

Primitif Café, Brisbane (1957-1974)

On March 11 1957, the Primitif Café opened its doors in the Piccadilly Arcade in downtown Brisbane. Its owner was a woman with the unlikely name of Peter Cox. She now is better known as Peter Hackworth and considered one of the doyennes of Brisbane's hospitality industry. But at that time, she was just a 21-year-old woman, with no previous business experience and a three-month-old baby in tow. To open the café, she used a 1000 pound legacy, left to her by her father.

This cafe was a space where young people could find music, coffee and conversation. With the help of some friends, Peter transformed the cramped space, in the arcade's basement, into one of Brisbane's hippest locations. In no time '*The Prim*', as it was affectionately known, became the home for Brisbane's nascent bohemian culture. It was an alternative oasis, in the otherwise staid and conservative city, where black clothes, goatees and a cool attitude were de rigueur. "*It was popular from the very start,*" remembers Peter "*it seemed to attract all the people who were bored with everything else*".

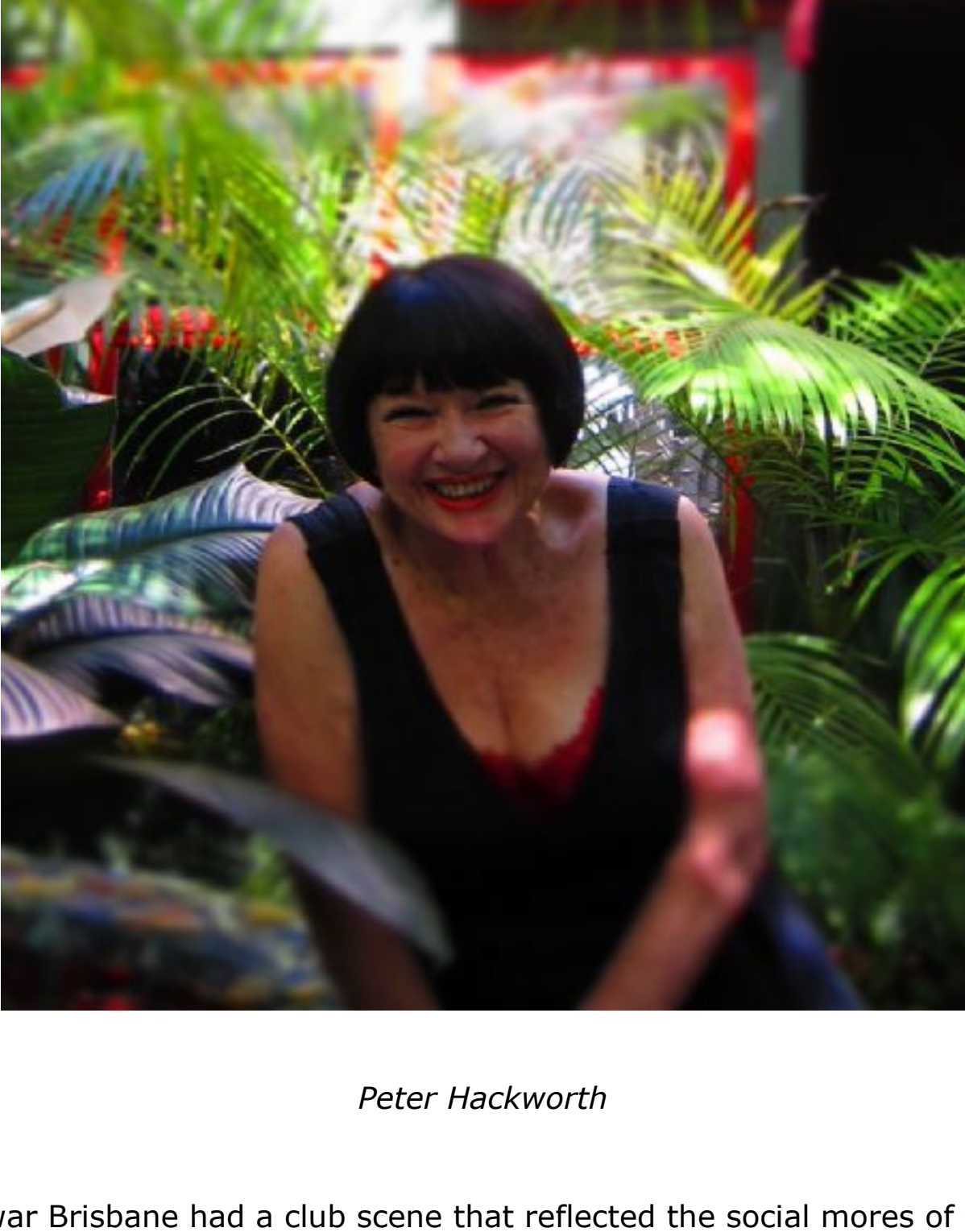
In 1957, Brisbane had fewer than three dozen restaurants, a town where roast, gravy and three veg ruled. But from Primitif's tiny and cramped kitchen, a French chef produced an extensive selection of innovative European dishes rarely seen on Brisbane menus at the time. The Prim's food pre-empted, by at least two decades, the emergence of the "gourmet dining" boom, which swept Brisbane in the mid 80s. Behind the counter, Italian baristas made coffee on one of the city's earliest Gaggia coffee machines. Peter recalls the difficulties she had in obtaining many of the ingredients that were needed at the cafe, particularly good quality coffee and olive oil. She often called on friends returning from Sydney and Melbourne to bring back supplies of such precious commodities.

In an era when the drinking age was 21, there were few places, apart from the ubiquitous milk bar, where young people could gather to listen to music, enjoy a bite to eat and simply 'hang out'. The Primitif provided a space between the milk bar and the pub, a place created and run by a young person for the benefit and entertainment of other young people. Peter encouraged the economic participation of young people and was one of the first restaurateurs in Brisbane to employ university students and struggling artists as waiters and waitresses, beginning what would become a right of passage for many young Brisbane residents on their way to a professional career. Peter continued this practice in all of her establishments and counts many prominent Queenslanders, including Premier Anna Bligh and well-known Brisbane Courier Mail journalist Lizzie Loel, as former employees.

For 17 years, Primitif provided food, music and a space to hang out. Anybody aware of the fickle vagaries of the hospitality industry knows this is a very long time. The Prim literally went under, in the 1974 floods that devastated Brisbane. "*The water reached to the ceiling,*" Peter recalls "*and everything was ruined.*"

Undaunted by this disaster Peter went on to continue her career in the hospitality industry, opening landmark Brisbane restaurants such as *The Great American Disaster*, *Scaramouche* (housed in a disused church in the city) and *The Cat's Tango*, a favourite haunt for students and academics. She was president of the Queensland Restaurant and Caterers Association during the heady days of Brisbane Expo '88, a period that completely refashioned the dining out scene in the city that saw the introduction of side-walk dining. Peter was also the pioneer of Brisbane's market scene and became the driving force behind the city's famous Riverside Markets and later the Green Flea Markets in West End. When pondering the difficulties she faced as a young woman opening a business by herself in the late 1950s; and her enduring success for over fifty years in a cut-throat industry Peter says "*nobody told me I couldn't do it, so I did it*".

Source: <http://www.womenhistory.com.au/person.asp?piD=209>



Peter Hackworth

Post-war Brisbane had a club scene that reflected the social mores of the time. A lunch-time dance club was held every so often at City Hall, King George Square and a number of cafes and diners peppered the inner city, though the rowdier 'good-times' were still predominantly held at the city's many hotels.

People went out earlier, Cloudland was in full swing and rock'n'roll dominated the jukeboxes of local milk bars though live entertainment was illegal on Sundays. Of course, that didn't stop Ms Hackworth hosting Sunday jazz nights at Primitif.

"*I also opened Prim Junior upstairs with three different bands working for the young club scene,*" Ms Hackworth says.

"*I'd have three bands playing and they were Mick Hadley, the Purple Hearts and the Bee Gees*".

"*They'd never allow it today because it was so popular and crowded –you couldn't move, people just moved up and down – I had to put bouncers on the door.*"

From the '60s, Ms Hackworth also remembers the Havana nightclub "*up the road*" and the National Hotel. "*But Fortitude Valley in the '60s wasn't a club scene like it is now – it was mostly Chinese restaurants – Brisbane today is very, very different.*"

Source: [http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/entertainment/restaurants-and-bars/charting-brisbanes-nightclub-family-tree-20101005-165tr.html#1950 to 1969](http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/entertainment/restaurants-and-bars/charting-brisbanes-nightclub-family-tree-20101005-165tr.html#1950%20to%201969)



Peter Hackworth

Peter has made a significant contribution to Queensland culture over the past fifty years. In that time, she has created a series of brave and eclectic venues and events - unique restaurants, cafes, bars, craft and farmers markets. Each establishment has been infused with theatrical and eccentric design, introducing brave new world cuisine to Queenslanders and giving them a vibrant and diverse dining experience. Her convivial atmospheres have also given forums for Queensland artists, actors, musicians, writers and craftspeople to converge, expose and share their ideas.

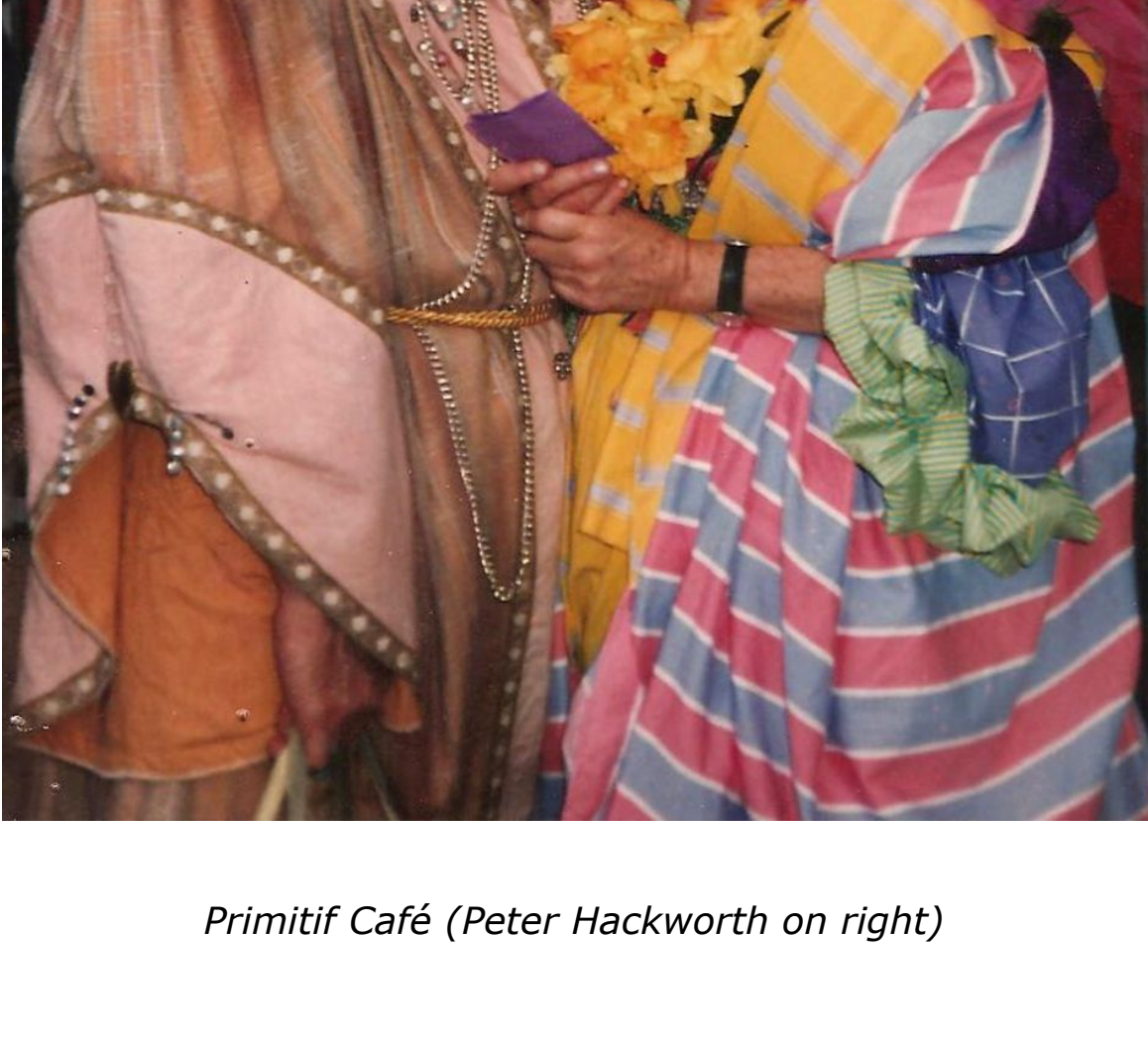
Peter is an inspiration for female entrepreneurs and businesswomen. At 22 years old, she opened a Jazz club/European bistro called PRIMITIF in the Piccadilly arcade. PRIMITIF was one of two places in Brisbane serving European cuisine (which the public then called wop food) and espresso coffee, and it doubled as a music venue launching the careers of *Peter Allen*, *The Bee Gees* and *The Purple Hearts*.

Seventeen years later, Peter lost PRIMITIF in the great flood of 1974, but pioneered on, opening a string of fabulous firsts for Brisbane. *The Great American Disaster* - the first Pop art Yankee diner in Brisbane. She then opened *Manouche* - a French provincial restaurant and the iconic award winning French restaurant *Scaramouche* in an old church at North Quay.

She furthered her menu in the 80s with award winning *The Cats Tango* at St Lucia and *New York Latin* at Southbank, introducing Brisbane to Nuevo Latino Cuisine and *Plum Cafe/Deli* in Kenmore. She has consulted and designed on numerous restaurants throughout Australia.

At the request of artist friends, opened a craft market in *The Cat's Tango* car park that later became the iconic Riverside Markets. She has led her life by generosity and instinct. Her passion and desire to make convivial atmospheres and communities led her to open the *Southbank Crafts Village*, *Green Flea Community Markets* at West End and *Kelvin Grove Farmers Markets*, winning numerous tourism awards for her vision. These places have provided important shared outdoor spaces for the community, festival to integrate food shopping, food, coffee, social arts and entertainment.

Source: <http://gallery.women.qld.gov.au/entry/Peter%20Hackworth/165>



Primitif Café (Peter Hackworth on right)

Peter Hackworth is Brisbane's first lady of markets, restaurants, cafes and bars. A true entrepreneur and highly successful businesswoman, who for over 50 years created a series of brave, eclectic and iconic venues and events, that continue to transform Brisbane's cultural and gastronomic landscape.

In 1958, at just 22 years of age Peter opened a European bistro and jazz club called Primitif – one of only 2 places serving espresso coffee at the time. She followed this landmark venue up with another, *The Great American Disaster* - Brisbane's first Pop Art Yankee diner. Two French restaurants followed including one of Brisbane's most famous – *Scaramouche*. In the 80's Peter opened award winning *The Cats Tango* complete with Arabian themed palm reading, belly dancing and extraordinary dining. And just to top it off opened the *New York Latin* introducing Brisbane to the previously unheard of Nuevo Latin food and music. With the help of her artist friends Peter then launched her craft and farmers market phenomenon. Peter's famous and longest running markets like Riverside and Southbank have paved the way for some of Brisbane's newest like Kelvin Grove and Boggo Road.

Each of Peter's establishments has been infused with theatrical and eccentric design, introducing brave new world cuisine to Queenslanders and giving them a vibrant and diverse dining experience – transforming Brisbane from big country town to world-class city. Her convivial atmospheres and market communities have also given forums for Queensland artists, actors, musicians, writers and craftspeople to converge, expose and share their ideas, providing the community with important outdoor spaces to integrate food, shopping, coffee, arts and entertainment.

For Peter, people are important, she loves seeing ideas and projects come to fruition, she leads her life with generosity, instinct and passion, she is truly one of a kind and she is always on the look out for the next brave adventure.

Source: <http://www.peterhackworthgroup.com.au/bio.html>



Peter Hackworth

Peter continues to work and dream and believes you can achieve anything if you have the passion, courage, belief and determination to follow your heart.

Link to a 45-minute interview with Peter Hackworth broadcast on ABC Radio on 21st July 2009.

http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/local/brisbane/conversations/200907/r403534_1898785.mp3