Rolling Back the Years: December 1995-2005

We get back into the archives and review the last three decades of the industry, as seen through the eyes of Wares magazine. Merv Robertson reports.

20 YEARS AGO – DECEMBER 1995

In December 1995, as in December 1978, 48 year-old Farrah Fawcett was Playboy’s cover girl. With four Emmy Award and 6 Golden Globe nominations behind her, Farrah died from cancer in 2009, aged 62.

Another repeat – remember the Brixton riots? It was on 13 December 1995. Hundreds of youths attacked police, ransacked shops and burned cars following the death of a black man in police custody.

And at 31 December 1995, our population was 3,706,700 souls, which was just 1.6% up on the previous year. Since you asked, for every 100 females there were 97.3 males – hardly a man drought back then...

Is the price right? – Wares’ editorial 20 years ago looked at the topics which had made the running in 1995, including the discontinuation of RRRPs, the Guild addressing problems facing the service industry, F&P stealing market share in Australia with its Smart Drive washer and the rapid upsurge of personal computer sales.

On the subject of RRRPs, Sony’s Carl Rose told Wares at the time: “We have become increasingly concerned with some issues relating to recommended retail pricing. After considerable discussion of various options, we have decided to realign our recommended retail prices (current mark-up structure remains unchanged) in accordance with the sell-in prices necessary to achieve our targeted sales.”

He added that this would reflect the true value of Sony products rather than a percentage discount off an RRP which few customers ever paid.

Carl now lives in Sydney where he has his own business consultancy with a focus on consumer electronics & appliances. He has worked with Harvey Norman in the past and is currently consulting to Miele.

Still working with shavers – 20 years ago, Philips was celebrating a remarkable milestone, the sale of the 300 millionth Philihave electric shaver. Rebecca Wootton was Product Manager back then. A special limited edition, HS930 marked the achievement and, including an adapter cord for an in-car cigarette lighter, retailed at $299 or around $450 today!

Becs is now Rebecca Nevill, a happy “stay at home mum” to two children, living in Auckland.

Rices and the rise of the expo – Rice Refrigeration in Southland was a long established family business which became simply Rices, when entrepreneurial Sales Manager Dennis O’Brien and his Accountant partner Allan Baxter bought the company.

Dennis (aka “The Silver Fox”) was a brilliant retailer and the pioneer of the expo phenomenon which swept the country in the late 1980s and 1990s.

The Rices event was held at Invercargill’s Ascot Hotel and in 1995, as usual, suppliers queued up with special offers which accumulated into a myriad of product lines going out the door at very hot prices.

Rices’ Expo was heavily promoted. As Dennis told Wares at the time: “They just keep getting bigger and better!” The three-day extravaganza returned sales of $2.5 million (which equates to $3.75 million today), an extraordinary outcome! Both Dennis and Allan are retired and both still live in Invercargill.

Dick Smith’s expansion – 20 years ago, Dick Smith Electronics was expanding its Authorised Distributor Network and had just...
20 years ago, Piaggi Systems in Thames was Dick Smith’s latest Authorised Distributor.

Piaggi was a computer company which had been in operation for 14 years, owned by husband & wife team Roseann Piaggi and Philip Blake. They had developed software, including costing and wages systems which were used by several local businesses and were computer retailers as well.

Philip considered the Dick Smith agency a natural progression: “We wanted to grow a little bit with safety and Dick Smith Electronics provided that avenue,” he explained. The pair left the business in 2003 and sadly Philip passed away 10 years later. Roseann has retired to Auckland to be close to family.

Customers were greeted by a large multimedia screen pulsating with brilliant pictures, kept there with the coffee bar and a trial video game area which was attracting queues.

Tim Gunther was Assistant Manager back then and he pointed out: “Each display is vastly different, incorporating a variety of brands, colours and styling, but with a definite emphasis on the fact that the appliances are working.”

The Southpower retail operation was bought by Smiths City in 1997 (Wares Iconic Retailer series, August 2012) and renamed Powerstore. These days Tim is a Service Account Representative for Otis Elevators in Christchurch.

“It’s war out there” – The Fijian Resort hosted the 1995 Betta Electrical conference. Themed, “It’s war out there”, General Manager Warren Brewin, now CEO of the Lifestyle Retail Group, proclaimed the event a great success.

At the AGM, Graeme Wingate was re-elected Group Chairman and the board was the late Jack Wallis as Deputy Chair along with the late Alf Ellis, Mark Jury, Des O’Neill and Graeme Findlay.

At the conference dinner, NEC Home Electronics won the Supplier of the Year Award with Tharcold Betta Electrical lauded as Member of the Year. On the final day, teams contested the Awful Cup, a volleyball trophy presented by Larry Temperly of Amalgamated Finance.

Today, the two Graemes and Des have retired, Mark heads up ECL Group a (now trading as Applianceplus) and Larry has his own management consultancy, working primarily in the finance industry.

RJ Magness’ jubilee – The 50th jubilee of Wares Iconic Retailer RJ Magness (February 2011) was marked in December 1995 by a big show in Auckland. Roly Magness had founded the business in 1945 with premises at 71 New North Road in Eden Terrace, for which he paid 5 shillings a week rent. He had started Magness Sound in 1935.

Gary Paykel spoke at the birthday function, saying: “I didn’t know until tonight that Roly once manufactured fridges and I’m glad he gave it up.” These Magness-branded open unit fridges were in fact produced in a small factory behind the shop in 1947 and two of them, still working, were on display for the jubilee bash.

We now know this retailer as 100% Magness Benrow and Roly’s son, John Magness, is its well-known Managing Director.

Wonder to the Max – “When was the last time you were truly filled with wonder?” So asked signage 20 years ago marking the new 15,000ft² Southpower Max store on Moorhouse Ave in Christchurch, one of six appliance outlets operated by energy supplier, Southpower.

Southpower’s big new Max store on Moorhouse Ave in Christchurch was one of six in 1995. Tim Gunther (seen today) was Assistant Manager.

From Betta to roofing – Betta was also in the news 20 years ago with its impressive new outlet, Moselen O’Loughlin Betta Electrical, in Station Road, Penrose. Previously the company had mainly been a trade supplier but embracing Betta meant new premises, a total refurbishment and the introduction of brown goods.

Dave Moselen, the owner operator, reported that although a
traditional strength was cookware, which was a core trade category, refrigeration and laundry were being targeted to reach similar levels.

Dave closed the business in 2000 and is now in the roofing game with his own enterprise, Metal Roofing Systems in Auckland.

Year-end movers & shakers – Parex Industries had the Movers & Shakers slot to themselves with Miriam Spencer and Graeme Laurence appointed as DeLonghi Product Managers.

I couldn’t find Miriam, but Graeme now heads up two companies. He is Managing Director at Beak & Johnston, a fresh meat processing company making small goods for retailers and also Pitango, an exporter of fresh soups and ready meals.

In 1995, Parex Industries’ new DeLonghi Product Managers were Miriam Spencer and Graeme Laurence.

Size does matter! – As the Actress said to the Bishop, “size matters” and 15 years ago, Westinghouse agreed, especially when the conversation was around refrigerators. We were reminded that Christmas was fast approaching and that meant extra volumes of food to be stored. Plus, a recent survey had indicated that Kiwis wanted bigger fridges and Westinghouse could oblige.

At the time, Westinghouse’s Rosalie Davison warned that kitchens of the future would have to be designed with larger appliances in mind. Rosalie’s current position is Group Marketing Manager at Mammoth Insulation and Smart Energy Solutions, businesses of InZone Industries.

Well-being not a new phenomenon – Fifteen years ago, Hagemeyer was welcoming Homedics personal well-being products into its portfolio. Product Manager Melinda Dyer previewed the line-up for Wares, accompanied by Account Manager, Brenda Jones.

overturn the US Presidential election results in Florida. The Supreme Court announced that recounts would stop, effectively awarding Florida to George W Bush and granting him the Presidency.

Closer to home, with the new millennium ahead of it, this very magazine was now called Wares instead of Appliance & House Wares as it had been from its inception back in November 1992.

Still with Wares, Simon Little, then Group Sales Manager (but still loving the limelight!), was pictured after his award winning accolade at the Advertising Institute’s annual awards, in the Trade Magazine Category.

Who’s the boss? – At the Auckland Home Show back in the day, three well known blokes seemed confused as to who would be whose boss in the morning.

Malcolm Bain of Email, John Mahar of Electrolux and Bevan Baker of Maytag met to sort it all out and were snapped in the process.

As John recalls it, Electrolux Group was looking to acquire Email in Australia at the time and rumours were rife that Maytag USA was also under the microscope – hence the amusing “chat”.

Malcolm is now Director of Electrolux NZ, John is contracting to Maxim Housewares as General Manager Sales & Marketing and Bevan is National Sales Manager at Eurotech Design.
The range was a virtual one-stop-shop for home healthcare appliances and was divided into categories such as sensory therapy, beauty therapy, massage therapy and body therapy.

Today, Mel has a marketing contract role with Fletcher Living whilst Brenda, who retired some years ago, is a dab hand on the ukulele, playing in a group called the Unpredictables and, with partner Stephen, enjoys the great outdoors.

For the last 18 months or so, Homedics has been in the Phoenix Distribution stable, along with GoPro, Marley, Blaupunkt and other brands.

Uniden struts its stuff – Uniden was full steam ahead for Christmas in Y2K.

Broadband: Hot technology – In the new technology section, AT&T’s new Broadband phone was getting plenty of attention. This telephone was easy to use and offered limitless potential for applications.

It consisted of a traditional receiver linked to a video display so, for example, a telephone call to order concert or sports tickets could be easier if the operator could show the customer a seating plan, including the remaining seats available.

That was very hot stuff back in the day!

Not a mall, more a town centre – AMP Asset Management had a different vision for a destination shopping centre in Auckland’s Eastern suburbs, but not just another huge box-like mall. When it opened, Botany Downs was a “shopping village” – still quite a modern concept and this was 15 years ago.

Farmers, Bond & Bond, Noel Leeming and Hill & Stewart were all there from the get go and overall the development exceeded 16 hectares at a cost of around $180 million. Stage two, including a New World supermarket and 130 speciality shops was due to open the following April. There was customer parking for 3,000 cars.
Assistant at Porter Novelli, a leading PR consultancy.

Darryl now holds the position of Country Manager at Groupe SEB and Sonja calls the Blue Mountains in NSW home, working as a Sales Co-ordinator at Dare, a company providing employment opportunities for the disabled.

David Stannard joined Sunbeam as a Key Account Manager and at Hagemeyer, the JVC brand was strengthened when Kere McConnell took up the position of Customer Services Manager and Chris Ashton signed on as Account Manager for the South Island and Wellington. David is now Sales Manager at Key Service Limited, distributors of Braun & Oral B appliances, Kere’s current location eludes me but Chris is a claims specialist at Southern Response Earthquake Services.

10 YEARS AGO – DECEMBER 2005

In 2005, The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe grossed $107 million worldwide on its debut weekend, making it the #2 December movie of all time behind 2003’s The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King.

Meanwhile, still 10 years ago, Peter Jackson’s King Kong premiered in Wellington, while in Auckland, 40-plus people dressed as Santa went on a rampage, robbing stores and assaulting security guards. Office parties, eh?

Who won at the Wares Awards? — Much was made in the last issue of the year a decade ago of the results of the 2005 Wares Awards. Cherie Kerrison of Meikles Retravision in Whakatane took out the premier Retailer of the Year award while Liam Bryers of Harvey Norman Wanganui picked up Young Retailer of the Year. Tong Kingi from Lockyers Retravision was voted Young Achiever and Evan Claxton, Proprietor of Harvey Norman Hamilton, accepted the award for Retail Store of the Year. Supplier awards went to Avery Robinson, Electrolux Home Products, Panasonic and Vodafone.

As GM of Appliance Shed, Cherie is still prominent in our industry, Liam is with Whirlpool in Melbourne, Tong is Managing Director at Lockyers Appliances & Furniture in Turangi and Evan as GM Small Appliances at Harvey Norman NZ.

After 25 years, 150 million Dustbusters had been sold globally and in New Zealand GfK awarded it #1 ranking for hand-held vacs.

Just how big is big? — Black & Decker, famous for its range of power tools was still cleaning up with its Dustbuster cordless vac, developed way back in 1979 to take B&D’s cordless technology from the work bench to all parts of the house.

In fact, after 25 years, 150 million Dustbusters had been sold globally. In New Zealand GfK had awarded it #1 ranking for hand-held vacs.

In this issue 10 years ago, however, it was the new Click & Go range which was introduced. A range of three fashion-coloured machines included two bagless models and one bagged version.

At the time, Senior Brand Manager, Regan Whitehead, talked of “no more wrestling with the hose”. Regan is currently at EE, a leading UK network provider.

Ahead of their time? — As much as a decade ago, New Zealand’s Direct Imports was being recognised as one of if not the longest serving international distributors of TEAC. In 2005 TEAC was rapidly developing its consumer electronics activity, with DVD portables and MP3s being introduced and more to come.

Also in this issue, Ian R Little showed us the Pentax Optio S60 digital camera, describing it as “easy to use and hard to put down”, which is a nice line. Back then, you could still sell a compact camera – after all, the iPhone wouldn’t be launched for another couple of years! The firm still has the Pentax brand.

Direct Imports is still one of if not the longest serving international distributors of TEAC; 10 years ago, Pentax was still doing well with compact cameras; and the Shark brand was on entertainment fridges.

Other names of note — Anton Oliver is well known as a very fine former All Black hooker and captain, but a decade back, just ahead of the Grand Slam tour, he was lending his artistic skills to Dyson and the Asthma & Respiratory Foundation.

He had dreamed up an autographed creation forming the design on a limited edition of the new, revolutionary DC15 upright, The Ball. One of these machines was auctioned and the winning bid of $725 was donated to the foundation. The Tan family of Kohimarama by the way won the online auction. We wonder if the Tans’ Ball is still rocking & rolling.
Briscoe’s “Adds a Dollar” – December 2005 was quite a busy month for retail. First up was Briscoe Group’s charity golf day at Gulf Harbour, north of Auckland, with participants including key suppliers and service providers to Briscoes and Rebel Sport. $160,000 was raised and when the proceeds of the company-wide “Add a Dollar” campaign at shop level were added, a donation of $250,000 was made to Cure Kids, a charity which Briscoes supports to this day.

For example, November 2015 saw the 12th annual Cure Kids Charity Golf Day, followed by an auction night which closed the fundraising for the year. All Briscoes, Rebel Sport and Living & Giving stores had participated in the charity work, still including the “Add a Dollar” scheme and “Red Nose Day”.

Of the event this year, Briscoe Group GM Operations, Craig Robertson, reports: “I’m stoked at the way stores get behind Cure Kids. The last two years have broken all records by achieving just short of $5 million after it took the group nine years of fundraising to go past $3 million!”

Retravision goes it alone – One of the longstanding top events of the industry year was for quite some time the Retravision Trade Fair. In 2005, however, Retravision New Zealand “went it alone” in Auckland, rather than combine with Victoria in Melbourne.

Sky City Grand was the venue and without doubt, the weekend was a huge success. The Trade Fair was held in conjunction with the AGM, conference and gala awards dinner, all under the umbrella theme of “Beyond the Horizon”.

Meikles, Smith & Church, Hubands and Retravision Morrinsville were among the Retra Award winners.

Chairman Alister Lilley and CEO, Leighton Cox, both addressed the conference, as did Keith Perkin, CEO of Retravision Pty Ltd from across the ditch. Keynote speaker, John Anderson, founder of Contiki Tours, inspired delegates with his determination to succeed, his self-belief and the way he handled his ups and downs, all of which had a pertinent message for Retravision owner-operators.

Today, a decade on, Alister remains head honcho at Smith & Church Appliances in Ashburton but Leighton has now retired after 7 years as CEO at IMS and consequently as a Director of TradeZone.

LV Martin goes underground – LV Martin & Son was the subject of the Direct Imports-sponsored “Focus on Retail”, in recognition of its Wellington CBD branch which was approaching its first birthday underground.

Underground? BNZ Mall, New Zealand’s first subterranean shopping complex, was opened on 29 August 1989 with 40 shops, a third of them actually underneath busy Willis Street.

LV Martin had opened in this unique setting in January 2005 and CEO Trevor Douthett was a happy man: “We are still the big box,” he said, “but at the right price. The store has gone great guns and exceeded all expectations.”

Trevor is now CEO and sole Director of Baby City.

Everyone ’appy at Appnet – The 2005 Appnet conference had been held in Hamilton and the theme was “Evolution”. This was seen as most appropriate as the group had evolved from a small network of electrical contractors, service agents and whiteware retailers into a strong national organisation, the formation of Betta Electrical, the acquisition of Kitchen Things and the establishment of the pioneering G2 Betta Electrical stores.

GM Warren Brewin introduced the new group positioning statements which were, for Betta Electrical: “The brands you want from the people you trust”; and for Kitchen Things: “Livin’ it up with Kitchen Things.”

The gala dinner rocked to the music of Tom Sharplin & The Cadillacs and of course the annual awards were handed out; Martins G2 Betta Electrical, Peninsular Betta Electrical and Kitchen Things Mt Eden took the main honours and Applico, Direct Imports and Pudney & Lee were the supplier winners.

A decade of movers & shakers – People on the move 10 years ago were Jan Nicol, who became MD of Sharp Corporation; Amanda Oneil, who joined Pudney & Lee as a Sales Representative; and Kate Stachurski, who was Groupe SEB’s new Trade Product Manager, replacing Lisa Buscomb, who’d transferred to Sydney.

Jan remains Managing Director at Sharp; Kate is a Category Manager at Nestlé in Auckland; however I was unable to trace Amanda.

So there’s another trip back in time which, hopefully, has rekindled a few memories. In the February issue, we will roll back to see what cordless phone was ringing retail cash registers 20 years ago, we’ll see which award Alister Lilley and his Smith & Church team picked up early in 2001 and we remember which supplier celebrated a centenary in 2006.
It is fair to say that Nik Papa was instrumental in laying the ground work for the success that Australian retailer Harvey Norman has seen in New Zealand. He is being inducted to mark his role in creating a unique New Zealand model, creating a culture of close internal and external relationships and above all, leading with passion.

The Appliance & Electronics Industry Hall of Fame runs alongside the annual Wares Awards and is directed by a formal committee of respected members of our industry.

To nominate someone to be considered for induction into the Appliance & Electronics Industry Hall of Fame, and see the current Inductees, visit www.hof.org.nz