

THE NOT SO HUMDRUM Mr. Meldrum

"I wuz wondering if you could get my name on the door tonight," slurred the young boy tottering around on the living-room floor.

"I just want to be able to say that I'm with your party because I really want to see Suzie Quatro," he continued.

The person being asked looked decidedly uncomfortable. A friend of his quietly ushered the boy out of the door, explaining that it's difficult to get names on the door at this particular venue.

Molly Meldrum sprawled on his couch and sighed. Then he got up and fixed himself yet another Scotch and Coke. In less than two hours he's due at the Croxton Park Hotel where, every Thursday night, he's the special DJ.

The boy in question had arrived at Molly's house in the inner-Melbourne suburb of Richmond early in the day, apparently delivering a parcel. He'd stayed all day, sitting at the bar drinking beer, playing records and watching the passing parade at Molly's house.

Ten minutes after the incident the boy rang Molly from a public telephone booth to apologise for his behaviour.

Having people he's never met before in his house is not an uncommon experience for Molly. In fact he encourages it. Molly's house is almost always full of people wandering around, helping themselves to drinks, making phone calls, playing records, asking favours and wanting to know all the latest gossip.

Molly takes it all in his stride, only occasionally appearing to be ruffled by the constant flow. He goes about his business, be it redecorating his house or planning next week's *Countdown* show.

Molly's assistants attend to the other areas of his life, matters such as finding out if accommodation at the snow is available for the weekend and when the four-wheel drive can be picked up.

The Meldrum residence is an extremely impressive place. From the street a high wall makes it look like just any other house. The only give away is the black Rolls Royce parked out front.

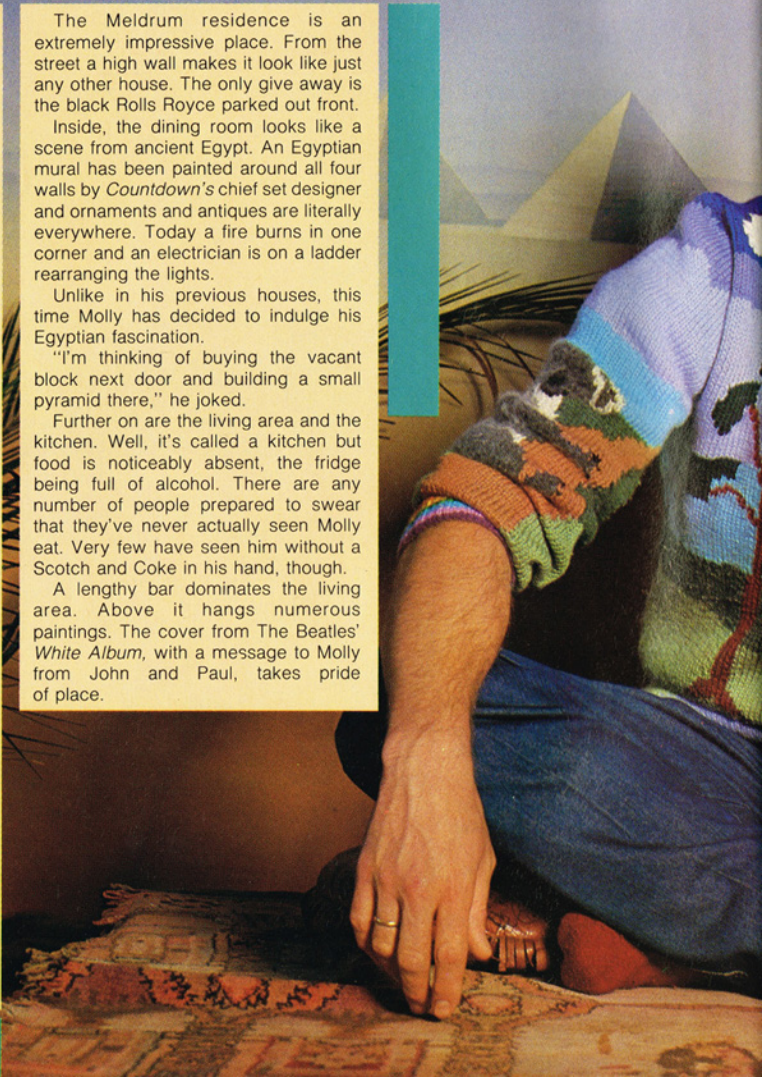
Inside, the dining room looks like a scene from ancient Egypt. An Egyptian mural has been painted around all four walls by *Countdown*'s chief set designer and ornaments and antiques are literally everywhere. Today a fire burns in one corner and an electrician is on a ladder rearranging the lights.

Unlike in his previous houses, this time Molly has decided to indulge his Egyptian fascination.

"I'm thinking of buying the vacant block next door and building a small pyramid there," he joked.

Further on are the living area and the kitchen. Well, it's called a kitchen but food is noticeably absent, the fridge being full of alcohol. There are any number of people prepared to swear that they've never actually seen Molly eat. Very few have seen him without a Scotch and Coke in his hand, though.

A lengthy bar dominates the living area. Above it hangs numerous paintings. The cover from The Beatles' *White Album*, with a message to Molly from John and Paul, takes pride of place.



Lonely at the top? Maybe it is but in the crazy world of Molly Meldrum you'd never notice



Glenn Marzella

To the right is Molly's enormous bedroom and another door leads to the music room, dominated by huge speakers and an equally enormous video screen.

Out back is a huge, heated swimming pool. "I often forget to turn off the heating and people get a shock when they jump into the pool," Molly said, laughing.

Along with Dolly's editor, Lisa Wilkinson, I spent around eight hours at Molly's house. Two of those hours were spent doing a photo session, during which time Molly was the most obliging subject imaginable, rushing around changing clothes, getting his housekeeper to iron shirts and posing for endless shots. When Lisa showed him the July issue of Dolly, containing the Michael Jackson poster, Molly went straight to his fridge and stuck the poster on the door.

During the day there seemed to be no less than 10 people wandering through Molly's house. By 9pm, when there were only four people left in the house, Molly relaxed enough to do an interview. He poured himself yet another Scotch and Coke, closed the music-room door where his friends were playing records and sat on the couch.

The first question was obvious: was this an average day in the life of one of Australia's best known media personalities?

"Yep," Molly said, looking more than a little tired.

And don't get any ideas that Molly gets to sleep in till lunchtime before all this madness starts.

"It's become hard now because on Tuesdays and Thursdays I have to be up at 6.30am, which I'm not normally used to, to do my radio show on EON-FM and then the day goes on from there because there's no way you can get ▶

◀ some sleep between time," Molly said. Molly claims that he tries to get around six hours sleep each night but after observing his lifestyle that sounds rather like wishful thinking.

I was curious to know just how well-known Molly's address was and he answered the question in one of those typically 'round-about sentences that everyone knows so well...

"It's not that well known at all... I guess it must be, actually it's not, this place is far more private than the last, however, being in this industry and being what I am and being what I am in myself, it is not just a closed shop either," Molly explained!!!

Well, I'm glad we got that cleared up! In a past interview Molly admitted that he actually enjoyed having all these people around his house all the time.

"I do," he said, "The only thing I don't enjoy is when someone like that guy who was here before is saying 'can you get me into this or that venue'. I mean, I can't cope with people wanting me to get them into gigs free."

So, does it ever get to a point where Molly Meldrum just wants to forget the whole rock'n'roll business and take a break?

"No, no," he stated adamantly. "It's not a matter of forgetting it because my whole life is designed to schedules and the schedule is *Countdown* meetings, *Countdown* tapings, EON commitments, TV Week commitments, now even Clarion commitments — that's just a local, suburban paper where I talk about the roads of Richmond, the shops and goodness knows what.

"I love doing that but I don't like people thinking I'm something else and that I can get them into venues for nothing or whatever as a favour, because I don't ask favours from anyone," Molly said.

"I'll give you an example. Even with The Clarion, which has an immense readership now, just in the suburbs that I live in, there's a shop called Fantasia which I gave a very pro mention to a few weeks ago over a jumper I bought for full price and they said, 'well, we'll give you a discount' but I don't want a discount because I don't live my life like that so I don't want people coming to me saying they want a discount to get into a rock venue."

And does that happen a lot?

"Only with certain people but they can just go and shove it for all I care," Molly said.

So when does Molly actually get time to himself, to do the things that he enjoys without people being around?

"Basically at weekends more than anything," he said. "I go out on Saturday nights to see bands. I may go to three or four gigs on a Saturday night and, basically, people do leave me alone

there. They may come up and discuss things but I don't mind that because I'm discussing the music that I've gone to watch.

Obviously you get the odd drunken yobbo coming up and trying to make a point but you have to accept that. To me, that's part and parcel of what I am."

At last count a typical Molly Meldrum week involved planning a *Countdown* show, writing two TV Week columns, writing a Clarion column, appearing at two discos, consulting with people about Molly's Video JukeBox, presenting two early morning radio shows and any number of other activities. One is drawn to wonder whether he's a compulsive worker or whether there are other reasons for the fact that Molly appears to work harder than most other people alive.

"Well someone asked me the other day, is it greed for making money or making the most while you can?" Molly said.

"But that's not the point. Take The Clarion alone. The Clarion's fee for my column goes half to The Royal Children's Hospital and half to Odyssey House.

"I find that if I'm not going skiing at the weekend or whatever and I'm home here, I get really bored with myself. And that's no reflection on my friends or anything else like that but I just get edgy.

"Maybe it's that hyperactive thing in me that I just want to do something else.

"It probably comes down to being a record producer where, basically, you're in the studio, literally 24 hours a day so you're used to that schedule. I put myself through that, even in the Go-Set times, for so long it's part of my life now.

"Even when I was going to university I'd wake up at 4 o'clock in the morning and feel guilty that I wasn't studying. I tried to read all the books but I achieved nothing because I wasn't taking it in."

I asked Molly if he ever felt the desire to get completely away from rock'n'roll.

"Not at all but there are other things I want to do as well," he said.

"I'm going into the production of records again. I'm going into film production, too.

"I'm lucky to have that passport of being Ian Meldrum now, of having that passport to go into those sorts of areas."

Looking around Molly's house it's impossible not to ask about the Egyptian influence, something that hasn't been obvious in any of his previous abodes.

"It's a long-standing interest," Molly said. "It comes basically from a fascination with the country itself and then seeing Art Deco.

"I've always been into Art Deco and suddenly realised the basis of it, which is Egyptian and because I've been there

quite a few times and love it, I just thought this is the thing I'm really interested in."

Molly has visited Egypt five times, the first time being back in 1962 and the second when he was sent on a world trip by Go-Set magazine.

"I went straight to Cairo," Molly said with a smile.

All the antiques and ornaments in Molly's house have been collected over the past two years. Looking at the amazing pieces in the house I was drawn to ask Molly how the house had looked before he moved in.

"A lot different to this," he laughed and that was about all he'd say.

Seeing as how the Egyptian influence hadn't been apparent in any of Molly's other houses that I'd visited, I was curious to know what exactly it was that attracted him to Egyptian culture. As usual, the answer was, well, rather round about.

We looked around the living area and Molly pointed out that there were a number of other influences present.

"When you look at this house... perhaps the Egyptian side is taking over this part of the house but if you take these photos here, if you look at this one... if you've seen the Elton John film clip, well that's the hotel he's dancing in and out of, that's the promenade he's dancing up and down. That's Cannes. This next picture is Venice. Then Switzerland. And the next one is Nice. That's Rome. And that one's Paris.

"When you're an Australian and you go to all these places, there's a sort of total fascination."

Then Molly continued, explaining what had attracted him to places like Egypt.

"I mean something I was totally disappointed in, was, say, going to the Coliseum in Rome because you come out of it and it's all surrounded by city, whereas with the pyramids it's still the desert so even though erosion has eaten into the Sphinx and the whole thing, it's still basically the same. It's in this decrepit arena and it looks wonderful, you stand in the middle of it all and you look down and the ground is all broken up, it's filled in but you see all the caves underneath it where supposedly the Christians were held."

According to Molly, if he lived anywhere outside Australia, it would either be in New York or Cairo.

"As far as New York goes it's a place like Cairo," Molly said. "Everything you know or have ever been told about New York is there."

Molly went on to discuss the sense of history that accompanies his favourite places. I asked him if there were any places in Australia that felt the same.

"Yeah, well Ayers Rock because they



can't destroy it," Molly laughed.

"I think that's why the Franklin River was so important. It was one part of the world that hadn't really been touched that much.

"Now, I feel sorry for the Tasmanians that needed the power because they became subject to that whole thing between at least keeping the heritage and being involved in the modern world.

"I think that it is probably, at the expense of the Tasmanians, more important to keep the Franklin River as it was."

Talk returned to Egypt and Molly explained that Egyptian history had always fascinated him, especially the huge pyramids.

"I was fascinated by how they could use manpower to build such colossal

structures," Molly said.

"When you go and see it you suddenly see a piece of stone that could fill this entire house and that's just one piece of a structure that weighs tons and tons.

"Today we haven't got anywhere near the technology or the equipment that could lift something like that and you wonder, how on the earth did they

do that?

"Now, when you see films like *The Ten Commandments*, especially when you're a kid, you think well that's how it was done but how was it really done?"

"There's been many theories since then. There's that theory that an alien planet of people came down and helped build this entire structure. You just don't know."

Do you believe in God?

"Yes I do," Molly said.

"As a child I accepted that God made the world, the whole thing, like that. Now, I still believe in God though I don't believe he made the world."

Would you call yourself a Christian?

"Not in the true sense of a Christian but I still believe that there is something that is the maker of us."

Do you belong to a specific religion?

"No," Molly said. "I was brought up as Church Of England and I occasionally go back to church but I don't believe everything one reads should be taken as gospel truth."

I asked Molly about whether he believes in Jesus. He said that he thinks it's possible and moved onto his explanation of E.T.

"Basically what Spielberg was doing was putting a modern day story of Jesus Christ into E.T."

"E.T. died and then his heart started beating again and it was the resurrection. That's the way I looked at

it. So I don't know whether the story of Jesus Christ was just a story or a story in that time like E.T. in our time.

"I'm sure that a child firmly believes that E.T. exists, that E.T. died and then came back again and then he was saved and put back out in the spaceship."

"I mean if you really analyse E.T. there's the disciples who finally become the ones on the bikes saving E.T."

"Now I don't know if, in 2000 years, if that film is kept in an archive, that some people may treat that as being something that really happened in 1982, this little god coming down and saving the world."

Talk turned to music and Molly expressed his excitement for 12" mixes of songs, suggesting that "The Real Thing", a song Molly produced for Russell Morris in the Sixties, was possibly the first record in the world structured like 12" mixes are today.

I wanted to know what else excited Molly in the rock'n'roll world.

"Malcolm McLaren," Molly said.

"Malcolm McLaren excites me only for one thing... because I think that he's visionary in the way he looks at music and the tastes of people and, quite frankly, I did the interview with Malcolm McLaren in England and it was just going to be the standard six-minute interview and suddenly, in three

minutes, I knew that this guy fascinated me and was just fascinating within himself so even though I was given instructions not to do more than 10 minutes, at the most, with anyone, we went on for an hour and a half.

"I won't say he's always right but I think he has an amazing insight into public taste and into music itself."

A few minutes later there was a knock on the door. In walked people from Polygram records with some *Flashdance* paraphernalia for Molly to give away that night at a disco called Croxton Park.

Molly wandered off to change his clothes, gathered the records he wanted to play that night, fixed yet another Scotch and Coke and danced around the living room to the sounds of a couple of his current favourite records.

At 9.45 it was time to go. Everyone marched out of the house, someone hopped into the driver's seat and Molly sat in the passenger seat. Then the black Rolls vanished into the night.

It would be at least 1am before Molly finished his DJing stint and then he was due to see Suzie Quatro and who knows what might have happened after that. And then it'd be time to start again.

Molly was out and, as usual, he was surrounded by people helping, wanting and watching.

But at least the house was quiet.

Stuart Coupe

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