Sunday Times
6 July 2008

INJECTING NEW LIFE

Some of the seamier side of life has disappeared from the neighbourhood and it's the cosmopolitan flavour and cultural mix that attracts people now

by Hermione Scott

It may be a small street but it's got big memories. Building designer Anthony Casella, who live and works at No. 11, has lived in Ruth St for 10 years and says when he first bought it was as undesirable as the syringes and burnt-out cars that lay behind in a laneway.

"It was the closest I could get to Perth that was affordable," he says.

"I designed the top floor, which I live in, and the middle and lower floors were made into offices.

"l could see the area had potential, and knew that once East Perth and the inner city had been exhausted, people would have to come here eventually. And they did."

Anthony says he cleaned up the laneway at the rear of his house and planted olive trees which prompted the council to bituminise it and also plant trees along the streetscape.

"There are many owner-occupiers in the street now and everyone is very house proud and makes an effort to keep the street looking beautiful," he says.

"It is a real community. We have laneway parties every year and just last week it was my birthday and lots of people from the street came over.

"There is a group of locals who have a drink after work every day at the Northbridge Hotel.

"I take my dog, Humma, for a walk around the block and stop in for a beer. They all love Humma and feel she is their own."

Another resident who likes a social drink is Palazzo Automotives owner Paul Palazzo.

"Everyone who drops in after five knows there is beer in the fridge for them," he says.

Paul, who has been in business at 12 Ruth St for 40 years, says he enjoys its central location, which is also ideal for customers.

"People come and drop off their cars for a service and go for a coffee at Tarts around the corner, feed the ducks at Hyde Park with their kids or go to town for a shop." he says.

"We have customers come from as far as Mandurah and Gingin and some have been coming so long their kids and grandchildren now continue the trend.

"I have been to quite a few weddings of customers over the years."

Paul's business, which recently won the 2008 Motor Trades Association Repair of the Year award, has employed about 50 apprentices, all of whom he refers to as his "sons".

"My son, Anthony, works for me and will eventually take over but I treat everyone the same," he says.

"All of my staff have been here for many, many years. One of my mechanics, Jo, started sweeping floors when he was 14."

New resident Rosemaree Cunningham, who renovates houses and has lived all over Perth, says she enjoys the street's access to Perth's

cosmopolitan lifestyle.

"It has amazing proximity to really interesting traders, one-off furniture and clothing stores small galleries and cafes, pubs and restaurants," she says.

"If I were never to cook again I could eat somewhere different every night of the week.

"My 18-year-old son loves it because he can walk to all the night life. The downside is it's a meeting point for all his scaly mates."

Despite being in the thick of it, Rosemaree says the street is whisper-quiet.

"It feels like we live in a suburban street," she says.

"The street and surrounding streets have a wide population base with many Italians and Asian communities and that brings a real cultural mix."

Rosemaree says community spirit is high and uses the times she was renovating her Ruth St home as a good example.

"Trucks and other large vehicles needed to get into the street but it has limited space and access, the boys over at the mechanics used to park the cars they were working on in tandem car bays and move them just before the trucks came. They would even stand in the spaces with their arms crossed," she says.

"Everyone looks out for one another. No one is made to feel unwelcome."