



East meets west and heads south

A friendship forged in Berlin has proven strong enough to endure emigration and the establishment of a business

KLAUS RASCHE // 46 AND
JULIANE RENKE // 30, CO-OWNERS GW PRIVATE ROOM

He says:

Juliane and I met in Berlin in 1999, at a function at the Ritz-Carlton where she was working. Later, we went out for drinks with some friends. I ran into her again a couple of days later – it turned out her apartment was just 500m from mine, so we had a coffee and from there we became friends.

I think the reason we connected so well is that Juliane grew up in East Germany. Because East German people lived under socialism, their first reflex is towards team compatibility, not competition. For most West Germans, where I'm from, the first reflex is to be competitive. Do I have the biggest car? Do I have the biggest watch? I was sick of that rat race. I wasn't in the mood for this competition anymore, and I think that's why we connected so well.

I was born in Australia and I came back to visit in late 2005. There's a level of happiness here that is so much higher than in Europe – after two days I decided I was going to move.

I went back to Berlin and told Juliane, "I'm leaving". She decided to come with me and go into business together, opening a high concept hair salon.

I grew up in a hairdressing family, but the last time I had had scissors in my hand had been more than 20 years ago. I knew the business though, and together we came up with the GW Private Room concept. We've just won the best hairdressing salon award at the Australian Small Business Champion Awards.

She says:

I grew up in Potsdam, in the former East Germany, and when I met Klaus, I was only 22. Klaus was always looking out for me.

I went overseas a lot and he was always waiting for me at the airport – most of my other friends didn't even have cars.

When he returned from Australia and said he was going to move here, I didn't hesitate. I never saw myself growing old in Germany. I hate nothing more than the depressing feeling you have from December to April every year in Europe.

When we first met, Klaus was very German – very punctual and always on time. Now he's more flexible and easygoing; we both are.

We both have made our own friends here but he's still my best friend and we try to spend a lot of time together. I have absolutely no regrets about coming to Australia with him, none at all.