



Bells has been a part of Broken Hill life...



...since the 1930s.



WE BOUGHT THE OLDEST

milk bar

IN OZ!

Chelsea and Matt swapped the Gold Coast for spiders and milkshakes in Broken Hill



Matt and Chelsea love life behind the milk bar!



Bells has served up sweet treats for decades.

Chelsea Spresser describes walking through the doors of Bells Milk Bar in Broken Hill, NSW, as taking a step back in time. But after stumbling on Australia's oldest milk bar by accident, Chelsea and her husband Matt didn't just buy a milkshake, they bought the whole place! "We were in Broken Hill looking for a laundromat after five days at the Mundi Mundi Bash," Chelsea, 46, tells *Woman's Day*. "Google Maps brought us to the street where Bells is and we had a milkshake while we waited for our laundry."

Not only were the milkshakes delicious, they loved the retro decor, featuring huge dancing fruit and a diner-style chequered floor. But even after noticing the "for sale" sign, Chelsea and Matt, who were living on the Gold Coast, around 1500km away, didn't think about buying it. "On the way home Matt kept talking about it and then for weeks afterwards," Chelsea laughs. "We'd just sold a business and were looking for something, and in the end I told him if he was passionate about it, we should do it!" Eight months later, the pair were proud owners of the iconic cafe, which first

opened in 1892. And along with the bricks and mortar came the secret recipes for all the traditional milkshakes, syrups and spiders from its 1950s owners. "The recipes are out the back in a safe," says Chelsea. "We make the syrups ourselves and they're even measured out in drams like they were originally. We sell them online and that's part of the business we'd really like to extend." The real joy of their new purchase though, is being part of the rich history the milk bar holds in the small town.

First opened as a cordial store, it became Bells Milk Bar many years later in the 1930s, when Les Bell Snr and his wife Minnie owned it. "Everyone has a story about Bells," says Chelsea. "Older people have come in and told us they remember their first date here and one lady messaged us on Facebook and said [the 1950s owner] Mavis used to make hot milkshakes. We introduced flavoured hot chocolates after that." Chelsea and Matt plan to have more food options but want to keep the traditional milkshakes and spiders at the heart of the place. "The chocolate milkshakes and the green lime spiders are our bestsellers," Chelsea says. "They've been on the menu forever." While she can't give any real recipe secrets away, she does admit there are a few tricks to making the perfect

'Everyone [in Broken Hill] has a story about Bells Milk Bar'

Another unlikely tip is to use milk that's been open in the fridge for two days to get the perfect consistency. And a few teaspoons of malt to give that traditional flavour. While there are 50 flavours on offer, including Strawberry Cheesecake, Hawaiian Delite and Cherry Ripe, Chelsea's got a simple favourite. "It's always vanilla for me," she says.

RICH IN HISTORY

- The Black and White 4d Milk Bar set up in 1932 in Sydney's Martin Place by Greek migrant Joachim Tavlaridis was Australia's first milk bar.
- Milk bars often acted as a town's general store. A family would set up a milk bar in each successive town so they wouldn't compete. They

were usually passed from father to son.

- Milk bars reached their heyday in the 1970s, with 6000 in Victoria alone.
- Spiders were invented by accident in the late 1800s when US soda shop owner Robert Green ran out of cream for his soda and syrup drink and added ice-cream instead. Called ice-cream floats or ice-cream sodas elsewhere, they are called spiders in Australia and New Zealand.

