

weekend
pulse
August 07-August 08

focus: digital canvas

travel: haven for soul

garden: citrus twist

drive: mercedes slk300



Strictly ballroom

Take a turn around the dance floor with Glen Strauss.

REPORT: P4-5

COVER STORY



LEFT: Chris Cambey, 18, of Albury, and Kira Furst, 19, of Wodonga, receive some instruction from Glen Strauss.

Pictures: TARA ASHWORTH

By his third dance class Glen Strauss was hooked. Seventeen years later, the ballroom aficionado puts his passion into teaching students – and taking **NATASHA SHERWOOD** for a quick spin around the dance floor.

AT 13 Glen Strauss shimmied into his first dance class. He had always been a mover and shaker, dancing in the hallway or with the shopping trolley. The holes in his socks were evidence of that.

But his first dance class terrified him.

"It was the girls," Glen recalls.

"I was too shy."

That was 17 years ago but now, sitting in his own Albury studio, Glen remembers the following classes much more fondly.

"I got the hang of it the second week," he says.

"And then the third week I thought 'I want to have my own studio and I want to do this for the rest of my life'.

"I found it quite natural to learn how to dance and I wanted to show other people how it feels natural as well."

It's a dream that was fulfilled when Glen and his wife Niki bought the Albury-Wodonga Dance Centre recently.

Glen's love of dancing is clear and he even persuades this somewhat reluctant *Pulse* journalist to give the cha-cha a go.

While I won't be hitting the *Dancing with the Stars* stage any time soon it was a first-hand lesson in how while everyone can dance and it's a lot of fun, it really does take some practice.

So does Glen, who works as a graphic designer by day, keep up-to-date with TV dancing shows?

"I don't have time to watch *Dancing with the Stars*, I'm here teaching," Glen says of his busy schedule in the evenings.

"I'm dancing with the stars here as it is."

However he reveals that he used to train with a lot of the dancers on the show including Luda Kroitor, who is partnering George Houvardas of *Packed to the Rafters* fame this season.

RIGHT: Glen Strauss teaches Amy McMillan, 16, of Thurgoona, the art of ballroom dancing.



“We used to train in the same studio in Sydney,” he says.
 But his real love is to teach dance and see the changes that dancing can make to people’s lives.
 When Glen dances he says he feels “comfortable”.
 “I just feel like I belong somewhere,” he says.
 “And I feel that vibe from a lot of the kids.
 “When they come in here they don’t feel shy; they don’t feel limited.
 “I let them do whatever they want as long as they are respecting others.
 “I think that’s why they keep coming back.”
 He says a confidence boost also has its place in adult classes.
 “You get the males that can’t lead so the females do the driving,” he says.
 “I change that around.
 “The ladies are not allowed to lead.
 “It’s not on.
 “It gives the guys a chance. There’s been a lot of guys that feel that confidence and they like that control.”

Last week Glen also hosted a Deaf Can Dance class at the Townsend Street studio.
 The class was for deaf and hearing-impaired Border students who got the lowdown on hip-hop moves from a group of professional, and hearing impaired, dancers.
 It was a class close to Glen’s heart as he also has a hearing impairment.
 But he is quick to emphasise that he is not deaf; he considers himself a hearing person and says his dancing is not affected.
 For many of Glen’s students a career in dancing starts well before he took up the sport in his early teens.

LEADING MAN

He says there were a few boys at his school who did ballroom dancing but it wasn’t something that was really spoken about.
 “When I was growing up through school it was as though it was wrong,” he says.
 “A lot of the boys thought it was a girls’ sport, but it was the best thing I ever did and I’d really recommend it to anyone.”
 Glen says he didn’t really reveal his passion for dancing at school but when there were school displays and PE lessons on dancing he’d show off his moves.
 “I’d join in with some of the girls and the guys would see you on stage with the girls and they’d say ‘that’s actually cool’.
 “It was sort of a relief for my later years in high school that people started to recognise me as a dancer.”
 Throughout his schools years he would dance about three nights a week. That was until he moved to Sydney after school to take his dancing to the next level.
 He was training about 15 to 16 hours a week with a series of partners, for the five years he lived in Sydney, culminating in winning the Adult B-grade New Vogue category at the Australian Dancesport Championships in 2003.
 “Ever since then I just haven’t had as much time to do the training because I’ve been focusing on the teaching more,” he says.
 While Glen still has the glitter in his eyes he says he simply doesn’t have time to compete professionally.
 “With a baby on the way and new management of the studio I don’t think Niki and I would have time,” he says.
 But he always makes time for a dance with his wife.
 “Niki books herself in for lessons,” Glen says.
 “We try to have a dance once a week.”



LEFT: Costumes come out of the closet on competition day: men don tuxedos and women dress in ballgowns with full skirts. Kira Furst in her ballroom finery, led by a dapper Glen.

While great for confidence, co-ordination and social skills, Glen says dancing is also a great way to get fit.
 “I don’t go to the gym but I’ve still got a six-pack,” he laughs.
 Glen and Niki bought the studio from Lorraine Hewitt who ran it for the past 30 years.
 “I started teaching for Lorraine three years ago for a bit of a change,” he said.
 “She looked after me so much.
 “I could see why people loved coming here, they were very much like a family.
 “It has a great atmosphere.
 “Whether you were a competitor and learning to dance or a social dancer it didn’t matter; it was sort of like home.”
 And home it has become for the Strausses, too.
 “I virtually live here now,” Glen says.
 A special part of what he does is teaching bridal couples dances for their big day.
 And then there’s the elderly couples who want to freshen up their technique.
 “They’ve got some routines they’ve been practising over the week and they say ‘I don’t remember how to do this, can you show us how to do this?’
 “It’s really quite cute.”
 While practising in the studios everyone wears whatever they feel comfortable with.
 But on competition day the costumes come out of the closet.
 “Men wear tuxedos for new vogue and modern and ladies wear frocks and ballroom gowns,” Glen explains.
 “In the Latin American section you’ve got tighter clothing, open shirts, ladies wear bugger all.”
 Then there’s the make-up, fake tan and fancy dancing shoes.
 But, for the record, while his shoe size may have changed over the years, Glen still has holes in his socks.

“When I was growing up ... it was as though it was wrong. It was a relief for my later years in high school that people started to recognise me as a dancer.”