

# theage (melbourne) magazine



## The after dark issue

Rock on: Why Molly Meldrum still loves the nightlife (at 60)

Fancy a drink?  
What it's like to  
open your own bar

Births, brothels,  
burgers: Melbourne  
by night by numbers

Up all night: Who  
is working while  
we're sleeping

Black and blue: The  
only colours to wear  
this winter



# whatever happened to?

Ossie Ostrich

Words Peter Barrett



Ossie Ostrich as a chick.



Ossie Ostrich today.

**Oswald Q. Ostrich**, the perpetually 11-year-old puppet better known as Ossie, spent nearly 23 years as Daryl Somers' comic foil.

Operated by comedy writer and producer Ernie Carroll from a stool just out of the camera's shot, Ossie was a fibreglass head on a cardboard tube with a pink body made from windcheater material, ostrich feathers and felt. Carroll did the voice with a microphone dangling around his neck.

Ossie (or at least, his character's voice) was born on radio station 3GL, and his television debut came in the mid-1960s with a stint on children's variety program *The Tarax Show*, after Carroll was inspired by a French television show that had a talking duck. Carroll liked the comic potential of an ostrich (Rod Hull was already entertaining Sydneysiders with his puppet, Emu) and "Ossie" seemed like a nice alliteration.

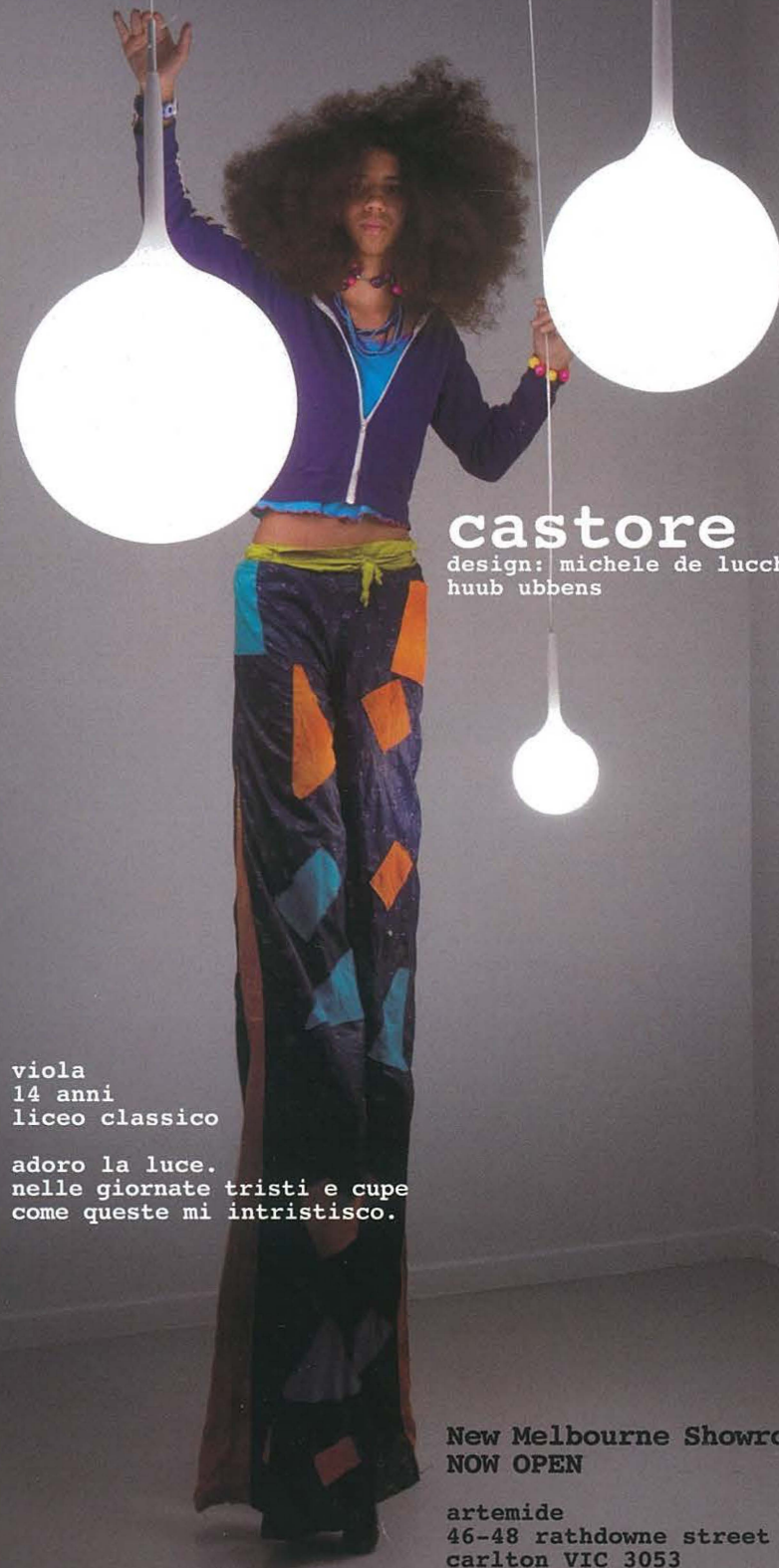
When *The Tarax Show* folded, Ossie was shelved at Channel Nine until Carroll revived him for a new show with Daryl Somers in 1971 called *Hey Hey It's Saturday*, the spin-off of a show called *Cartoon Corner*. Somers' co-host was originally Collingwood footballer Peter McKenna, but he left after his coach decided the show was affecting his game, to be replaced by a puppet ostrich – Ossie – in May 1972. The show changed format several times, at one point screening on the 0-10 Network as the *Daryl and Ossie Show*, but *Hey Hey's* natural home was Channel Nine, where it had its heyday from 1984 until 1994, with Daryl at the helm and Jacki MacDonald as co-host until 1988.

Except for a brief appearance with Mr Squiggle on the ABC and a series of segments with Graham Kennedy's *In Melbourne Tonight* (Carroll was one of Kennedy's writers), Ossie rarely strayed from *Hey Hey*. Carroll says there was "a bit of mumbling" about doing something in America after broadcasting from the Warner Bros' Los Angeles studios in 1991 but the Americans didn't really "get" their humour. When English punk violinist Nigel Kennedy quipped one night that there was a bloke with his arm up a bird, Ossie replied icily, "Some people have no sense of fantasy." Ossie's girlfriend, Olive Ostrich, wore a blonde wig. To add to the mystery, she and Ossie were never seen in the same place together.

In December 1994, Carroll, then 65, decided to leave *Hey Hey*, taking Ossie into retirement, too. "I'd been in television for 40 years," Carroll says today. "I just thought it was time for me to give it away. I thought the show needed to be adjusted a bit at the time and I thought it was easier to do without the puppet." Somers took it badly. "It hit me quite hard because it's like a part of the family that's leaving," he said at the time. Ossie was replaced with a man-size duck called Plucka and another five years were squeezed out of the format until the final emotional episode on November 20, 1999.

Before Carroll retired to his home on the Mornington Peninsula he dropped Ossie off at the Victorian Performing Arts Museum. The puppet, who has had "about a dozen" heads over his lifetime and various bits and pieces replaced, recently travelled to Sydney's Powerhouse Museum where he will be on display as part of *On the Box: Great Moments in Australian Television 1956-2006* from April 6 until late January next year.

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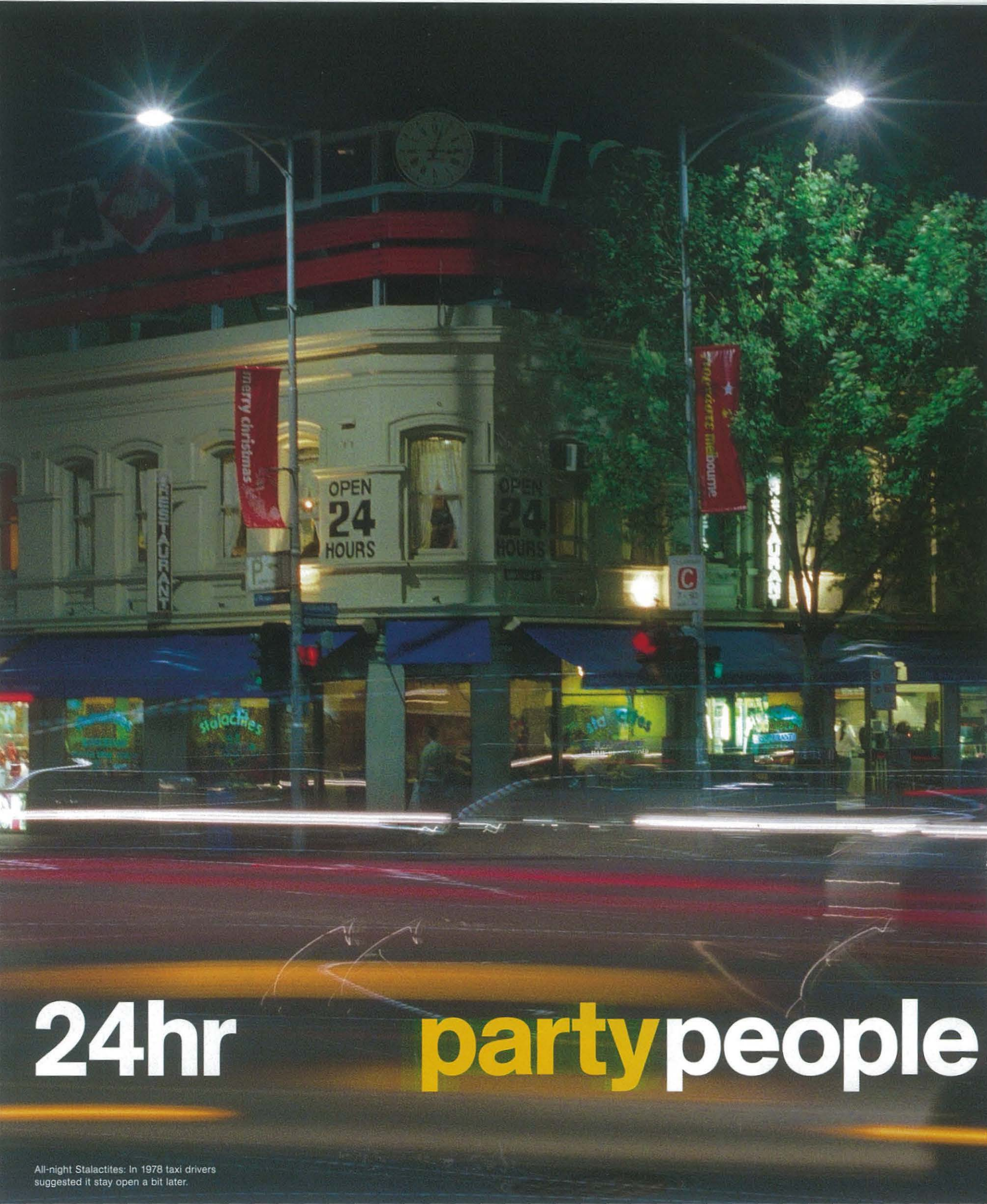
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# 24hr party people

All-night Stalactites: In 1978 taxi drivers suggested it stay open a bit later.



Stalactites, the Greek restaurant on Lonsdale Street, has become a Melbourne landmark for one reason: it never closes. But who wants a souvlaki at 3am? Peter Barrett finds out.

Photography Jesse Marlow

**When Cypriot tennis player Marcos Baghdatis wanted** to celebrate his success in this year's Australian Open, he made a beeline for the corner of Lonsdale and Russell streets, to Stalactites, the restaurant modelled on a Greek cave. Baghdatis had been here a year earlier, as a relative unknown; this year, he arrived with five television networks and a handful of radio stations in tow as they followed the biggest story of the Australian Open. He stayed until 5.30am, dining on platters of lamb and chicken, octopus, calamari, salads and chips, all on the house. "Since then, people have been coming in saying, 'I want the souvlaki that Baghdatis ate, the Baghdatis souvlaki,'" says Nicole Konstandakopoulos, store manager and daughter of the owner, Nondas Konstandakopoulos. Indeed, the family promised to rename the eight-dollar mixed lamb and chicken souvlaki "the Baghdatis" in his honour if he won the tournament (he didn't, they didn't). On the Sunday night of his defeat in the final, Baghdatis sent his French girlfriend, Camille Neviere, to Stalactites to pick him up a consolation takeaway.

Not that Stalactites particularly needed the publicity: pop in any time, day or night, and it's likely to be busy. The takeaway counter at the front of the shop churns out some 800 souvlakis (or, correctly, souvlakia) a day – that's about one every two minutes. On a typical night they will turn over the always-packed tables inside the restaurant six or seven times.

Exactly why it is so busy is hard to say. Perhaps it is a testament to the enduring popularity of the souvlaki. Or maybe it is as simple as this: it is open late.

Before he opened the place in 1978 with his wife and father-in-law, Nondas Konstandakopoulos ran a fish and chip shop in Bacchus Marsh and a cafe in Chirside Park. Stalactites was a music shop before Konstandakopoulos arrived, although this stretch of Lonsdale Street was already a Greek quarter, with Caras Emporium, a few doors down, selling Greek newspapers and magazines, religious paraphernalia and souvenirs; the Greek Orthodox Community centre on the corner opposite; and several other restaurants and cake shops.

Konstandakopoulos wanted to make his new place into a corner of the old country, so the family plastered the ceiling to make it look like one of the Diros caves, a tourist attraction near his wife's family's ancestral home.

The other innovation – 24-hour trading – was to cater for shift-working taxi drivers, who suggested the place open "a bit later". Konstandakopoulos took this to the extreme: the restaurant was to open for business around the clock, non-stop, for 20 years, until it was eventually forced to take a breather when the 1998 gas crisis turned off the rotisseries.

Dressed in white open-necked shirt and black pants, Konstandakopoulos has a tray glued to his hand, ferrying food and drink back and forth between the kitchen and the restaurant, always on the lookout for people arriving or about to leave.

He tries to get family to fill in on the tricky overnight shifts, with son James, daughter Nicole and nephew Peter taking up the challenge. "It's hard, very hard," he says. "You can't get staff ... (people) don't want to work all night."

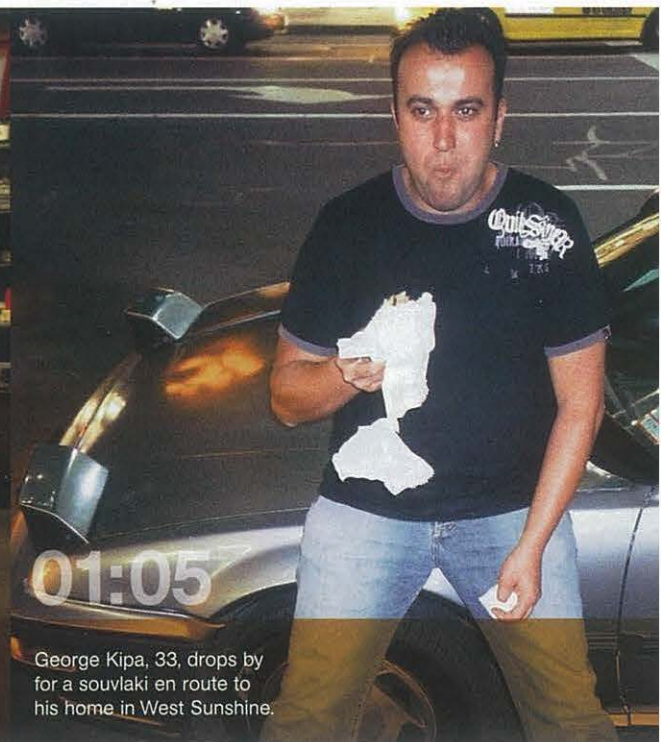
**23:01** The street hums with traffic and the bass throb of dance music from the nightclub next door, Two Floors Up. Inside Stalactites, four chefs are a blur of arms and electric knives as they carve slices of lamb and chicken from five sizzling, juice-spitting meat skewers. The temperature here does not drop below 30 degrees and on very hot days can climb as high as 60. The queue is five people deep and three across, including, right now, a neat man in a suit, nine tall football players and four young women. All keep their eyes glued to the sweating men on the other side of the counter, waiting for them to start work on their orders. Alex Smirnakos, a 38-year-old call centre team leader from Box Hill, is here with his wife of 15 years, Helen, a beauty therapist, their two children, and their friends, the Kalepouris family. They came after a school concert for the Oakleigh Greek Orthodox College at the Dallas Brooks Hall in East Melbourne, where their children sang songs in Greek and English. It was Smirnakos's suggestion to come – he has been coming here since he learned to drive, 20 years ago. "When we go out we usually order up pretty big," he says. "Good old traditional souvlaki, fries, pickled octopus, dips and the fried cheese, saganaki."

**23:45** The pedestrian traffic down Lonsdale Street is flowing like a river now. A fetching woman in a halter-neck top receives a lot of attention from two boys as she waits on the footpath. Out comes her mobile phone – she's not interested. A tall DJ lurches by, a heavy case of records in one hand and a laptop in the other. →



23:01

The Kalepouris and Smirnakos families.



George Kipa, 33, drops by for a souvlaki en route to his home in West Sunshine.



Inside, Duncan Ferguson bursts free of the crush clutching his second souvlaki of the evening. The 35-year-old, who works as an engineer at the Cadbury chocolate factory, has made his way here alone, a little worse for wear, after a "booze cruise" on the Yarra with eight work mates. His night began with a mystery bus ride from the factory in Ringwood, which took them to the Docklands for the cruise to Williamstown and back, then to a city bar called St Jeromes, where he left his jacket on the back of a chair (later, after returning to the bar three times to look for it, he eventually got it back). He lives in Heidelberg with his girlfriend Samantha, who, he predicts, won't be impressed when he arrives "stinking like a bucket of tzatziki".

**00:38** The families have departed, replaced by young people and groups of friends. In one corner are 18-year-old nightclubbers Elena Andoniou, a graphic design student at Victoria University, and Carla Eustathiou, a hospitality student at William Angliss Institute of TAFE, both from St Albans. They had been invited to a club called Long Room for a friend's birthday party, but were turned away at the door because, Eustathiou complains, it was "guest list only". Stalactites turns no one away.

**01:05** The "private room" – where Baghdatis partied into the night – is deserted and in the rush downstairs, all but forgotten by restaurant staff. The long, L-shaped table is a messy graveyard of empty bottles and plates of food scraps, littered with screwed-up paper napkins. Strangely, the room smells of coconut suntan oil. The room often plays host to impromptu performances from Greek singers, and Marinella (Kyriaki "Kitsa" Papadopoulou), Demis Roussos and Vasilis Karras have all eaten with their

entourages here. Outside, George Kipa, 33, is leaning back on a parked car, eating his souvlaki. He runs a sound and lighting business and has dropped in on his way from work at an under-age disco to his home in West Sunshine.

**02:14** Architecture student Redmond Hamlett, 23, came up to Melbourne from Geelong to attend a rally against racism in the Bourke Street Mall many hours earlier, then went to pick up his girlfriend, Eden Cox, 19, in Ashburton. Several city bars later, Hamlett is casting a professional eye over the room. "It has a really cool finish," he says. "I think it actually has stalactites inside the main dining area." (He's right.) At the restaurant entrance a tall man in a green shirt and cowboy boots drops his souvlaki on the pavement, picks it up and continues eating.

**03:12** There is a sudden surge in takeaway customers and the souvlaki chefs – always busy, it seems – turn up the intensity a notch, preparing five at a time. There are a few things you need to be able to do in order to make a good souvlaki. First, you must apply the ingredients in the right order (bread, tzatziki, lettuce, tomato, onion and meat) and then you need a good, fast rolling technique. Nicole Konstandakopoulos says she can tell who has made a souvlaki just by looking at it. "We've got people who've been here for 25 years and some people have been here for five and they all know what they're doing. But their souvlakis all look different." The bottom line, of course, is to roll them tight, so the filling doesn't fall out.

Outside, Gordon McKenzie, 44, an online engineer with a publishing company, and his friend, an IT consultant who doesn't want to give his name, claim to have come up with an actual mathematical formula that describes how to

## Stalacfacts

In one week, Stalactites uses 800 kilograms of chicken and up to 1400 kilograms of lamb.

The restaurant goes through up to six whole rotisserie skewers in a night.

Celebrity patrons have included: Kylie Minogue, Prince, Angry Anderson, actors from *Acropolis Now*, ABC radio presenter Red Symons, actors from *Prisoner*, the band System of a Down, Andre Agassi, former premier Jeff Kennett and former Labor prime minister Gough Whitlam.

Until 2001 the restaurant had closed for business only twice – for two weeks during the gas crisis in 1999 and for one week in 2002 to lay new carpet.

Now the restaurant is open constantly apart from Christmas Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. The restaurant appeared on the news in January when Marcos Baghdatis made it his home base during the Australian Open.

When Greece won the European Championship football tournament in 2004, Stalactites was so busy it ran out of meat.

The family don't own the premises but lease them. They have attempted to buy the property many times but have been denied.

If you like your souvlaki meat well-done, arrive for lunch early in the day – by 12.30pm. After this time, the meat tends to be medium rare because of the quick turnover.



**Above**  
Carla Eustathiou and Elena Andoniou, both 18, on a pitstop between nightclubs.

**Top**  
Eden Cox, 19, and Redmond Hamlett, 23, discuss the unusual interior design.

**Top left**  
The upstairs "private room" has hosted Demis Roussos and Marcos Baghdatis.

**Above and top**  
Sudden rushes for takeaways can have the cooks making five souvlakis at a time.



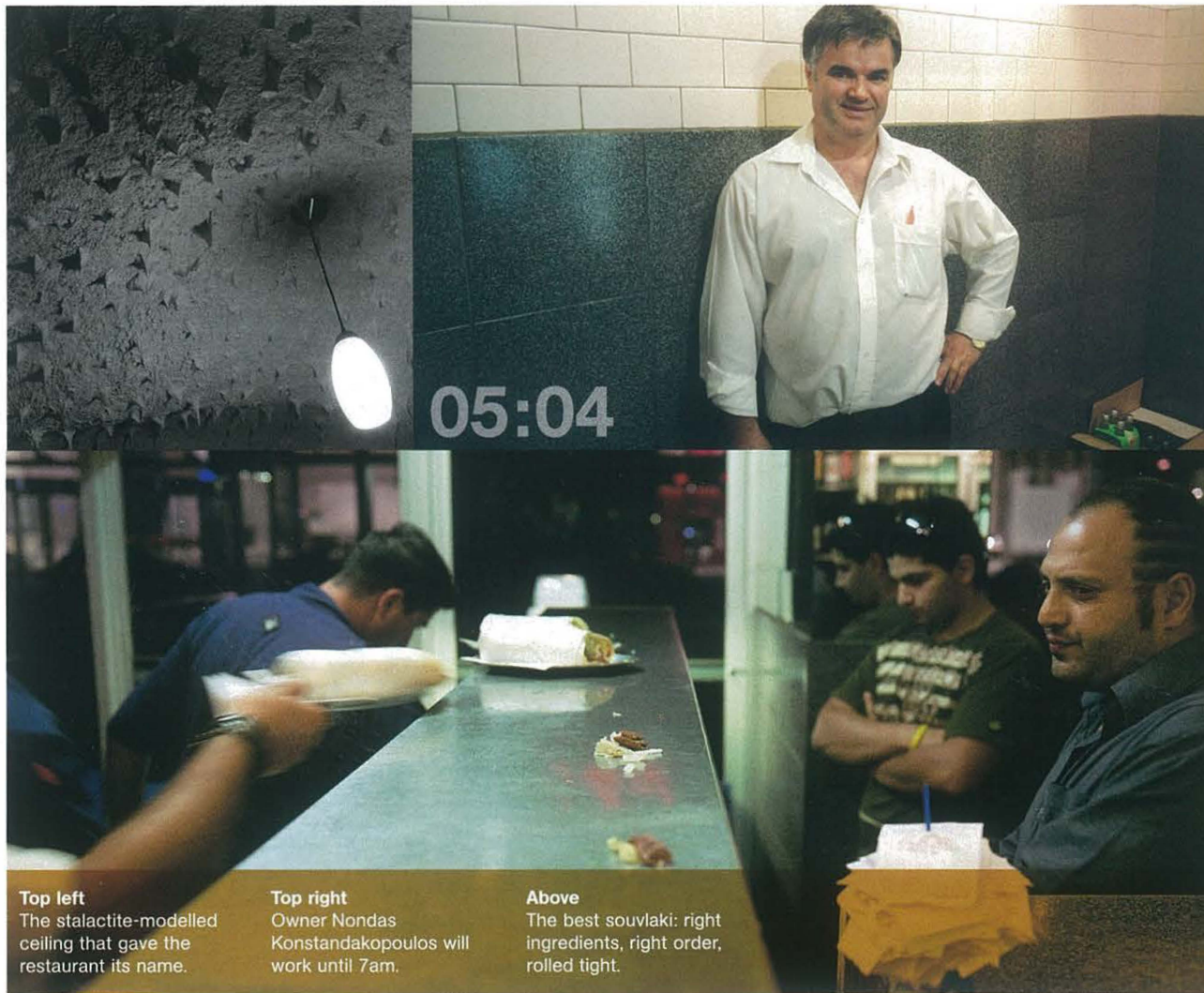
make the perfect souvlaki. They could be having a lend but they seem to have a grasp of complex mathematics. "We've filled a blackboard with calculations," says McKenzie, explaining how the equation determines the amount of meat required in any given souvlaki to avoid the undesirable outcome of wrapping paper being folded into the interior of the souvlaki when it is rolled up, with salad and bread being the constants, and meat the variable.

**04:15** The tables are about half full now, a mix of clubbers in various states of inebriation. Barry Nguyen, 22, a physiotherapist from Glen Waverley, is here, he says matter-of-factly, "because it's the only place that I know that is open 24 hours." He orders the chicken and lamb souvlaki and is pleasantly surprised to hear that he shares the same taste in souvlaki as Marcos Baghdatis.

**05:04** The street is relatively empty now except for the odd group of party stragglers trying to hail already booked cabs. Konstandakopoulos can sit down for a moment and reflect on the night. How does he feel after 10 hours on a Friday night? "Normal, just normal." He takes a nap in the afternoon for a couple of hours and will work through until 7am.

Tonight was a "normal" night – since 10pm they have gone through 200 kilograms of lamb – and although there were a few more people than usual, the orders weren't as big. Families are good for business but tonight there were more young people, who tend to spend less.

Four cleaners will arrive at 5.30am. By 7am, when most of the customers have left, they will vacuum the restaurant floor and Konstandakopoulos will go home, watch television for half an hour, have a shower and go to bed. (m)



**Top left**  
The stalactite-modelled ceiling that gave the restaurant its name.

**Top right**  
Owner Nondas Konstandakopoulos will work until 7am.

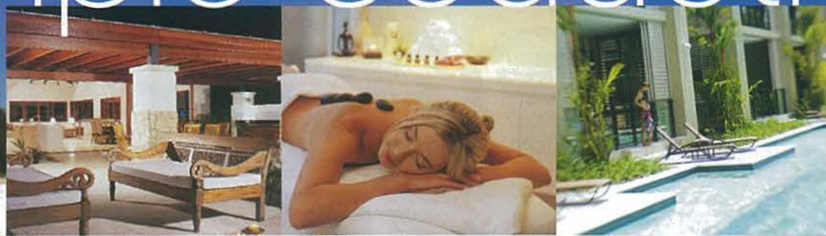
**Above**  
The best souvlaki: right ingredients, right order, rolled tight.

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