

# Corporates operate most of Brisbane pubs but there are still couples living the dream

While their numbers may be dwindling, there are still couples at the sharp end of the Brisbane pub scene juggling work and family.



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It's been the toughest 12 months on record for the Brisbane pub sector but for the local husband and wife teams who have reached the other side of 2020 and are still pulling beers and serving up food, the dream continues.

Long hours mean juggling between work and family time, and when Peter Cedergren is asked why he dreamt of getting into to the pub game, he jokes: "Doesn't everybody and then they realise it's a really bad idea once they're there".

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Mr Cedergren and wife Nikki took the opportunity to buy the leasehold of the historic Alliance Hotel in Spring Hill in 2018 and have been juggling their logistics business (AERgO), raising two girls and getting through COVID-19.

He admits his wife does most of the heavy lifting at the pub with his other business commitments taking precedence.

“Nikki brings hard work and detail,” he said. “She’s the one who get up every day. She goes in there and picks herself after a good day or bad day and does it all again,” Mr Cedergren said.

“It’s not easy. You have to have a pretty robust relationship because there are a lot of robust conversations involved but it’s given us a deeper bond. We work around each other to make it work with the kids.”



The Alliance Hotel owners Nikki and Peter Cedergren.

What drew Mrs Cedergren to the pub game was the chance to create a “community” harking back to her upbringing in a small NSW town.

“I love the people who come into our door everyday. We have genuine conversations and we really connect,” she said.

“But there are days when you open the pub and it feels like a Sunday, there’s no one around and that’s gut wrenching. But Peter is a really positive influence by reminding me to look at he bigger picture.”

The Cedergrens are only a handful of couples in Brisbane who are at the sharp end of the pub game.

Corporate giants and large groups run about 70 per cent of Brisbane hotels with most of the other pubs run by well known generational pub families.



Nick and Meagan Gregorski and their Port Office Hotel in the CBD.

As well as the Cedergrens at the Alliance Hotel, other married couples who run their own pubs in Brisbane include Lucinda Dowling Black and Toby Black at the Full Moon Hotel in Sandgate and Nick and Meagan Gregorski at the Port Office Hotel in the CBD.

Another couple, Grant and Michelle Clark, own Brisbane Brewing in West End and the Brewhouse Hotel in Woolloongabba.

They bought their first pub Auroras in Albert Street in the CBD in 2005 which they renamed the Brewhouse. They operated it until the end of 2008 and bought the Clarence Corner Hotel and renamed it's the Brewhouse there in 2010. They opened Brisbane Brewing in West End in 2015.

With two children they say juggling their working and family lives can be a tough.

“We alternate on the coalface as such and generally we have different roles in the business and they don’t overlap,” Mr Clark said.

“We do enjoy working together so we’re pretty blessed in that aspect and we structure our schedules so we can do the things away from the pub that we want to do.”



Michelle and Grant Clark own and run Brisbane Brewing in West End and the Brewhouse Hotel in Woolloongabba.

Mrs Clark, who has a background in marketing, said running pubs as a couple was a “big commitment” especially with children.

“But it’s something that we’ve both genuinely enjoyed doing from day one,” she said.

“And when the business has my attention Grant helps me out with the kids when he can and when the children have my attention he helps me out when he can.”

Toby Black and Lucinda Dowling Black have owned and operated the Full Moon Hotel at Sandgate for over five years.

Mrs Dowling Black said she and her husband cut their teeth running a pub in Darwin which has been in Dowling Family for four generations.

They then owned and operated an old timber country pub in the Byron Bay Hinterland, where they had their three children before buying the Full Moon Hotel.

“Needless to say, those days are a blur of late nights and early mornings, a pregnant belly working behind the bar and clearing tables with a sleeping baby in a sling,” Mrs Dowling Black said.



Lucinda Dowling Black and Toby Black owners of the Full Moon Hotel.

She said she and her husband have separate strengths that complement one another.

“Toby is natural publican — a strong work ethic, always up for a yarn and wants to show folks a good time,” she said.

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“I’m the organised one. We stick to our lanes, so we don’t tread on each other’s toes, yet we collaborate remarkably well.

“We have great respect and trust in each other, so disagreements are few and far between. Pubs can be all-consuming — a 24 hours a day, seven days a week commitment that can take its toll on relationships.

“For us, we have found a winning formula — time for each other and family, employing a talented and trustworthy team, and a genuine love for the work.”