

# SPOTLIGHT ON ANDY FREEMAN

CEO AND FOUNDER OF  
SNEAKERS & JEANS, PERTH



Perth's original architect of revelry, Andy Freeman is the creative marketing mind behind some of Perth's most exciting and original venues. Back in the days when TGI Fridays, Planet Hollywood and Hard Rock Café were big everywhere but here in Perth, Andy was touring Australia and the UK as a multi-award-winning flair bartender, planning to shake up Perth. This is the guy who got the party started and really kicked off the lively bar scene Perth enjoys today.

“ Finding that secret sauce that makes unique brands and experiences is not in any recipe book ... It's taking what you feel and finding a way to share that with the consumer. ”

## Give us your bbq pitch. What do you do?

We create brands that give Perth good vibes and good times. Some we've built up and sold along the way, but of the five in our current line-up there's Varnish on King, Perth's first American whiskey bar. There's The Flour Factory function centre, restaurant and bar, with over 100 gins to try with a bespoke garnish and tonic. Then came Caballitos; Perth's first fun (and a little reckless) tequila bar and Mexican cantina. I guess we matured a little bit when we opened Hadiqa, the first middle-eastern venue in the city – a chic, 'grammable and female-friendly restaurant and rooftop terrace bar. And two floors below, we opened Goody Two's, bringing good tunes, great cocktails and a place to dance in plush, comfortable surroundings.

## Did you always plan to work in this industry?

My brain was always wired for the creative side – art, English, sport – and when I left school, I wanted a paid social life and a job that would take me travelling. I wanted a career I could put in my pocket and pull out at London, Paris, New York and get a job. Hospitality gave me all of that.

## So, how did it all begin?

I studied Hospitality and Tourism at TAFE, but it was in bartending that it all started. I met a guy from the UK who did flair bartending. I got bitten by that bug and travelled Australia competing in flair. Then, not long after completing my TAFE course, I got on a plane to the UK to compete in London, Scotland and all over. By the time I arrived back in Perth I was 23 with a whole bunch of awards and ideas. I was working around town as a cocktail bartender for hire essentially – a different bar every night, but things really kicked off when we bought Luxe Bar. And the rest is history.

## How would you describe yourself?

I was always a shy, quiet achiever, but hospitality quickly brings people like me out of their shell. You're brought into a really strong team environment where everyone relies and depends on each other. And it's lights, camera, action and you're on stage. So you have to kind of create a persona for yourself. Underneath that, I'm still an introverted, creative marketing guy who always thought CEO was a big word for someone like me. I've always worked hard and loved the industry I've chosen – I've never shied away from any challenges.

## What do you love most about the industry?

The people, food, music, wine, energy and fun. It's not just a job, it's a lifestyle choice. It's busy, and every day is different. Our office has a great team, with great music playing all day. We wear sneakers and jeans to work. We're very relaxed, but we're very focused. I don't work late nights anymore, I've done my apprenticeship, but I crush my days and love feeding the night-time economy with new brands and concepts.

## What's the best part of your job?

Creating. We don't sit around in meetings all day with spreadsheets, flip charts and whiteboards. For us, it's a lot of gut. A lot of emotion. A lot of creativity and connectivity. Finding that secret sauce that makes unique brands and experiences can't be found in a recipe book. And nothing we do is cookie cutter stuff. It's taking what you feel and finding a way to share that with the consumer. We're leaders, not followers.

## What's your best advice for anyone starting out?

While you're still finding out who you are and where you want to be, hospitality is a fun and vibrant industry that allows you to study during the day, work nights and weekends and get paid to have a good time with a great community of people. That's not to say it isn't hard work. It's a lot of hard work, but there's lots of opportunity. When I got my first job, I was a glassy. I saw the guys in the bar talking to the girls, so I worked my way into the bar. Then I saw the bar manager getting the glory for all my hard work, so I took his job six months later. Now I'm CEO, I always say to my exec team, if you want my job, come and get it, buddy!

## And what's next for you?

Pirate Life Brewery is the next thing. Started in SA by a couple of WA guys. They always wanted to open a tavern/brewery in their hometown and approached me. The design, layers and features make it a homecoming brewery like no other. It's a whopper and coming very soon. And we've got plenty more ideas coming through to put the gellignite sticks into the parts of Perth that need to be shaken up and set alight.

## Connect with Andy on LinkedIn

[www.linkedin.com/in/andy-freeman-255b5634/](http://www.linkedin.com/in/andy-freeman-255b5634/)

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