

# It's beer and skittles in Freo

Cameron Wilson

AMBER, cloudy and icy cold; to borrow from Roy and H.G. (who we all pray are immortal), it's the taste of an angel crying on your tongue. I'm perched at the bar in Little Creatures brewery, frosty glass of pale ale in hand. Miles Hull, the brewery's head of creative development, is seated beside me and probably explaining all sorts of interesting things about the beer, but my taste buds are telling me everything I need to know: Little Creatures Pale Ale is the best beer in Australia.

That Australia's finest boutique brewery is housed in what used to be a crocodile farm is perhaps emblematic of the weirdly wonderful character of Fremantle, WA's major port and second city. When I first landed in Perth in 1995 as a first-year communications student at Murdoch University, it was impressed upon me that although Murdoch was ruled by "hairy-legged feminists and ratbag lefties", it was close to "Freo" and that made it a good place to settle in for a few years of university life. Before long, I'd discovered much of what there was to love about Fremantle: proper beer; a burgeoning cafe scene; the Freo markets; great live music venues; authentic hippies; Tim Winton; a generally cool, arty vibe.

Many an hour I dawdled over a cappuccino while sneaking bites of a bakery muffin I'd smuggled to a street-front cafe (being then a full-time student, lavish cafe muffins were an unjustifiable extravagance). People-watching on the main drag was always a treat, as was the muscled cruise. On a Friday or Saturday afternoon, you could expect to witness

a procession of pimped-out V8s and polished-up relics chugging along South Tce in second gear. Now and again something truly special would rumble by – a canary yellow '76 Holden Torana or an American Ford Mustang with spoked wheels and white-wall tyres – prompting me and my uni mates to rise and applaud.

Happily, as Miles and I take a stroll through the newly expanded brewery premises, he's able to confirm that Fremantle's cafe-dwellers and rev-heads still enjoy a healthy symbiotic relationship.

When we head upstairs to Creatures Loft – an airy, harbour-view space that hosts bands, performers and movie nights – our conversation turns to the vigorous live music scene of which Fremantle has long been proud.

As a live music enthusiast and lifelong sufferer from pub second-hand smoke, I recall almost weeping with gratitude the first time I attended a show at the Fly By Night Club. Established as a non-profit musicians' community club in the mid-'80s, in 1996 the Fly did the unthinkable and declared itself a smoke-free venue, more than a decade before legislation dragged the rest of Australia's bars and pubs into the 21st century. The place was soon attracting the best Australian and international performers to visit WA, as it provided a uniquely comfortable pub experience for up to 500 people. It's still one of the country's best live rooms, so you'll have a great night out too (on this visit I'm treated to a performance by Australia's eccentric custodian of hillbilly blues and 1920s Calypso, C.W. Stoneking).

After polishing off an excellent Little Creatures lunch – crispy pizza



topped with zucchini and mozzarella followed by skewers of tender marinated kangaroo and, of course, a glass of pale ale – I bid farewell to Miles and stroll over to the Fremantle markets. In this heritage-listed 1897 warehouse are dozens of crammed-together stalls selling exotic coffees, teas and honeys, clothing and jewellery, Aboriginal art and assorted hippie gear, all of it humming along to a live soundtrack provided by a dedicated retinue of (mostly) talented buskers. Watching a pair of guitar-strumming troubadours at the building's western entrance brings to

mind the rags-to-riches story of Aussie roots-rock outfit the John Butler Trio, as this is the same patch of pavement where Butler developed his unique guitar style and loyal following more than a decade ago.

The JBT having long ago graduated from the kerbside to the world stage, I'm left with today's hopefuls entertaining me and the punters who are now trickling through the entrance in anticipation of another fondly remembered Freo tradition – the 5.30 Sunday markets rush.

In a short while, thrifty parents and savvy uni students will weigh in for a

**TOAST: The Little Creatures brewery in Fremantle.**

share of the last of the week's produce, all of it bagged by the kilo and priced on the go by shouting stallholders. The vendors won't be back for five days so they need to sell, but it's the punters' last chance to buy too so a certain amount of brinkmanship is employed on both sides. Sadly I won't be participating in this lively piece of theatre, but the truth is I don't need a kilo of apples or even a \$1 punnet of strawberries so I'm content to leave it consigned to days gone by.

In what I choose to interpret as a sign from above, the week after I return to Sydney my local publican is suddenly dispensing Little Creatures Bright Ale on tap and, joy of joys, has a fridge full of pint bottles of Little Creatures Pale Ale. Like Guinness poured in a bar outside Ireland, it's not quite the same as a pint pulled at the brewery in Freo, but then it's a fair distance back to WA so I'm just happy this precious little beverage has followed me home.

## Wish you were here

### Fact file

Little Creatures brewery, bar and restaurant is open for lunch, dinner and beer tastings daily until midnight; [www.littlecreatures.com.au](http://www.littlecreatures.com.au)

For upcoming gigs at The Fly By Night Club, see [www.flybynight.org](http://www.flybynight.org)

Fremantle markets are open Fri 9am-8pm, Sat 9am-6pm & Sun 10am-6pm; [www.fremantlemarkets.com.au](http://www.fremantlemarkets.com.au)



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