

Coffee houses in a froth over Oprah's McCafe sell-out



WE barely lived down Hoges' "Throw another shrimp on the barbie", but now Australians, courtesy of Oprah Winfrey's commercial partners, have a whole new cultural furphy to live down: that the whole country goes to McDonald's for coffee.

[This morning's Australian](#) revealed that the American fast food giant had paid the talk show Queen to portray McCafes as being ubiquitous, highly popular hangouts.

According to Oprah's *Aussie Countdown*, which screened to 10 million Americans last week, we Australians call men "blokes", women "sheilas" and we like to meet up at "hip joints" called McCafes to sip on gourmet coffee.

Some of the one-million-strong Australian audience who saw this report on the Ten Network last week were a little surprised to hear of the importance of McCafes to the Australian lifestyle.

"While there are a lot of differences, there is one comforting similarity," Oprah's guest reporter, Ten personality Carrie Bickmore, said in her "crash course in the Australian way".

"While you have your diners, we have McCafes. Guys come for business meetings, girls come for a catch-up over coffee. It's all just a little bit fancy."

With Winfrey's multi-million dollar marketing train about to roll into town, it's giving Australian coffee drinkers a bad reputation according to those in the industry.

"I don't think it portrays the average coffee drinker in the best light," Ross Quail, president of the Specialty Coffee Association, says.

"It's unfortunate and disappointing that people are led to believe that this is what the Australian market likes and I don't agree with that."

Aileen Young, the co-owner of award-winning Vella Nero coffee in Sydney, agrees.

"I was quite surprised. I don't think it's a very clear reflection of the Sydney coffee trend," Ms Young says.

"It's probably not showing Australian coffee culture in the right light ... I don't think it's correct to say this is the way Australians drink coffee."

McDonald's may be market heavyweights, but when it comes to quality, the Golden Arches just doesn't cut it, according to Mr Quail.

"There are hundreds of places you can go around the country where you would get a better cup coffee than McDonald's," he says.

"I think Australians are embracing specialty coffee. While it's a smallest segment of the market, we're leaders in innovation."

We're also world beaters. At the recent World Coffee Championships, Australia was crowned the overall winner.

With the eyes of hundreds of millions Americans on us, this latest brouhaha is a wasted opportunity to showcase the best local products and Ms Young is "absolutely" disappointed.

"This is an opportunity to showcase the crème de la crème of Australia and I think that specialty coffee is a reflection of Australian culture and the way that Australians appreciate the finer things in life," she says.

"I don't agree it's a correct summary of the culture and taste or the trends within the market."

But McDonald's isn't the only big company that have hitched themselves to Winfrey, with both Telstra NextG and Motorola signing on for ride.

Winfrey is expected land in Sydney for her special tour tomorrow.