



WEST
COAST
photography Anson Smart

PERTH IS A BOOM TOWN FED BY MONEY FROM THE THRIVING RESOURCES INDUSTRY. Mark Dapin GOES WEST TO SEE WHAT CHANGES THE INFUX OF MONEY HAS BROUGHT TO THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR VISITORS.

Sunday best Cottesloe Beach, just 15 minutes from town, is a favourite place to unwind on a Sunday afternoon ahead of a session at the pub.

PERTH IS BOOMING. LIKE A DRUNKEN GLADHANDER STUFFING DOLLARS IN THE POCKETS OF THE EASTERN STATES, A BIG-NOTING, BIG TIPPER SMOKING A CIGAR AND GULPING FINE MARGARET RIVER CHARDONNAY FROM THE BOTTLE.

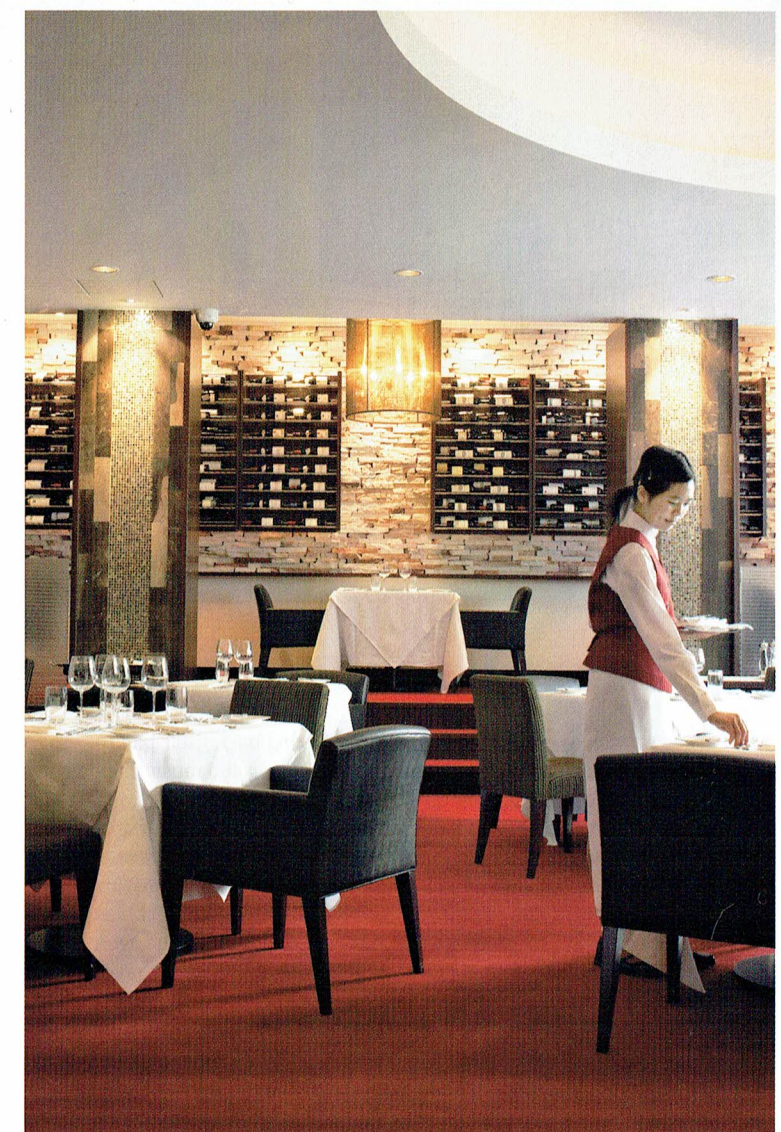
I'M WANDERING THROUGH downtown Perth to the Carrillon City shopping precinct, on a hot, clear morning. My eyes are continually drawn in two directions at once: up to the peaks of cocksure 20th-century skyscrapers and down to the gables of unassuming 19th-century chapels. It feels as if history is still being made in this constantly changing city, and the past 200 years of architectural development all happened concurrently. Turn-of-the-century workshops, whose builders were proud enough to plaster their names onto the facade, rest side-by-side with Brutalist relics of the 1960s and 1970s, whose builders, if they were known, would be cursed to the last generation.

Even the most prosaic structures take on a lucid glamour in Perth's glorious light: a flat, clean glow that, all day long, lends the city skies the colours of a tropical island in the hour before sunset. It is a photographer's light, a make-up artist's light, a light that makes everyone and everything appear beautiful, no matter how shabby they may look when dusk falls.

Perth is booming. It is booming like a drunken gladhander stuffing dollars in the pockets of the eastern states, a big-noting big tipper smoking a cigar and gulping fine Margaret River 2003 Leeuwin Estate Art Series Chardonnay from the bottle. Resource money is pouring into Perth, from the north and the east, and the new money is building a new city, bulging with self-assured water-side development, modish restaurants, chic bars and flushed, friendly locals.

The face of Perth was modelled in boom times. Many of the Victorian civic buildings were designed in the neo-Classical style, to make it look as though they were already established institutions. Profits from the 1890s gold rush paid for them, and money from the 1960s mineral boom often levelled and replaced them. The glass skyscrapers were raised in the entrepreneurial 1980s and – now that Perth is truly a city with a history – the more recent prosperity has paid for the establishment of heritage precincts to preserve the memories of good times past.

Today there are jobs advertised everywhere. Perth offers work to the unskilled, inexperienced, transients, the young, and everywhere the skyline is scratched by super-cranes. Early on Monday morning, hundreds of people dressed in company overalls take off their steel-capped workboots and put them through the metal detectors at Perth Airport as they prepare to board flights to Newman, Port Hedland or Karratha. They will earn twice the wages they could make in the capital, in roasting hot and remote company towns where »



The mild West
Clockwise from top left: The Janet Holmes à Court Gallery; Opus restaurant at The Richardson, West Perth's new five-star boutique hotel; Gucci is just one place in the Perth CBD where cash-laden workers can spend their hard-earned dollars; The Richardson hotel.





there is nowhere to spend it, and they will bring back their pay to squander it in town with splurges on food and drink and music, cars and boats and second homes.

The resources rush that has drawn hundreds of workers north has made it hard for hotels and restaurants to find staff. As a result, some people are not very good at their jobs. Waiters are baffled by orders. Taxidriver don't know the roads. Not one but two cabbies assure me that my (recently opened) hotel does not exist; one even claims the (long-established) road on which it sits does not exist, either. Another driver has never heard of one of the best-known hotel chains in Australia (and the world).

With a boom comes building and after the boom come the benefits. North of the city centre, in a small but serene heritage precinct at the foot of Beaufort Street, is the marvellous Art Gallery of Western Australia, itself a child of the gold rush. Its galleries hold two centuries of paintings of the city. From the pedantic taxonomy of the early ships' artists though to the flawed experiments of WA's impressionists, the qualities of light and water remain the same.

Once the colony was established, artists began to focus on the city's growth and recording its new buildings. Theirs was boom-time painting, a reflection of imperial confidence. The time of the entrepreneurs brought painters back from the country to express a kind of admiring despair at the new city of skyscrapers.

"It will be interesting to see whether the current boom becomes reflected in new images of the city," says AGWA curator Melissa Harpley. "It's not happened that I've seen, but maybe the artists are still in their studios working on them."

Among the most moving canvasses is Christopher Pease's *Nyoongar Dreaming* (1999), in which an Aboriginal man stands on a recently completed piece of freeway. The road looks like an ugly intrusion, something that has no business to be there.

The Nyoongar – more commonly spelt Noongar – are the indigenous people of south-western WA. The name means simply "man". When the first whites came, the Noongar thought they were the ghosts of dead Aboriginal people.

A VISITOR WILL OFTEN hear that Perth is the "most isolated capital in the world", as if it were the hub of a country, rather than a state. The people are as bafflingly friendly as country folk. A man coming out of an elevator in the large and central Hay Street Mall (home



Free for all Clockwise from above left: photos dot the walls at Gino's Cafe in Fremantle; Fremantle Prison; the harbourfront at Fremantle; contemporary design in the Perth suburbs. Opposite: Lamont's Restaurant has helped East Perth become a major dining destination, top; the futuristic lines of Carillon City, bottom.



to chain-stores, buskers and the tourist office) points to his wife and tells me, "She's put on a kilo."

A man in the landmark and beautifully appointed No 44 King Street Café, where the coffee is as good as it gets, strikes up a conversation about the novel I am carrying, *Power Without Glory* by Frank Hardy. His mate joins in, too, even though neither of them have read it or, even heard of it.

Perth's social life has long been lived in its suburbs and on its beaches, but the city centre has lost a little of the post-apocalyptic hush that used to descend in the evenings and, in East Perth, an attractive suburb of largely tasteful residential developments has been reclaimed from the remnants of the working waterfront.

East Perth's waterfront dining and drinking options are dominated by the local branch of Kate Lamont's pioneering Lamont's Restaurant, and the classy Royal Bar and Brasserie. Lamont's serves unfussy but creative modern Australian food. Pemberton marron, which only occurs naturally in the Margaret River region, is a standout menu item along with braised duck leg with duck shepherd's pie and corn-fed chicken with pumpkin puree. The Royal serves excellent draught Hoegaarden.

Nearby, the Janet Holmes à Court Gallery, with its unrivalled private collection of Aboriginal bark paintings, brings culture to the dockside.

The slow rebirth of East Perth began about 12 years ago, and Lamont's has been in the area for seven. "It was a long, hard road in the beginning," says Kate Lamont. Nobody ever thought of going to East Perth to eat. But now, she says, "It's starting to become a food destination on its own."

Lamont says it is important for bars and restaurants to cluster. She thinks Melbourne-style tapas grazing and bar crawling is the way of the future, and she expects an explosion in the number of small bars later in the year, when Perth's liquor licensing laws will be liberalised.

"I think that will make the CBD a lot more vibrant," says Lamont. "[Perth's] CBD needs vibrancy: wearing my tourism hat, I'd say that; wearing my resident's hat, I'd say that; and certainly wearing my business hat, I'd say that. At the moment, the city dies in the evenings, because there's no critical mass of hospitality precincts."

Lamont points to Leederville as another suburb that has recently come to life. Nick Sheppard, formerly a guitarist in the final incarnation of the impossibly influential British band, The Clash, runs a chic »



PERTH'S LIGHT IS A PHOTOGRAPHER'S LIGHT, A MAKE-UP ARTIST'S LIGHT, A LIGHT THAT MAKES EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING APPEAR BEAUTIFUL, NO MATTER HOW SHABBY THEY MAY LOOK WHEN DUSK FALLS.



rock-and-roll streetwear boutique there called Yo La Tengo, and another clothes shop, Elroy, in up-and-coming Mt Lawley.

When I meet Sheppard in Elroy, he is screwing the arms onto a torso of a mannequin wearing a Guns'n'Roses T-shirt as if he is God assembling Axl Rose from scratch. He fixes the torso to a pair of legs wearing pinstripe trousers. "It's all about textures and juxtapositions," he says.

After The Clash broke up Sheppard married an Australian and migrated to Perth. "I feel incredibly lucky that I could move here," he says. "Everything's different. The sea is different. The sky is different. This is not Brighton. There are no condoms in the surf when you go for a swim. You can see the bottom of the ocean."

"It doesn't matter how rich you are in London," says Sheppard, "you can't get to the beach in 15 minutes. You can get to [Perth's] Floreat beach, and it's literally the best beach in the world. It's ruined me. And the people here have that kind of positive attitude. I think the fact the weather is so good really lifts your spirits."

The beaches are Perth's slightly skewed tiara, a broken band of white sand that stretches from Sorrento in the north to Fremantle in the south, via Scarborough, Floreat and Cottesloe. Still gorgeous when crowded but breathtaking when quiet, the beaches are the Australia of European dreams, where the bodies are beautiful, the surf's up and the ocean skies go on forever. Cottesloe, only 15 minutes from central Perth, attracts the most tourists with its surf, snorkelling and affably raucous party-pub scene. Don't let the odd circling shark – in the ocean or a nearby hotel – put you off.

BACK IN THE CITY, the beautiful bodies rub together politely in always-fashionable Subiaco, and with a grittier energy in the bars and

clubs of Northbridge. Northbridge's chaotic jumble of ethnic eateries – Malaysian, Hong Kong Chinese, a pizzeria, a Greek taverna, Japanese, Indian, Korean barbecue, Thai and karaoke – with bubble-tea houses, gay clubs, straight clubs, strip clubs and wine bars, makes the place look like an old-style Hollywood lot, where flimsy facades built for wildly different epic movies wait to be dusted off for the sequels.

The clubs nurse a long-suffering air, as if they have seen too much in too short a time. The sign outside Geisha warns of the usual comprehensive dress regulations, but adds, "Gentlemen... turn off your engines. Geisha is a female-friendly club and girls don't want to be hit on by drunken groups of guys. Please don't expect to be granted entry if you're having a boy's night out!!!"

Although it can be tough to get a hotel room in the city centre, a couple of smart new places – including the five-star Richardson boutique hotel in West Perth – have opened near Kings Park and the Botanic Garden, an essential destination for any strolling visitor. In the vast, wildly scenic park, a partially elevated walkway, funded by money from that tax on hope, the state lottery, has gorgeous views over the Swan

Creature comforts
From left: the Sail & Anchor at Fremantle; enjoying a beverage at Fremantle's Little Creatures Brewery. Opposite: inside the Little Creatures Brewery, top; the coffee crowd at Gino's Cafe in Fremantle, bottom.



River and to the Mt Eliza escarpment, once a Noongar kangaroo hunting ground.

The Swan River sweeps through Perth from the Swan Valley to the port of Fremantle. Freo was once a city in its own right, but it is now far-south Perth by default. It's one of the most liveable historic places in Australia, at once lively and stately, established and bohemian, Victorian and punk.

The railway is the quickest and cheapest way to reach Fremantle, but the river is the most pleasant. Regular passenger ferries glide past the Old Swan Brewery and the Royal Perth Yacht Club – home of Australia II's never-to-be-forgotten-for-one-minute-in-this-town America's Cup win – while a crew member offers breathless commentary about waterside real estate, spiced up with the pornography of property prices.

They point out the mansion of Seven Network owner Kerry Stokes, whose rags-to-riches life story – he once owned a company that installed television antennas – proves anybody can achieve fabulous success in the Australian media, if they are called Kerry.

The architecture is proof that in WA – Janet Holmes a Court aside – wealth and taste tend to go together like smoked herrings and chocolate ice-cream. One home has seven archways to represent the seven seas, but this seems restrained compared to the gauche foolishness of the "Egyptian-style" Burswood Casino complex.

I walk off the ferry at Fremantle, past a funky food hall with a busker and a bar. I stop to sit on the dock of the bay, and, on cue, the busker sings *Sitting on the Dock of the Bay*, reinforcing my already dangerous delusion that all the world is a

stage and I am the star.

It is only a couple of minutes' stroll to Freo's preserved and restored colonial heart. In High Street, impressive private art galleries – such as Japingka, and Indigenart: the Mossenson Galleries – blossom in stately old buildings.

Some of the other galleries have a little less credibility. It can be difficult to know where to buy paintings but, as a general rule, a place that sells "authentic Aboriginal art dreamtime napkins" is unlikely to discover the next Emily Kngwarreye or Rover Thomas.

Incidental reminders of a simpler past help give Fremantle its nostalgic charm. A shop called the Record Finder boasts one of the largest selections of second-hand 78rpm records in the world. I ask the owner, Terry Lahogue, if there is much of a market for them.

"No, no, mate, no," he says, sadly. "They're going the same way as everything else." He is lucky to sell one a week.

I have been in more Australian jails than most of Perth's disgraced entrepreneurs – but only after the buildings have been de-commissioned. I am a sucker for prison tourism, and Fremantle Prison, built by convicts in the 1850s, was opened to the public in 1992. It has a solemn, turreted gatehouse and grim but fascinating cells, with original graffiti still visible on the limestone walls.

In the prison chapel, the sixth commandment, "thou shalt not kill", is rendered as "thou shalt not do murder", because the jail boasted a working gallows. The last man executed, serial killer Eric Edgar Cooke, was hanged in 1964.

Fremantle Prison has its own small art gallery, showing work by current and former inmates of WA jails. The best of the paintings are better than some of the work in the more commercial galleries in town, and half the price. The prison's tragedy is that almost every picture takes an Aboriginal theme: it is either dreaming – often »

THE FACTS PERTH



WHERE TO EAT

Lamont's East Perth

The star of East Perth boasts great service, highly regarded food and fantastic views. Other branches in Margaret River and the Swan Valley. Book early and book often.

Dinner for two from \$190.
11 Brown Street, East Perth;
08 9202 1566;
www.lamonts.com.au

Must Winebar

Cool, stylish venue for modern French food and modern Australasian and European wines. Great for people watching. If you're lucky, you might catch sight of local identity

Nick Sheppard. He used to be in The Clash, you know.
Dinner for two \$175.
519 Beaufort Street, Highgate;
08 9328 8255;
www.must.com.au

No. 44 King Street

Eponymous West End institution with decent wine list and delicious home-baked bread. Good for breakfast, and a quiet, atmospheric spot for dinner in the city centre.

Dinner for two \$145
44 King Street, Perth;
08 9321 4476.

Maya Indian Restaurant

One of the finest Indian

restaurants in WA. Tandoori dishes are especially tasty.
Dinner for two \$116.
75-77 Market Street, Fremantle; 08 9335 2796;
www.mayarestaurant.com.au

WHERE TO STAY

The Richardson

The spa and Opus restaurant add to the relaxed appeal of this thoughtfully designed, attentively staffed new hotel. Pamper yourself.

Doubles from \$325.
32 Richardson Street, West Perth; 08 9217 8888;
www.therichardson.com.au

Outram Small Luxury Hotel

It's small, it's luxurious, it's minimalist, it's almost too cool.

Doubles from \$295.
32 Outram Street, West Perth;
08 9322 4888;
www.theoutram.com.au

Esplanade Hotel Fremantle

Recently refurbished classic old hotel. The Esplanade is the Raffles of Fremantle, the place to stay to soak up the history of the port. Accommodation varies. Make sure you get a balcony. Doubles from \$205.
Corner Marine Terrace and Essex Street, Fremantle;
08 9432 4000; www.esplanadehotelfremantle.com.au

WHAT TO DO

Art Gallery of Western Australia

Check out the major indigenous art collection and the largest

selection of painting relating to WA in the world (unsurprisingly). Perth Cultural Centre, Perth; 08 9492 6600;
www.artgallery.wa.gov.au

The Record Finder

Still searching for that elusive Alexander Kipnis 78? The Record Finder has a set of six.
87 High Street, Fremantle;
08 9335 2770;
www.therecordfinder.com.au

Fremantle Prison

Serve 90 minutes' easy time in a decommissioned jail on a tour where the guides have sworn not to reveal if they were ever inmates.

1 The Terrace, Fremantle;
08 9336 9200;
www.fremantleprison.com.au

WHERE TO DRINK

Cottesloe Beach Hotel

Perth's most famous Sunday session in its most beautiful Sunday setting, overlooking the Indian Ocean. If you drink enough, you can see all the way to Sri Lanka. Just don't try to swim it.

104 Marine Parade, Cottesloe;
08 9383 1100;
www.cottesloebeachhotel.com.au

Rosie O'Grady's

Party all day with serious drinkers at this large, raucous but very friendly Irish pub.
23 William Street, Fremantle;
08 9335 1645;
www.fremantle.rosieogradys.com.au

supercharged like panel-van airbrush art – or a naively rendered memory of growing up in the bush.

THE SPIRIT OF PERTH takes flesh on a Sunday afternoon, when every decent drinkers' pub from Scarborough to the Sail & Anchor in Freo hosts a Sunday session.

As a rule, you need ask yourself only two questions before deciding whether to enter a pub: is it named after a non-existent Irish woman, and does it have a giant, fibreglass leprechaun chained to the ceiling? If the answer is yes on either count, it may be best to walk on by. However, a cavernous Irish pub that goes by the name of Rosie O'Grady's (but is really the old Federal Hotel) has perhaps the liveliest Sunday session in Fremantle. The obligatory three wizened Irish musicians play the obligatory *Danny Boy* to an appreciative and eclectic crowd that, on

the day I visit, includes a gay leatherman, a boy in a Cannibal Corpse T-shirt, and about a dozen elderly Irish couples. The musicians seem to know most of the large audience by name, and the Irish feed the keyboard player hot chips.

If one man personifies Rosie's Sunday sessions, it is 110-kilo Steve Daniels. Three years ago – partly on Daniels's suggestion – the pub introduced its "Pub Club" scheme, in which regular drinkers earn redeemable points for every dollar they spend. Daniels, an auto-parts salesman, was the first cardholder. Recently, when he received his member summary, he learned he had spent \$49,338.70 on beer since the scheme began. Daniels drinks at the bar, under a sign that says "Steve's Corner", a space he has occupied since Rosie O'Grady's opened in 1996.

"The Sunday sessions over here have always been good, no matter what pub you

go to," says Daniels. "It's always packed, and you always get a really good crowd. Everyone goes out first thing in the morning and they go to the beach, because the weather's so good over here. And come lunchtime it's 'Let's go to the pub' and that's the end of it until midnight."

On my last night in town, still well before midnight, I am walking down Hay Street, past silent, shuttered cafes and the occasional quietly bright hotel, when a shadow of a man stops me and asks for two dollars. He is not drunk-fat or heroin-thin, and Perth – and a couple of icy beers – has left me feeling generous and content.

When I hand him the coin without protest, the shadow seems struck by guilt.

"Are you battling too?" he asks. "Or are you doing alright?"

"I'm doing alright."

"Oh, I couldn't tell in the dark." +