

Milkshakes, fancy sundaes and steak and eggs with chips

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Stunning pictures of the iconic Greek milk bars and cafes of the 1950s that brought 'exotic' food and art deco glamour to Australia's suburb and country town.

- Stylish Greek milk bars were in every Australian suburb and country town
- Since the 1930s Greek families opened them all hours seven days a week
- They had American names like the Niagara, Astoria and the Paragon
- The cafes were decorated in glamorous art deco style
- they served steak and eggs, American ice cream sundaes and chips
- Evocative images from family albums are collected in stunning new book
- 'Greek Cafes & Milk Bars of Australia' has hundreds of images and stories

They had names like the Paragon, the Niagara, the Astoria and the California cafe and they graced the main streets of country towns around Australia with their iconic art deco style interiors and their offer of 'exotic' American style meals.

For Australians from the 1940s and for decades after the milk bars and cafes often run by Greek immigrant families provided a taste of exciting food and a glamorous retreat from ordinary life.

Some were attached to picture show houses, making the link to Hollywood escapism even stronger, and they were the best place to find the previously unknown American milk chocolate and ice cream sundaes in towns where the only alternative dining out venue was the local pub.



Virtually every Australian town and suburb once had a Greek cafe or milk bar. They did not serve Greek food but were run by Greeks serving Australian food of the time - steak and eggs; mixed grill and chips with lettuce, tomato and beetroot, tinned spaghetti on toast, sliced white bread and butter, tea and milkshakes.

They flourished in country towns like Longreach in Queensland, Narrandera, Nyngan, Cootamundra and Gundagai in NSW as well as in capital cities around the nation.



Perth's first milk bar, the Golden Star Milk Bar in Perth operated by Stavros and John Coufos, who are pictured in the centre behind the counter, opened in 1935. The brothers, from the Greek island of Kastellorizo, sparked a string of similar establishments across the city

But the Greek cafés were catering to the established tastes of their overwhelmingly British-Australian clientele in what was then, racially and culturally, a 'white Australia'.

As documented by the authors of a new book **Greek Cafes and Milk Bars of Australia** which documentary photograph Effy Alexakis and historian Leonard Janiszewski have spent 30 years researching, the cafes were uniquely Australian.

The Black & White Fruit Milk Bar in Wollongong (Left) which was taken over in 1956 by brothers Peter, Harry and Theo Tambakis and so successful that other Greek-run milk bars soon appeared. The milk bar attendants' uniforms were an important 'visual branding' and styles differed from one cafe to another



Sisters Marion (left) and Julie Canaris in their parents' Star Milk Bar in Darwin in 1948 which proved to be a 'real money spinner' selling ice creams, milkshakes, scorched almonds, lemon squash, Cherry Ripes and cigarettes'. A Greek lady made the uniforms and people still recognise 'Julie from the Star Milk Bar' today

The authors conducted 1800 interviews and prised evocative images from family albums of cafe owners of the milk bars of last century as well as taking hundreds of stunning photographs and the few that survive today.

Janiszewski writes in the book, 'In an Australia we still remember, in each suburb and every country town, was the Greek cafe or milk bar – open all hours, 7 days a

week. Remember the Niagara, the Parthenon, the Astoria and the Paragon?

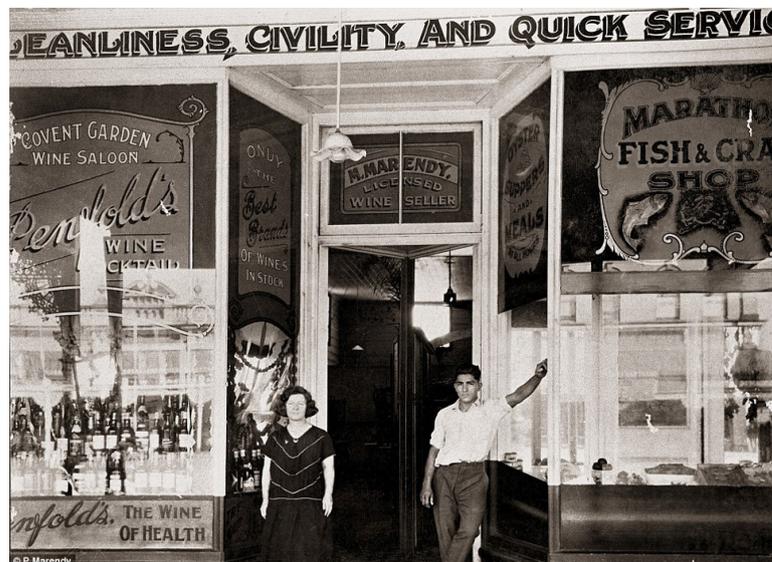
'They gave us more than milkshakes, lollies, ice cream and home-style meals. With Modernist designs, American gadgetry and coloured lights, Greek cafes brought atmosphere, a touch of glamour, at times a hint of Hollywood – a little break from the mundane reality of local life.'

'They were the beginning of fast food in Australia and in that way they were the victim of their own success when [McDonalds and KFC] took over and highways began to bypass country towns,' Effy Alexakis told Daily Mail Australia.



Peter Zantiotis (below) and his father Lambros Zantiotis (far right) in the Busy Bee Cafe in Gunnedah in the 1940s which opened in 1933 and was later operated by Peter and his wife Loula. Greek interior de-signer, Stephen Varvaressos installed its glamorous art deco fittings which remained virtually unchanged for 70 years

While many people think of mid-20th Century Australia as



a sponge for British, European and then American culture, the cafes and milk bars were such a hit here that they became a global export, with entrepreneurs opening establishments overseas in England, New Zealand and South Africa.

And Leonard Janiszewski says the slogan 'quality, service and cleanliness', usually attributed to McDonalds founder Ray Kroc, was originally

A forerunner to the classic Greek milk bars of the 1950s was the Marathon Cafe, Wine and Fish Shop (pictured with Emanuel Marendy and a staff member in the late 1920s) in the Queensland town of Bundaberg by the Marendy brothers who promoted 'cleanliness, civility and quick service' on their shop sign

The Greek Australian milk bar was soon exported to England and South Africa and to New Zealand where the Golden Gate Milk Bar (pictured, in Wellington in 1938) was opened by Peter Bares in the city's central business district



© Bares family and ZB Blades

coined by Greek-American caterers and adopted in the Greek Australian cafes.

'With their round windows, which were in the curvilinear art deco style, serving up milk shakes and American style ice-cream and often next door to the picture theatre they were a marriage between food and fantasy,' he said.

'It was all part of a package wrapped up like a gift.'

Steak and eggs or a mixed grill could be bought with an 'American Beauty' fancy sundae for dessert, and a spider soda drink - cocoa cola with ice cream - or a flavoured milkshake in a chilled metal shaker to wash it all down.

'To a degree, the Greek café was a Trojan horse for the Americanisation of Australian eating habits well before the 1950s,' Janiszewski said.

'Prior to that Australians didn't have smooth ice cream or milk chocolate, only dark chocolate.'

Effy Alexakis, whose own family emigrated from Greece to

The Astoria Cafe in Newcastle's Hunter Street, pictured in the late 1940s, with proprietor Jerry Kolivas (centre, right, partly obscured by the soda fountain) shows the classic art deco design and the female staff uniforms. The Astoria was a block from the picture theatre and was flocked to by cinema goers



Australia in the 1950s and later ran a fish and chip shop in Padstow in western Sydney, began researching Greek Australian cultural history initially to break down stereotypes.

Greek Australians were classified by their common occupations of milk bar or cafe owner and fish'n'chip shop proprietor just as Italian Australians were often thought of as fruit and vegetable shop owners.

'Then we started looking at the pictures of these cafes and saw the signs saying "American ice cream and chocolate" and began to recognise the American influence in the Greek café.

Cafes run by Greek immigrant families earlier in the 20th century were often called oyster bars or saloons, and their proprietors broadened the customers and fare beyond working class men and oysters and beer.

Greek-run oyster saloons sold confectionery, fruit, meat dishes and 'American Soda Fountain Drinks' as early as 1914 and encouraged women and families through their doors.

Janiszewski said the classic Greek Australian cafe first came into being in the 1930s when a Greek immigrant Joachim Tavlarides - who changed his name to Mick Adams - opened up the Black & White 4d Milk Bar in Martin Place, in the centre of Sydney's CBD.

So named because milk was priced at four pence a glass, the cafe created by Adams modelled it self on the American drugstore 'soda parlour', but called it a milk bar, not a term used in the US because they associated bars with alcohol.

Adams, the book says 'was impressed by the soda parlour's focus on rapid bar trade over sit down service and the use of electric mixers to create milk drinks swiftly.

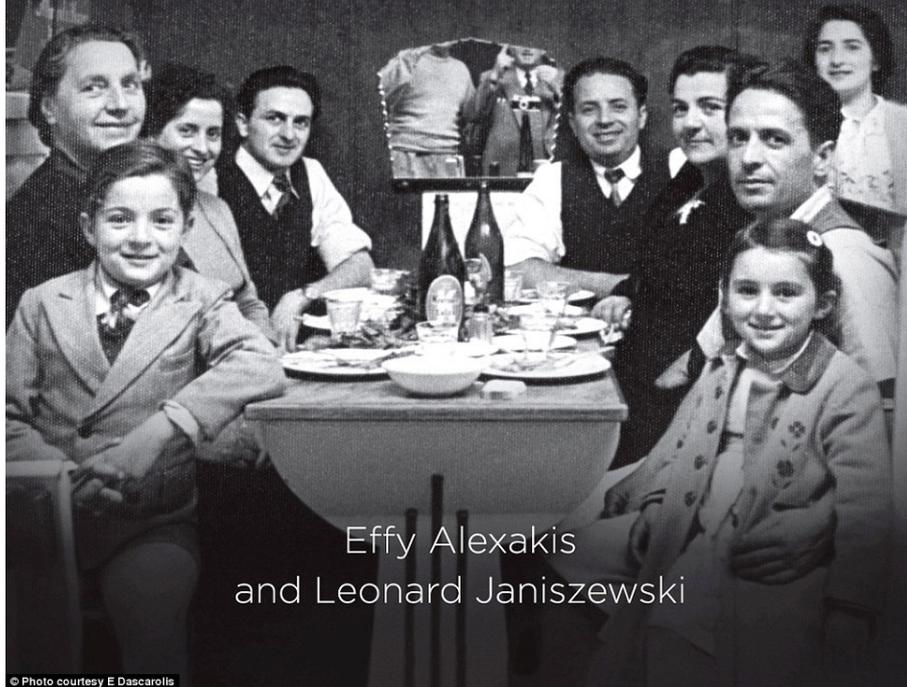
'A rapid stand-up trade in milkshakes became the successful commercial foundation of the milk bar concept.' Adams would go on to open a Black & White milk bar chain.

But the iconic art deco style of the cafes was to evolve far from Sydney, in the western central NSW country town of Nyngan.

Cafe owner, Jack Vanges, who later became the town's mayor, opened the California café, one of three Greek-run cafés in Nyngan, all with American names. The others were the Niagara and the Golden Gate.

Vanges commissioned Greek designer, Stephen Varvaessos, to outfit the California in elegant Art Deco curves with shiny surfaces and a menu of American food. A style was born.

GREEK CAFÉS & MILK BARS OF AUSTRALIA



Effy Alexakis and Leonard Janiszewski

© Photo courtesy E Dascarolis

The cover of the new book Greek Cafes & Milk Bars of Australia shows the Theodorakis family and friends at their Cootamundra cafe in 1952 (from left) George Theodorakis, 8, Maria Coombes, Katina and Spiro Vardis, Nick, Marea, Manoli and Chrisanthy, 4, Theodorakis and at the back, Evangelina Theodorakis

Another of Varvaessos's glamorously shop-fitted cafes was the Busy Bee in Gunnedah, 400km north-west of Sydney, which was opened by the Zantiotis family from the Greek island of Kythera in 1933.

Peter Zantiotis took over from his father and he and his wife Loula



Cafe owner, Jack Vanges (pictured, left) whose real name was Evangelous Vangis and who later became the town's mayor, opened the California cafe (pictured) in the western NSW country town of Nyngan in the 1930s which was outfitted in art deco design by Stephen Varvaessos, and which started a cafe style revolution

The classic Greek Australian cafe first came into being in the 1930s when a Greek immigrant Joachim Tavlarides - who changed his name to Mick Adams - opened up the Black & White 4d Milk Bar in Martin Place (pictured in 1934)

operated the cafe for decades and continued after Peter's death, only closing in 2007.

On a street corner in Wollongong, 80km south of Sydney, three brothers, Peter, Harry and Theo Tambakis took over the Black & White Fruit Milk Bar in 1956 and made it so successful that other Greek run milk bars soon appeared, including the Monterey, the California and the Atlanta.

Alexakis and Janiszewski say in their book that uniforms worn by milk bar attendants became 'a significant element of ... visual branding'.

'Each establishment distinguished itself from its local competitors by highlighting and contrasting different design elements.'

Perth's first milk bar, the Golden Star Milk Bar in Perth operated by Stavros and John Coufos, who are pictured in the centre behind the counter, opened in 1935. The brothers, from the Greek island of Kastellorizo, sparked a string of similar establishments across the city.

Sisters Marion and Julie Canaris worked in their parents' Star Milk Bar in Darwin in the 1940s, which proved to be a 'real money spinner' selling ice creams, milkshakes, scorched almonds, lemon squash, Cherry Ripes and cigarettes'.

A Greek dressmaker made the girls' uniforms, which Julie Canaris said 'looked nice ... and I have people



recognising me even today as "Julie from the Star Milk Bar".'



The Silver Star Cafe in Cootamundra, 400km south-west of Sydney, in 1936 members of the Nicholidakis family proprietors and staff, from left to right, Elaine, waitress Mona Herring, Marea, Michael, waiter Nick Theodorakis and Angelo Nicholidakis. The family changed its name to Nicholson and ran the cafe for 40 years

For the next five decades, until their decline in the 1980s, the owners of cafes and milk bars would come from various parts of Greece, principally the island of Kythera, but also from Kastellorizo, and, in the city of Newcastle north of Sydney, mainly from Arcadia and Ithaca.



The interior of the Black & White 4d Milk Bar, above in 1934, which was so named because milk was priced at four pence a glass. The cafe was modelled on American style soda parlours with rapid bar trade preferred over sit down service and the use of electric mixers to create milk drinks swiftly



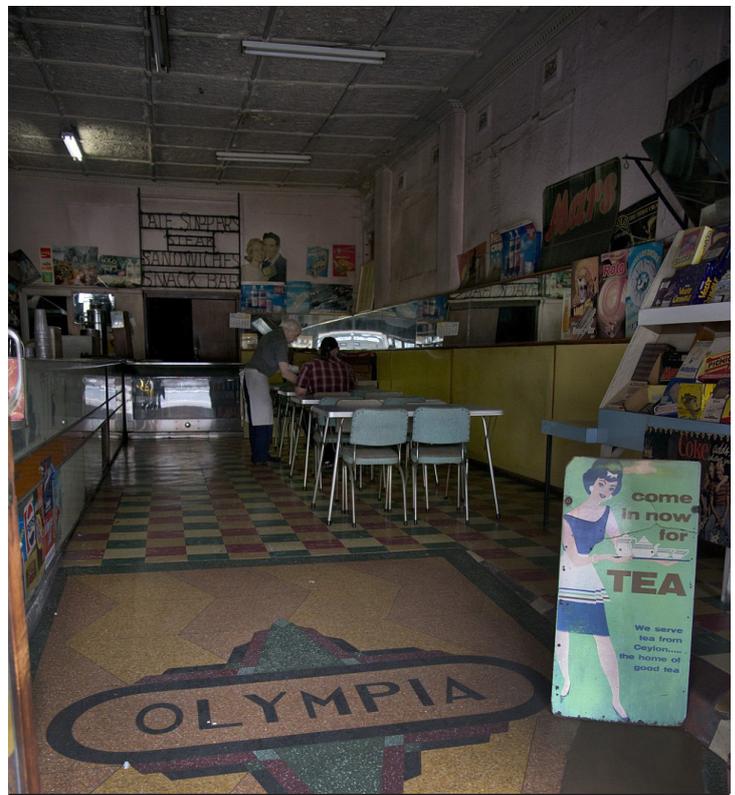
The Boomerang café in the North Queensland town of Silkwood, pictured in 1987 with family proprietors (from left to right) George, Anthoula, Mick and Anna Tsakissiris. The family came from Kastellorizo in the 1920s and following Mick's death in 1991 Anthoula continued to run it, but it was damaged in Cyclone Larry in 2006

The Peloponnesian region produced cafe owners from the Phillos, Varvaessos, Chellas, Panagopoulos, Dassopoulos, Favas, Georgiadis, Costadelos, Kringas, Tarifas, Bourtzos, Akon [Economopoulos], Soulos, Panopoulos, Loizos, Iliopoulos, Kostakis, Karanges and Androutsos families.

The march of the fast food chains and the decline of the Greek family run cafes and milk bars over the last 30 years has left only a few establishments open.

Effy Alexakis said a notable exception was the Olympia on Parramatta Road in the inner western Sydney suburb of Stanmore.

Alexakis said the milk bar, whose elderly owner, Mr Fotiou, still opens it from early until late six or seven



The Olympia Milk Bar, in the inner-western Sydney suburb of Stanmore, still opens from early until late six or seven days a week by its elderly owner Mr Fotiou (pictured) and is a local cultural icon which has featured in two novels

days a week, has a cult following.

The Olympia retains much of its 50s and 60s fittings and has become 'a local cultural icon' and featured in two novels.

Moulos Brothers Oyster Saloon, in Singleton 200km north-west of Sydney pictured some time after its 1911 opening, was operated by John Moulos and encouraged women and family customers and served up confectionery, fruit, meat dishes and 'American Soda Fountain Drinks'



