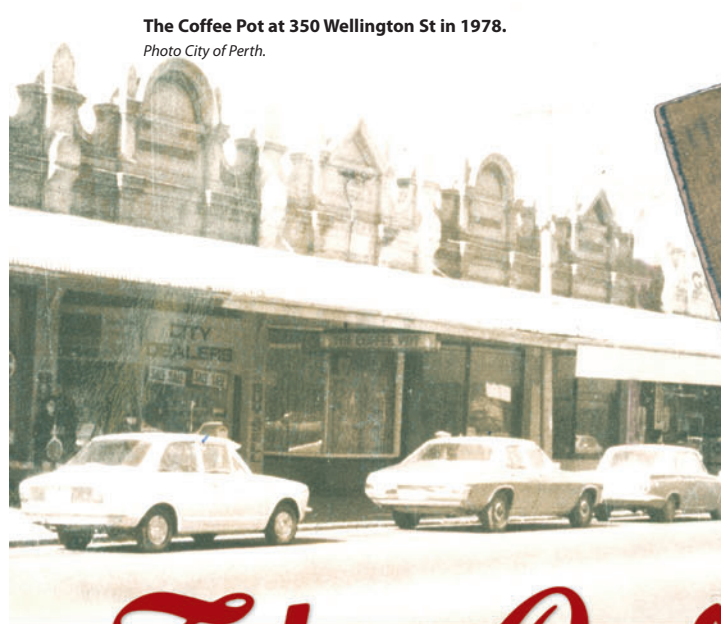


The Coffee Pot at 350 Wellington St in 1978.  
Photo City of Perth.



# The Coffee Pot

**From the exhibition: The Coolbaroo Club and the Coffee Pot, two extraordinary places in 1950's Perth.  
Perth Town Hall, 20 October – 7 November 2010**

The 1950's were years of change and modernisation in Perth. Young people yearned for a new sense of glamour and freedom from conservative dogma and discrimination.

This exhibition explores the role of a tiny late night coffee shop, the Coffee Pot, which was a unique part of Perth nightlife in the late 1950s and 1960s. It was a place people remember passionately, not just for its jazz music and delicious food but more importantly, as a place that encouraged conversation and connection.

The Coffee Pot also offered a refuge from the conservative social policies of the time. It was a place where different cultures could mix. In a time when homosexuality was illegal and considered a 'vice', the Coffee Pot was extraordinary in being a place that welcomed everyone.

This is a story told through the voices of those that owned, worked in, visited and loved the Coffee Pot.

*'I remember one night my mother burst in to drag me home from what she considered a 'den of iniquity' and said so to all assembled. Mother thought if you drank coffee instead of tea there was something 'wrong' and to want to associate with 'theatre people' was surely suspicious. I was so mortified that I never went to 'the Pot' again.'*

**Terry Maller, correspondence 1.2.2010**



Rob (left) and Prada Van der Nagel (centre) with Coffee Pot guests 1958.



Prada pouring coffee c.1958.



**One of the attractions of the Coffee Pot was its quiet, sophisticated glamour. This was largely imparted by its owners Prada and Rob Van der Nagel.**

Prada (Julie van Vloten) had spent her childhood at a resort owned by her father in Surabaya, Indonesia. She had attended Methodist Ladies College in Perth for 2 years until 1939, when WWII broke out and she returned to Indonesia. In 1940 Prada married a Dutch naval officer Hans van der Nagel, who was killed soon after in the war. Prada, her sister and her mother Louise were interned for 4 years in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in Indonesia.

Soon after they were liberated in 1945 and evacuated to Singapore, Prada visited Holland to meet her husband's family for the first time. There Prada fell in love with her husband's younger brother Gerard, known as Rob. Rob had spent the war years hiding underground to escape being sent to Poland or Germany. They married in Holland in 1947 and their daughter Frieda was born in 1948.

As there was no prospect of work in post-war Holland the young couple decided to immigrate to Perth. In 1956 Prada and Rob bought the Coffee Pot at 350 Wellington St, Perth. They managed it until 1979, when due to the road widening of Wellington St they had to relocate to 93 Rokeby Road Subiaco. They retired three years later in 1982.

**From an interview with Frieda Gibson, 10.02.2010**

*'At all times Rob and Prada were the epitome of 'casual chic'. Prada always wore ankle length dresses. She had a wonderfully serene and engaging smile, with a beautifully modulated 'upper-crusty' English voice, which had Dutch vowel intonation. Rob was always 'Mr Cool' in a Robert Wagner sort of way and often sat down with you to have a chat. They both loved art and the theatre. The Coffee Pot, in the manner of its European counterparts, was a veritable cultural oasis at a time when the cultural desert came right up to the Swan River!'*

**Winfred (Fred) Peppinck, correspondence, 5.03.2010**

Pietanella Boys worked three nights a week at the Coffee Pot from 1958 until 1969. In 1958 she held her wedding reception at the Coffee Pot. Left to right: Prada and Rob, Pieta and her husband Richard Pilling.



Gerald Glaskin c.1970. Photo by Leo van de Pas

When Prada and Rob started the Coffee Pot they were short of cash and were supported by West Australian author Gerald M Glaskin (1923–2000) as a silent partner. The agreement was that they pay him back as soon as they were able.

Glaskin was open about his homosexuality despite the fact that life for a 'Camp' person in 1950s Perth was clandestine and dangerous. Homosexuality was illegal and homosexuals lived with constant day-to-day fears of being beaten up; of blackmail; of police entrapment; of arrest, exposure, infamy and disgrace.

The Coffee Pot however, was always a place where 'Camp' people were welcomed. This was exceptional in Perth in the 1950s. It was not until 2001 that West Australians finally saw the end to discriminatory laws against gay and lesbian people.



Pamela Hunsley (nee Herynk). Photo by Gordon Much.

*'Customers from every walk of life and every part of the world came to the Coffee Pot; visiting actors, singers, musicians and the theatre crowd...'*

*The conditions of my employment required me to paint my nails and wear very high heels!'*

**Pamela Hunsley, hostess at the Coffee Pot, correspondence 21.05.2010**

The Coffee Pot was especially frequented by nurses living in the Royal Perth Hospital Nurses Quarters in Wellington Street. Photo shows Barbara Staveley in nurse's uniform, 1961.



Des Noble (Dec.), Noel Bourke and Alan Sutcliffe in 1957, on route to Fred Curry's Billiard Saloon (downstairs in Hay Street) and before visiting Winnie Wrights' Dance Studio (in Plaza Arcade) and finishing up at the Coffee Pot. Photo courtesy Noel Bourke.



*'Many of the trainee teachers from Graylands Teachers College would study at the Perth Public Library until it closed at 9.45pm and then, because the drinking laws of the time meant you couldn't go into a bar until you were 21, we would visit the Coffee Pot. Here we would sit for hours 'solving the problems of the world' in lengthy discussions and nursing a coffee.'*

**Noel Bourke, correspondence 12.03.2010**

The Coffee Pot was open from 7.30pm until 2.00am during weekdays and 3.00am on the weekend. Rob was famous for making Dutch apple pie, chocolate log and cheesecake and Prada for her pastries. Spring rolls were sourced from a Chinese restaurant near His Majesty's Theatre in Hay St.

Rob and Prada were keen to support local artists. Through the Skinner Gallery they met many young West Australian artists such as Brian McKay and Guy Grey-Smith. The Coffee Pot featured an artwork by one of these local artists every six weeks.

*'The Coffee Pot was an essential part of trendy Perth night life in the late 1950s and 1960s – along with Seacrest, the Heidelberg, Luis, Bernies, Cookies, the Van Eileen, the Budapest, Canterbury Court, the Embassy and the Uni Ref...'*

*I remember queuing on the pavement outside to get a table in that tiny and desirable spot with its quintessential 1950s décor, delicious Dutch-style coffee and cool jazz records playing in the background. I went there with dates after a ball, after a movie and often just to sit and talk. It was the place to go. After all we were the generation who invented the term 'cool'.*

**Diana Warnock, correspondence 9.04.2010**



Jazz Club members Diana Warnock (nee Robinson), the late Ron Morey and trumpeter Leon Cole, c.1960. Photo by Mary List.



A photo of Prada at the new Coffee Pot, Rokeby Road, *Western Mail Magazine*, special issue 'Where to Go-Café Society', 1984, p14.

## Acknowledgements:

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