesy of Giovanni Patané

You can take the boy out of the inner north...



Auctioneer Arch Staver lives in 'East Abbotsford' but wields the gavel in North Fitzroy

By Charlie Gill

In an era in which the term “iconic” tends to be overused, Arch Staver, the head mover and shaker at Fitzroy’s Nelson Alexander real estate, could be a deserving recipient. There are few locals who don’t know him by name and Arch says he has racked up over 7000 auctions.

Growing up in Abbotsford created a lifetime fixation on the inner-north, where he continues to trumpet the Wow Factor of grand terraces right through to fixer-uppers for the hordes of hungry buyers anxious to secure a little piece of our most eminent neighbourhood.

In 2002, however, he defected, buying a house on the other side of the river in what the rest of us call Kew, but which Arch calls “East Abbotsford” – it suggests, at least to this writer, a certain nostalgia for the old times of living in the heartland.

“It’s Kew, but it’s the part of Kew where people who don’t want to live in Kew go to. Quite literally, I’ve got a footbridge at the end of my street and once I cross it, I’m in Abbotsford, Richmond, where Victoria Gardens is. So, I’m still very near to the inner north.”

Near. But not quite. As any real estate professional knows, a few metres can make the difference.

While his residency in what many consider the world’s least interesting suburb may be unexpected, his energy in spruiking the charms of property in the inner north is not. Arch is an indefatigable, effervescent champion of the area. He began working in property in the early 1980s.

“I started with all the mundane duties including making coffee and emptying the ashtrays of the estate agents. I got into sales in about 1986... My first sale was a property in Nicholson Street North Carlton, which I sold for a princely sum of \$48,000”.

“I admired period architecture, I loved walking through the inner city streets and just looking at the variations of the streetscapes.”

“I quickly learned that it’s an extraordinary privilege to be invited into somebody’s home, for those people to share their story about their home with you.”

Pressed on what he misses about the old ‘hood, Arch admits he yearns for North Fitzroy’s “sense of community”, lamenting that in the eastern suburbs “the blocks are bigger and everyone’s got a garage, they drive their car into their garage, come straight into their house and never see their neighbours”.

“I think a suburb like Fitzroy North, what’s so wonderful about it is that it has that 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 who have built some very, very high-density apartment blocks. It has less cranes hovering over it than other inner-city suburbs.” The Piedimonte’s development, of course, threatens to compromise this.

Arch is at a loss to think of anything that North Fitzroy lacks, deeming it “one of those flawless suburbs”.

“My biggest criticism is affordability. It’s getting harder and harder for people to buy in the precinct, and that is an area of concern.”

So what makes a good agent?

“Ultimately trust is the very foundation of what you should be looking for in an estate agent and being a good listener is really, really important.”

Anyone who has seen Arch wield a hammer in front a crowd of cashed up punters will appreciate that the auction is all about theatre.

“I sometimes might get carried away at an auction and that’s sometimes for

entertainment value, but it’s always steered towards trying to keep the crowd engaged, the bidders engaged.”

So after so many years at it, and over 7000 auctions and counting, is the experience still nerve-wracking?

“I always get a nervous feeling at the base of my belly just before I start an auction. I think that the day I no longer feel that means I probably don’t care as much, which means I shouldn’t be doing what I’m doing.”

THE CHANGING FACE OF HAIR & BEAUTY



Inner peace in the inner north: Mien Salon Spa caters for the post-Covid world

Words by Charlie Gill

“We woke up the day after thinking – did that really happen!?”

Like many other small business owners in Victoria, Simon and Claudia Romeo – the owners of Clifton Hill’s Mien Salon Spa – were in a state of shock following 2020’s successive lockdowns. How were small businesses in the hair and beauty space going to survive?

Surely people would be less likely to want to congregate or to minimize touch points? And how would this affect the community’s beloved hairdressers and beauty therapists?

To find out more, I spoke to Simon and Claudia about their Covid inspired renovation and their take on where the hair, beauty and wellness industries are headed.

“It was such an odd and frankly quite scary time,” Simon reflects, “but it definitely shaped the direction of what we intended on doing here.”

“While we assumed that home hairdressing might become popular, we definitely didn’t see that with our clientele. They’re very loyal to the salon and were super supportive during the lockdowns.”

He notes that not only do people “still want that community connection”, they also want their hair attended to in a place of “inspiration”.

Certainly, it is very difficult to replicate the salon experience from home, and those clients – it seems to Simon – appreciated the “focus on hygiene, space and process that can only happen amongst a team of professionals”.

“We’re busy because we’ve got fabulous stylists on the floor who help people to look and feel amazing.”

Mien had planned for changes prior to Covid, but it’s renovation ended up being significantly influenced by last year’s lockdowns – following a year of relentless confinement, they needed room to breathe.

“We decided to incorporate a bit more space into our planned renovations. We’ve decided to get back to our roots – excuse the pun – and fit the salon out so that it’s modern, greener and more spacious.”

Who needs to trek out to a country retreat when Mien is around the corner?

Coordinator Claudia Romeo says its priority on service is what makes it one of the top urban destination spas.

She notes that their clientele still love luxurious facials, spa baths and massages – but that the modern spa client is more concerned with “revising skins condition and age management”.

“We’re at this cross road in spa care between the feel good factor and the make-me-look younger factor.”

“As such there are non invasive treatments with active ingredients that rejuvenate and optimise the skin’s function, as well as Ayurvedic spa therapies that bring balance to one’s mind body and spirit.” Claudia says.

“With a team of people on the top floor who can help with inner health, we think Mien Salon Spa makes a fabulous offering.”

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BLOOMSBURY

NO BONE UNTURNED

Dog field correspondent Ludo gives us the low-down from dogtown

By Ludo

Many North Fitzroyans (Fitzroy Northians? Fitzzens? North Fitzroyalty?) spend the large majority of their week at the dog-field set in between Brunswick Street



Oval and Alfred Crescent. Owners come from all over, after or before work. Who cares? Not me. I don't care about humans. It isn't a graphic designer field. It isn't a family therapist field. It isn't a solicitor field. It's a dog field. So let's talk about the dogs.

rough families, most come from loving families, and so everyone being home all the time has been a lot of fun, at least for me and most of the dogs I talk to. We don't really have an economy to look after, and we can't get the virus, so the usual suspects have been frequenting the field as regularly as ever: Buddy, Goose, Alfie, Olive, Turtle, Raffy, Lenny, Buzzley, Penny Lane. (By the way, sniffing each other's bums is a far more COVID-safe greeting than shaking hands. Try it some time.)

That being said, it's not always fun and games – for Adam Smith and Jane Rossi, it might just be a lighthearted puppy pilgrimage; for Spike and Rover and Rex it's a chance to talk business. This business can get murky and controversial.

Last week, Rover (Irish Setter) took advantage of Rufus, a fourteen year veteran of the field (and a fellow Groodle, so I might be biased) and traded him two tennis balls for Rufus' chew toy. This is a terrible deal. Rufus got way under market value for the toy, but he is 98 (in human years) and approaching senility – Rover sniffed an opportunity. It's caused something of a rift within our community.

But that's life here at the dog field. Always some fun, always some drama. Some dogs get on, some dogs don't. I'm not the biggest fan of pitbulls, OK? I'll admit it. And the German Shepherds and French Bulldogs haven't been happy with each other since 1940.

There's a lot of characters. Thankfully, I was able to chat to one of them: Alfie, a 3 year old Labradoodle, to discuss him and his life at the moment.

“COVID-19 hasn't affected us much. We don't really have an economy to look after.”

Thankfully, the Edinburgh Gardens dog field is an egalitarian one – this is not the case with all dog fields (I have heard rumours regarding some in the east, where cliques of sadistic chihuahuas bully and discriminate against the dogs that do not meet their standards). At our dog field, however, we are free to play with whomever we want to, and I, a Groodle, can easily fraternise with Jack Russels, German Shepherds, French Bulldogs, you bark it.

COVID-19 hasn't affected us much. In fact, while it's true that some dogs come from



meet Alfie

“It was great to spend a year focusing on self-care.”

ABOUT
Three year old Labradoodle
Also known as: Alfina, The Duchess, Baboon, Princess.

How was last year?
It was kind of great. I feel bad for saying that, but I love my family and I love bounding around the house. I was a bit sad considering I'm in my early twenties (in human years) and would love to be out with friends, but it was great to spend a year focusing on self-care. Do you know what I mean?

Your personal style? Your vibe?
I'm a pocket rocket. Small but elegant. I'd look great being carried around in a slightly oversized handbag. Prada, preferably. (Laughs). My personal style icons are Snowy from Tintin (he always looks so great; so capable) and, to be honest...Cruella. She's sort of fantastic. The dalmations will kill me for that!

What have you been watching?
LOVING Bridgerton – so much fun. Even before we started watching, my owners nicknamed me 'Princess' - it was a little disconcerting at first, but grew on me once I was desexed. And Married At First Sight, of course. I can relate. When my owners picked me up I'd never seen them before. I had no say in the matter, but I made it work!

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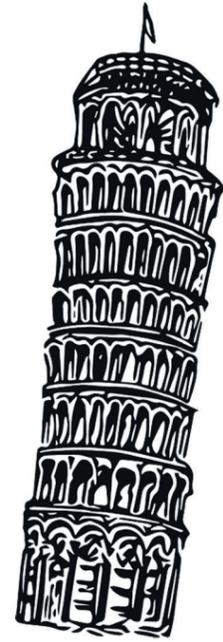
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