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Big impact in the Big Apple - Australia Day 2006 - A SPECIAL REPORT

FROM Broadway to the boardroom, Australians are making a name for themselves in America's key city. Like the song says: If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere. In a host of fields, from food to finance, New York City remains the state of the art of the deal. And Australians are now making their presence felt, notching up a string of Big Apple success stories.

A few, like actor Hugh Jackman and footballer Ben Graham, who moved from the AFL's Cats to the New York Jets, have won a high profile, but there are thousands of others who focus on more mainstream business activities.

A forthcoming book, *Away Game**, by Luke Collins-an Australian journalist living in New York-recounts the stories of dozens of Australians working in senior executive roles. These include Andrew Liveris, CEO of Dow Chemical; Judith Curr, executive vice-president of publishing giant Atria; and Poppy King of Estee Lauder. Even one of the city's major newspapers, the New York Post, has an Australian, Col Allan, as editor-in-chief.

Collins believes that globalization has made Americans more willing to recruit executives from other countries, and points to similarities between American and Australian business practices. He estimates that there are about 15,000 Australians working in New York.

Aside from the boardroom, Australians in New York are also making a name as entrepreneurs. For example, **Michele Anderson**-originally a Sydney girl-operates a company called The Wine Angel, which imports premium Australian wine into the US market.

"Being an Australian running a business focused distinctly on Australian products has been a significant advantage," she says. "Until recently, it has been very difficult for Australians to get work visas or start businesses in the US, so many of my competitors are Americans selling Australia. I'm reluctant to admit it, but just having an Australian accent is a huge corporate advantage for me."

Anderson points to her MBA degree from Wharton Business School as another benefit. It not only provided her with additional business insight but brought her into key networks.

"One really stark difference is how powerful and actively used professional and educational networks are in the US," she notes. "For example, my first wine distribution relationship was formed after I wrote a letter to a fellow Wharton Alumni who runs a multi-billion dollar wine distribution business. His office contacted me to set up a meeting the day they received the letter and we agreed to do business together after our first meeting. One other difference is that Americans are more up-front about discussing, promoting and celebrating personal achievement than Australians. We talk about the Australia's 'tall poppy' syndrome and I have felt it strongly over the years, although I feel it might be waning."

"In New York, I don't feel like an outsider. It is not unusual to find non-Americans running successful businesses. In many ways, someone from middle America would find it harder to do business in New York City than I have."

Anderson sees huge opportunities in the city for Australians with a streak of inventiveness. She recently established a new direct-to-consumer business called **GreatAustralianWines.com**, the first Internet-based business of its kind in the US.

Many of Anderson's views are shared by Robyn Donohue, who is Exhibition Program Coordinator at the Socrates Sculpture Park in New York.

“In general, some of the success of Australians in the US can be attributed to having a pretty good work ethic, creativity, and a sense of humour - although Americans don't always get our jokes,” she says.

“It can also be attributed to the sense, in Australia, of being the big fish in a small pond, and then wanting to be that again once you are here. Australians try harder to prove themselves.

“There are subtle differences in the way in which the art world works here. “The biggest adaptation I found was the need to research people and institutions thoroughly, using information in different ways.”

Donohue has used her position to showcase the work of several Australian artists, and has found a receptive audience, both in the arts community and the broader public. But Donohue, like Anderson and many other Australians working in New York, plans to eventually return to her home country.

“I would love to return to Australia at some point,” she says. “I think that with what I have learned and achieved here, I have a great deal to offer the Australian art community.”

Luke Collins agrees that most expatriates never lose their emotional attachment to the sunburnt country: “All but a handful of Australians living in the United States miss their homeland. They keep Vegemite in the cupboard and Tim Tams in the fridge. No matter where they are or how long they have been away, they continue to passionately declare themselves Australian.”

* *Away Game: Australians in American Boardrooms*, Luke Collins, Wiley.
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