

These days many Big Things have fallen into disrepair. Their fibreglass exteriors show signs of wear and weeds grow at their bases. Vandalism is also a problem: the Big Bull in Wauchope, NSW, was demolished in 2007 after its owner became tired of people stealing its testicles.

Yet despite all the setbacks there are still about 150 Big Things dotted around the country, mostly between major cities. They may not pull in the crowds that they used to but it doesn't matter. To devotees such as Stockwell, they are more than just kitsch promotional tools: he sees them as monuments to Australia's sense of humour. "There's just something inherently funny about enlarging something that's mundane," he says. "I hope Big Things stick around a bit longer." — (M)

ABOUT: Adrian Craddock, *Monocle*. Craddock is our Melbourne correspondent and former editor of the *Smith Journal*. His favourite Big Thing is the Big Banana.



02.

Anastasia Moloney Beauty salons are rife in Colombia – and it's the men putting the 'man' in manicure

At my local beauty salon, which is called Milagros (Miracles), attentive staff pamper regulars from dawn to dusk. One lady is being waited on by three young women as she watches the afternoon soap opera belting out from the television hanging on the wall. A beautician is hunched over her feet, which have been placed in a warm footbath; another is painting her nails a metallic-burgundy colour and a third is putting high-lights in her hair.

Nearby a schoolboy sits in a mock black-leather armchair flicking through a magazine. Pointing to a

photograph of Colombian football superstar James Rodríguez, he says to the hairdresser, "I want my hair just like that." His mother and teenage sister are having a manicure while sipping herbal tea. Nearby, unfazed by the fuchsia-pink walls, two gentlemen are having their nails buffed. No one raises a plucked eyebrow.

In Colombia you are never more than a couple of blocks away from a beauty salon. You'll find them everywhere, from a basic salon converted from a garage in a slum neighbourhood to luxury parlours in shopping malls and members-only social clubs in affluent areas. There's also a handy salon at Bogotá's airport.

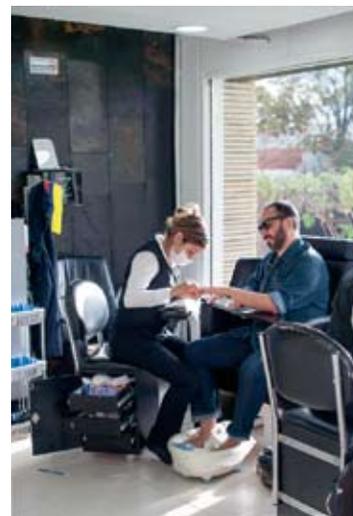
Given the huge importance that Colombians place on image and looking well groomed – from polished shoes to polished nails, pressed shirts to coiffured locks – people here don't need an excuse to go to the salon. "Colombian women spend a lot of time and energy wanting to look good," says Paola Diaz, a manicurist at Milagros. "Going to the salon is a habit. It's not seen as a treat or luxury but something you just do."

And it's not just for the well-heeled. With a haircut or manicure on offer for the equivalent of €3 at your bog-standard hairdresser, it's affordable for many. It's also, as we've seen, quite normal for men to frequent beauty salons; at Milagros, about three out of every 10 manicures are for gents.

The first time I became aware of the penchant for nail care among Colombian men was about 10 years ago when I was at a military base on the edge of a rainforest. While speaking to a stocky army colonel I noticed he had immaculate nails covered with a shiny transparent gloss. From then on I couldn't help but notice that many men boasted a polish, from taxi drivers and supermarket cashiers to bankers and lawyers.

Once, as I was having a manicure at my corner hairdresser, Colombia's then attorney-general popped in for an express manicure while his bodyguards waited outside. "Good afternoon Mr Attorney-General," the beauticians said in chorus as he strode through the glass doors. A manicurist painted his nails with a subtle shimmery varnish and gave him a hand massage using

'Two gentlemen are having their nails buffed. No one raises a plucked eyebrow'



PHOTOGRAPHERS JUAN FELIPE RUBIO, IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES

her homemade exfoliant made from hand cream and sugar. "Thanks ladies, see you soon," he said as he left, addressing each manicurist by name. He left a fat tip.

Beauty salons are the second most common small business in Colombia after the corner shop; one recent study estimated that there's one for every 276 Colombians. You can even get a manicure behind bars. When Bogotá's largest women's prison hosts its annual beauty pageant, hairdressers and manicurists come in and set up a makeshift salon where inmates get ready before strutting their stuff in the prison yard, which serves as the catwalk. And while it's well known that male inmates call prostitutes to come to their cells, it has also been known for them to call in manicurists.

One male accountant I know tells me that he gets his nails done twice a month. "You talk and interact with hands so I think it's important to have neat and clean fingernails," says Carlos Andres Leyton. "Having a manicure is part of my personal-care regime – and it's also a little bit to do with vanity." — (M)

ABOUT: Anastasia Moloney, *Monocle*. Moloney is our Bogotá correspondent. The full extent of her beauty regime is a closely guarded secret.

03.

Jeremy Klaszus Calgary's generation-spanning Peace Bridge keeping troubled waters at bay

It's Friday night in Calgary and a playful argument is underway on the Peace Bridge, a tube of bright-red steel with a glass roof and open sides. "You need a picture," says a woman to her partner, pulling out her smartphone. He shakes his head. "Don't want one." Undeterred, she throws her arms around him after passing her phone to a friend. Now he relaxes and laughs. They kiss with the bridge's X-shaped pattern as a backdrop. Up and down the bridge people are similarly posing and every so often an inline skater shoots out of the tube like a spitball from a straw.

The Peace Bridge has become a new defining symbol for a city that didn't know it needed one. Designed by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, the structure appears to rest lightly on each bank of the Bow River, which flows from the nearby Rocky Mountains. It connects a bohemian neighbourhood to the north with a new network of downtown cycle tracks. For those on bike and foot it's an artery into the heart of the city.

And yet when Calgary's city council approved construction of the bridge in 2008, it triggered an avalanche of derision. A city of 1.2 million, Calgary is accustomed to roomy suburbs and roads. Fuelled by oil and gas booms, new growth has sprawled onto the prairie since the Second World War, and until recently the car was king. For many, the idea of a CA\$25m (€17.4m) pedestrian bridge did not compute. Questions were undergirded with the practical concerns of conservative prairie folk: isn't the money better saved?

Pundits lampooned it as a frivolous vanity project. Dissenting city councillors argued for a bare-bones structure built on the cheap. "The bridge symbolises waste," declared an editorial in the *Calgary Herald* in 2010. News of a dodgy tendering process and construction delays were met with I-told-you-so glee.

Yet here we are, with people of all ages converging in this funny red tube day and night. The bridge is not just tolerated but loved and explored from every angle; it was crossed nearly 4,000 times per day in 2015. It has also been put to other uses: two sunrise breakfast fundraisers have been held on the bridge in support of military families, with tables set out across the span. The earlier controversy is all but forgotten now.

For a city that has often relied on cowboy nostalgia – previously its signature architectural work was a hockey arena shaped like a saddle – the Peace Bridge is a futuristic dose of relief. In addition to making it easier to get downtown without a car, the crossing has done more for Calgary's brand than anything built during the past two decades. As a structure constantly rippling with human warmth it creates welcome, memorable delays. "I want to go this way, daddy," says a boy in a bike trailer as his father pulls him past the bridge. The dad considers, takes a wide turn, and goes in. — (M)

ABOUT: Jeremy Klaszus, *journalist*. Klaszus is based in Calgary. He insists that he thought the Peace Bridge was cool before everyone else did.

