



# reminiscences

The apartment blocks towering over Broadway, the dominance of the retail chain stores dotted along the strip and the busy footpaths filled with unfamiliar faces – these are not characteristics of a Newmarket former retailer in the area Kevyn Male remembers.

Back in the '80s, as owner of landmark women's fashion store The Three Bears, he remembers: "I could walk down Broadway and name everybody." Today, it's a different story. "I couldn't tell you the name of one shop owner – not one."

But, chances are, many of the strangers Kevyn can't name will be familiar with the legacy he has left behind – jean store Route 66, his second success story there, now owned and managed by son Todd. "I still go to the shop and wave the flag," he says, "but I miss the old Newmarket. I used to love sweeping the front of the shop and doing my own windows – I didn't need a window display artist for 20 years, 'til I ran out of ideas."

But the ideas flowed thick and fast for 40 years. They began with the opening of the original version of The Three Bears on the corner of Broadway and Morrow Street in 1966 in a shop that sold only factory overruns and seconds. They continued through a move in 1978 to what was Newmarket Borough's former town hall (opposite and slightly north of the Rialto Centre) with exclusive women's fashion. And they ended with the launch in 1988 of what was to become one of Levi's largest single accounts in Australasia, Route 66.

At its peak, The Three Bears enjoyed a turnover of \$5 million, with a shop staff of just seven full-timers and one part-time office person. Between 1988 and 1991 it averaged around \$90,000 a week and "you could just about count on taking \$100,000 on day one of a Three Bears' sale."

## of a retailer

But, by 1992, "once the Aussies and the big chains had hit town, I knew the writing was on the wall. I didn't have one label to myself. They made it and they sold it."

The Three Bears closed in 1995, and Route 66 became a focus for Kevyn. Converting its former post office site into an edgy jean store with son Todd was a highlight, he says, as was the release of Levi's 501 jeans here. With just 1200 pairs released throughout the country and Route 66 stocking 800 of them, interest was unparalleled. "It was the biggest reaction to a garment launch we've had. There was a queue 100 yards long outside on launch day."

That said, Route 66's simple white cotton T-shirt, Hane's Beefy T, was its star seller. "We made more money out of that than any other product. We'd stack it high and sell it low." In the late '80s, it sold at a rate of 10 – 12,000 units a year and grossed an annual \$100,000.

But times have changed. Now, aged 64, the former king of the strip has turned management of his legacy over to his son. His passion for the business and interest in shop design have not faded, though. He's currently offering his services as a mentor and helping retailers with shopfitting and design when needed.

Oh, and he's been busying himself with producing a 12-book catalogue over the last 12 years, including three on retail. He indulges himself in a love of black-and-white photography and, from a studio in his Far North home of Taupo Bay (where he now resides three weeks out of four), he's turned his hand to painting.

'Conceptual art,' as he describes it. Having sold the Japanese-inspired health farm home he built at Whitford, he's now also overseeing two new coastal developments in Northland's Doubtless Bay.

He'll always have a fondness for the old days on Broadway, however. "The early Three Bear's days, when the floorboards went up and down, the shop racks were made from galvanised pipe and we had rough-sawn 6 x 2's on the wall – those were the days."

His opinion about Nuffield Street and the new Westfield development opposite 277 – "I like it, it's superb presentation, but it's not me."